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June 28, 2019

Supreme Court Clerk
P.O. Box 30052
Lansing, MI 48909

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my support for the proposed changes to MCR 8.115.

I am legal aid attorney practicing in the Detroit area. Nearly all of my clients are living in poverty. The 36th District Court is the largest district court in Michigan. It covers the entire city of Detroit. It does not allow cell phones.

Many of my clients do not have access to personal vehicles and must take the bus to court. A bus ride from the northeastern part of the city to the downtown courthouse can take an hour or more. Often my clients must get up early and walk through the city at dawn to ensure their arrival at court for an 8:00 am hearing. Unlike some courthouses, 36th District Court does not have lockers for the public to store their phones. This means that my clients are walking through the city, sometimes while it is still dark, taking public transportation downtown and then making the trip back all without a cell phone. For my female clients especially, the trip can be daunting.

The cell phone ban also effects my clients who are parents. Sometimes a hearing can last all day, and there is no way for a child's babysitter or caregiver to get in touch with the parent who is in court.

I believe the cell phone ban also raises some due process and access to justice concerns. Most of my cases in 36th district court are landlord/tenant cases. Landlord's are almost always represented by counsel, but it is extremely rare to see a tenant represented by counsel. Legal aid is only able to take a small fraction of the cases that need our assistance. Tenants are already at a disadvantage because they don't know the law, they then can't look up the law while they are in court, and they cannot show the judge pictures that are on their phone. Litigants are instructed to

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Region VII Area Agency on Aging, United Way, and St. Clair County Senior Citizen Millage





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print out cell phone pictures before coming to court, but many do not have access to printers, or the money needed to print the pictures in color with enough quality to show the judge.

Due to the limited resources of legal aid, we often ask our clients to attend the first hearing without us and obtain an adjournment. Sometimes litigants are pressured into signing a consent judgement, or they do not understand that they are signing a consent judgement. Giving litigants the chance to call their legal aid attorney while the litigant is at court will greatly reduce the number of consent judgments that are entered into by mistake.

I believe that the proposed changes to MCR 8.115 could allow my clients to obtain the access to justice they deserve.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marie Reimers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marie Reimers
Staff Attorney
Lakeshore Legal Aid

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