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August 2, 2021

Glenn A. Grant, J.A.D
Acting Administrative Director of the Courts
Comments on the Future of Court Operations
Hughes Justice Complex
P.O. Box 037
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0037



Dear Judge Grant:

I am the Chief Executive Office of the Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris, Inc., an organization that provides services to people with mental health issues and their families. We also advocate for the rights of people with serious and persistent mental illnesses as they are often discriminated against based on misunderstandings about them by the public. It came to my attention that the Notice to the Bar and Public regarding the Future of Court Operations, dated July 16, 2021, will likely affect some of the consumers served by our agency. I, therefore, would like to offer my thoughts about this. Please accept this letter in response to that Notice.

Individuals who are involuntarily civilly committed, have a right to a hearing. I am aware that during the pandemic, hearings were held virtually, and during those extraordinary times, that was necessary, although some mental health consumers found remote hearings very confusing. However, now that the court system is resuming in-person hearings for others, it is discriminatory to people with mental illnesses that their hearings should remain virtual.

Individuals who are involuntarily civilly committed are unlike those in landlord tenant court or small claims court. Their freedoms have been taken away. They have been taken from their homes, sometimes for lengthy periods of time depending upon the severity of their symptoms. They do not have a choice as to where they can seek treatment. They may visit only with certain people, eat the food that is served to them, and wear only the clothes permitted by the institution. To treat them the same way as those in landlord-tenant court or small claims court is simply not equitable.



Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris, Inc.

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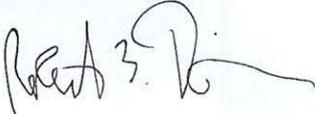
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The Division of Mental Health Advocacy within the Office of the Public Defender represents many of our clients in civil commitment hearings. Their position is that because these individuals have had their liberties taken away, they should be afforded every right that may help them regain those liberties. This includes a hearing where the judge is in the room with them and can see them when making decisions that affect every aspect of their lives.

Sincerely,



Robert N. Davison, MA, LPC

cc: The Honorable Stuart Rabner, Chief Justice, The Supreme Court of the State of New Jersey
Carl J. Herman, Esq., Director, Division of Mental Health Advocacy

