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April 1, 2011

The Honorable Harold J. Brubaker
NC House of Representatives
300 N. Salisbury Street, Room 302
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603-5925

Dear Representative Brubaker:

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Justice Initiatives, Inc. to ask that you limit Judicial Branch budget reductions to no more than what has been proposed in the Governor's recommended budget. We also ask that you grant the Judicial Branch the management flexibility to determine how those cuts are to be made.

Before going any further, I want to briefly inform you about our organization. Justice Initiatives is a non-profit formed in 2004 by a group of community and justice system leaders in North Carolina who believe that the state deserves nothing less than a world-class court system. We are committed to advocating for appropriate funding to the judicial branch and for supporting the continued development of innovative programs and services that have brought forth national recognition and admiration. Our board is comprised of members from the legal and corporate community.

With regard to the Judicial Branch funding, we have seen the list of proposed cuts circulated within the JPS Committee and note that successful core services like Family Court, Custody Mediation and Drug Treatment Court are included. We strongly believe that the elimination of these services will have a devastating and possibly irreparable impact on the administration of justice within this state.

We all recognize that these are difficult economic times and that the court system must do its part in finding ways to decrease expenses. However, a reasoned approach that does not compromise public safety or deny access to justice must be taken. Such an approach has already been demonstrated by the Judicial Branch through their recent reduction in force, which eliminated approximately 180 positions throughout the state. Through these staff reductions and some other adjustments, it has been said that a 5%, or at most, 6% reduction can be absorbed in the next fiscal year without impacting core services.

Without necessary staffing, there will be delays in accessing whatever court services remain and those delays will become more protracted with the passage of time. As these delays lengthen, children will go for extended periods of time without child support payments, estranged spouses will be deprived of financial support and access to property that is still jointly committed. Financial strains will mount and many will have to turn to family, friends, and seek public services, thus burdening local social services providers even further.

Along the same lines, eliminating Drug Treatment Courts will not stop individuals from abusing alcohol and other substances or from committing crimes while under the influence. All it will do is force them into an already over-burdened criminal justice system, which must rely on traditional sentencing options we know again are outdated, ill-suited, ineffectual and more costly. So, instead of engaging qualified defendants in Drug Treatment Courts which are proven to reduce recidivism, save money and save lives, we will return to a warehousing and revolving door approach. The increased incarceration costs, social services costs, medical costs and cost of the lost productivity and taxes will far outweigh the cost of our Drug Treatment Courts.

More importantly, though, are the human and societal benefits that will be lost. In FY2009-2010, a total of 25 drug free babies were born to mothers participating in NC Drug Treatment Courts. That equates to \$750,000 - \$1.4M saved for every baby born or \$18,750,000- \$35,000,000 for FY 2009-2010 alone! These are the type of numbers that should be driving the decision-making.

We all know that the Courts have a small constituency and that the system basically runs on fumes. That said, basic core priorities for the survival of a state involve water, sewer, and courts (including corrections). Add Medicaid and public school and pretty much everything else is non-core. We hope you will do whatever you can to take these options off the table.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CHASE B. SAUNDERS". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Chase B. Saunders,
Chair of Justice Initiatives