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We as official court stenograph reporters (CSR), certified electronic recorders (CERs), and freelance court reporters/recorders, would respectfully request that you consider supporting legislation to increase the page rate for official court transcripts. We have had many bills introduced in the past, but our efforts have not been successful. We would request your support of the proposed legislation to increase our rates for the following reasons:

- 1) Presently MCL 600.2543, effective as of January 1, 1987, mandates the page rate for official court transcripts as \$1.75 for the original and 30 cents for the copy. For comparison purposes, Federal Court transcript rates are \$3.65 per original page; copies are 90 cents per page. We would note that no other profession to our knowledge, has gone over 35 years without a pay increase.
- 2) The State of Michigan itself contracts with private court reporting firms for its own administrative agencies at rates averaging around \$3.00 per page. The copy rate for these transcripts is determined by the transcription company itself.
- 3.) Michigan is one of the few states requiring stringent testing and certification of those individuals who prepare and file transcripts, yet compared to other states, Michigan's page rate is one of the lowest.
- 4) Michigan rules and statutes require that official court transcripts be prepared by state certified court recorders and reporters. It should be noted that the pool of qualified, experienced, and certified recorders and reporters has diminished in the last few years for various reasons: retirements, resignations, and that the per page rate has remained stagnant.
- 5) It should be noted that the costs of many court transcripts are paid by the private parties involved in the case, not the court or funding unit.
- 6) The history of court reporting is that each judge had a CSR or CER. Said CSR/CER produced all the transcripts that they reported or recorded. There has been a dramatic shift in the production of court transcripts over the last few years as digital and/or video recording technology has been instituted. The proceedings are often recorded by a court clerk, magistrate, or even the judge or law clerk. As such, courts are now increasingly outsourcing the production of transcripts.
- 7) Elimination of these court recorder/reporter positions has enabled courts to appropriate this financial savings to other facets of the court system. These cost savings consist of not only personnel salaries, but medical and retirement benefits, paid vacations, office expenses, internet services, supplies and equipment, and technical support. These savings to courts is transferred as overhead costs to freelance firms and the CSRs/CERs who transcribe after work hours. As such, these individuals shoulder all of these costs that court-employed CSRs/CERs are usually afforded.
- 7) Private firms also must carry the various liability, unemployment, and workers compensation insurances and taxes that are required of freelance company owners who provide court transcription services.

8) Registered freelance firms who are willing to provide court transcription services are overwhelmed with transcript requests. These transcript requests may be declined due to a heavy workload and the shortage of qualified, experienced, and certified transcribers. This shortage of certified transcribers frequently causes delayed transcript production, resulting in the inability to prepare for and proceed with upcoming court hearings, trials, and appeals. The causal effect is a decrease in judicial economy and justice not being served.

9) The general consensus among CERs statewide is a new precedent wherein CERs are often forbidden to prepare transcripts during court time, a change in practice from years past. Oftentimes CERs perform additional responsibilities besides recording, i.e. jury clerk, court administrator/assistant court administrator, probation officer, traffic clerk, judge's secretary, and court clerks.

10) The field of court reporting/recording is a female-dominated industry. Producing transcripts after hours during family time, holidays and weekends, after working long days, is not financially advantageous to the court recorders at the present page rate. These employees search for firms to outsource their transcript production.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Shankleton-Novess

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MECRA Legislative Committee