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May 31, 2023

Dear Mayor Johnson and Common Council,

We are writing to urge the City of Milwaukee to save JusticePoint's Municipal Court Alternatives Program ("MCAP")—a program that has done incredible work for the City of Milwaukee for the last 40 years. It is shocking that Milwaukee Municipal Court would suddenly cancel the contract for such an invaluable program. The contract was cancelled without cause and was described as a "termination for convenience", with an effective date of July 11, 2023. The Court has provided no explanation for what is to happen to the hundreds of individuals currently being served by JusticePoint.

MCAP benefits defendants, the court, and the community at large. Many people experiencing poverty, homelessness, mental health crises, disability, and substance use issues have received excellent services from MCAP to resolve issues in the municipal court and help to stabilize those individuals in the community. Vulnerable people, such as those with intellectual disabilities, struggle to navigate the court system on their own and benefit from the expertise of JusticePoint's social workers and case managers to connect them to resources. Defendants with complex unmet needs require services and resources, not punishment that they are unable to comply with (and then further court sanctions as a result). Milwaukee Municipal Court has statutory and constitutional obligations to these defendants—JusticePoint helps the municipal court comply with the law.¹

JusticePoint's MCAP program has served nearly 62,000 people over the last twenty years alone—essentially all people from historically marginalized groups. For example:

- People of color, and especially Black people, experience disproportionate police contact and are therefore subjected to legal punishment systems and court debt at a higher rate. As a result, 80% of the individuals served by MCAP have been Black;
- Many people served by MCAP are experiencing homelessness because unhoused people have a high level of needs and are exposed to police contact at greater frequency. JusticePoint staff are skilled in connecting people experiencing housing instability to appropriate services, including helping to remove barriers to transitional housing;
- For defendants who are unable to pay their court debt, MCAP facilitates connections to nonprofits so the defendants can do volunteer work to show accountability and provide a benefit to the community. Over the last two decades, MCAP has facilitated nearly 150,000 hours of volunteer work at nonprofit organizations to resolve court debt the defendants were unable to pay.

These services are essential.

¹ See, i.e., [800.095\(1\)\(b\)2.a.](#), [800.035\(2m\)](#). U.S. Department of Justice 04/20/2023 "[Dear Colleague](#)" letter.

We respectfully urge you to take immediate action so that these services don't come to an abrupt halt on July 11th. Additionally, we urge you to take action to ensure Milwaukee Municipal Court does not compromise the success of the program in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Signed,

Coalition to Save JusticePoint's Municipal Court Alternatives Program

National Lawyers Guild (NLG), Milwaukee Chapter
Wisconsin Justice Initiative (WJI)
American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin (ACLU)
Milwaukee Freedom Fund
LOTUS Legal Clinic
Peace Action Wisconsin
Wisconsin Community Services (WCS)
Milwaukee Turners
Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee
Community Advocates
Equal Justice Under Law
Praise Cathedral Church of God in Christ
Meta House, Inc.
Kinship Community Food Center
Street Angels
Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT)
Rid Racism Milwaukee
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Southeast Wisconsin
WISDOM
Buddhist Peace Fellowship of Milwaukee
Center for Veterans Issues (CVI)
Benedict Center