



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES
Where Meeting Basic Needs Inspires Hope

Wisconsin Supreme Court
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701

RE: Petition 10-08: Establish a Right to Counsel in Civil Cases

August 29, 2011

Dear Honorable Justices:

Community Advocates, Wisconsin's largest advocacy organization, strongly supports Petition 10-08, which would amend Supreme Court Rule 11.02 to require circuit court judges to appoint attorneys at public expense for indigent persons in certain civil cases ("Civil Gideon").

For more than 35 years, Community Advocates has been a leader in helping low-income families and individuals overcome barriers that prevent them from meeting basic needs. We understand that when essential human needs such as shelter, health care, child custody, food, heat, clothing, and safety are compromised, a family cannot thrive. Therefore, it is our position that, as a community, we must work toward a system in which individuals are not deprived of these essentials without due process and equal access to justice. One means of ensuring access is to provide indigent civil litigants with representation, at public expense, in appropriate cases.

The vast majority of Community Advocates' clients live in a world where one lost paycheck can make the difference between housing and homelessness. They are generally unsophisticated when it comes civil litigation, yet often stand to lose the most in the event of a miscarriage of justice.

For this reason, we emphatically endorse the right to legal counsel for low-income Wisconsin residents when basic human needs are at stake, and believe that implementation of this rule would not only strengthen our community, but also demonstrate Wisconsin's firm commitment to equal justice under the law.

If you have any questions regarding this agency's position, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Joseph Volk
Chief Executive Officer