



## Wisconsin Judicare, Inc.

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Clerk of Supreme Court  
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P.O. Box 1688  
Madison, WI 53701-1688

Dear Honorable Justices of the Wisconsin Supreme Court:

Please accept this letter of support for Petition 13-14 to amend the judicial code to address self-represented litigants. As the largest civil legal services program in northern Wisconsin we are acutely aware of the issues that face the courts in our service area when it comes to the ever increasing number of *pro se* litigants. In addition, we see firsthand the uphill battle *pro se* litigants face when just by stepping into a court room. This simple amendment to the judicial code will have far reaching effects for the *pro se* litigants to whom our program can only provide brief services and for *pro se* adverse parties.

Wisconsin Judicare, Inc., is a non-profit law firm dedicated to providing equal access to justice for northern Wisconsin residents. Located in Marathon County, we are the civil legal service provider for Wisconsin's northern 33 counties and 11 federally recognized Indian tribes. While the funding we receive to provide services to those at or below the 125% Federal Poverty Level has never kept pace with the need for such services, cuts over the last 7 years have left us unable to provide extended representation to all but a handful of applicants. This means that the services we provide, to those who are eligible, are frequently limited to telephone advice, pleadings review and other brief services.

On the Wisconsin Judicare Helpline and at our outreach projects, we attempt to prepare *pro se* litigants as best we can, knowing full well they are at a disadvantage and may not be successful. We frequently advise these clients to ask questions of the judge when they do not understand the proceedings. Our staff attorneys have witnessed *pro se* adverse parties who have misunderstood an entire proceeding. We know that *pro se* litigants are frequently too intimidated to ask questions and hope that this rule will allow judges to feel open about questioning *pro se* litigants in regards to their understanding and participation in the proceeding.

The Wisconsin Code of Judicial Conduct currently does not explicitly address, either in the rules or comments, ethical standards for judges when adjudicating cases for self-represented litigants. The core of the proposed amendment would make clear that "reasonable efforts to facilitate the ability of all litigants, including self-represented litigants, to be fairly heard" are consistent with a judge's obligation to perform all judicial duties fairly and impartially. With this amendment, Wisconsin would join the 24 other states and the District of Columbia that have adopted provisions in their judicial codes addressing the adjudication of cases involving *pro se* litigants. We urge you to strongly consider its passage.

Thank you for your time,

Wisconsin Judicare Inc.  
cc: Margaret J. Vergeront