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Re: Magisterial District Reestablishment Proposal For the Second Judicial District

Dear Russell A. Glass,

This letter is in reference to the Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas Magisterial District Reestablishment Proposal For The Second Judicial District. This letter is from the SoWe Advisory Board and the SoWe Community Safety Committee who has reviewed the proposal and rejects the proposal to redistrict 02-1-01 and the proposal to reduce caseloads by allowing certain cases to be tried by Magistrate District Judges (MDJ) that are elected and serve outside the district. SoWe believes the proposal does not serve the best interest of the Southwest Lancaster City residents nor does it provide equal access to the justice system. SoWe and city residents deserve MDJ offices with lower caseloads as well as the right to be tried by their elected MDJ for any case that falls within the purview of the MDJ court. SoWe does not believe the redistricting proposal meets the intended goal of 'equitably distribute caseload and judicial workload among the remaining district'. The proposed changes raise concerns about residents' ability to equally and equitably access the justice system. SoWe calls for a larger community input process to fully understand community concerns and recommendations.

SoWe is a community development initiative supported by Tenfold, partner organizations, and the residents of Southwest Lancaster City. The initiative was created by residents to stem the tide of disinvestment in this neighborhood and ensure residents are supported and organized. SoWe hosts a resident-led board of directors as well as seven standing committees that advocate for the needs of its residents. Currently, the SoWe neighborhood boundaries fall within district 02-1-01.

SoWe does not support the proposed adjustments to 02-1-01 and the removal of the 4<sup>th</sup> ward. Although the removal of the 4<sup>th</sup> ward from district 02-1-01 decreases the MDJ's case load, it disrupts the footprint of an existing neighborhood. In the proposal's rationale to reestablish other MDJ districts it states, "*districts are established, clear and convenient to public and police*". This rationale should hold true to this district as well. Removal of the 4<sup>th</sup> ward from this district hinders the neighborhood's ability to speak as a unified voice and is geographically confusing. The proposal and the Court of Commons Pleas has not solicited community input for the proposed changes beyond a public comment notice.

Furthermore, incorporating the 4<sup>th</sup> ward to 02-2-02 places additional stress on a district that ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the county in case load and has 13% higher cases than all other MDJ courts. With

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the current proposal, the stress of the court system is transferred, and residents still do not have equitable access to the justice system as compared to their neighbors in the county. The Court should consider the creation of a new district in the city to equitably distribute caseloads and provide residents of the district equal access to the justice system as their county neighbors.

SoWe rejects the proposal to transfer certain cases in our district to outside judges. The proposal denies residents the right to be tried by a judge that they elected. The proposal suggests certain cases such as Welfare Fraud could be tried by MDJs with lower caseloads. MDJs with the lowest caseloads are largely from rural parts of the county where the community, its demographics, its constituents, and life experience are vastly different than those that live in district 02-1-01 and other high stress districts in the city. Residents throughout the county have the right to be tried by a judge they elected and SoWe and city residents deserve the same right.

In closing, the proposed method to reduce caseloads harms the overall equity of Southwest residents and their ability to fairly access the justice system. Residents of SoWe and district 02-1-01 are not given the same access to the justice system compared to county residents. SoWe supports the reduction of the caseload of district 02-1-01 but the current proposal is not in the best interest to equitably serve residents. SoWe calls for a larger community engagement process to understand community concerns to develop a proposal that meets the needs of the community. The MDJ system is set up to elect local judges at the neighborhood level. Allowing some cases to be tried by other judges creates a separate precedent for residents of the Southwest than other MDJ districts throughout the county. The Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas should reconsider their proposal and seek to not only reduce caseloads for MDJs but seek to ensure residents across Lancaster County have equal and equitable access to the justice system.

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