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November 5, 2021

The Honorable Max Baer  
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania  
601 Commonwealth Ave  
Suite 1500  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: Docket No. 20 EM 2020 Authorizing the Continuation of the Philadelphia Municipal Court  
Landlord-Tenant Diversion Program

Dear Chief Justice Baer:

On behalf of Just Mediation Pittsburgh and our network of 65 Community Mediators who mediate landlord-tenant disputes in Southwestern Pennsylvania, I thank you for the leadership your court has demonstrated in unparalleled times. Just Mediation Pittsburgh commends the continuation of the Philadelphia Municipal Court Landlord-Tenant Diversion Program and requests your support for establishing Alternative Dispute Resolution programs for residential eviction proceedings around the Commonwealth.

Here in the Pittsburgh area, Just Mediation Pittsburgh (JMP) was formed in May 2020 to mediate landlord-tenant cases and support parties in coming to mutually satisfactory agreements without burdening local court dockets and adding to the social and financial costs of eviction. In our time of operating a voluntary landlord-tenant mediation program, JMP has trained 65 Community Mediators from diverse racial and economic backgrounds to mediate landlord-tenant disputes. JMP has mediated 200 cases to date and helped parties reach agreements in 90% of those cases, avoiding litigation, thanks to a comprehensive network of resource navigators, legal aid providers, and engaged landlord and tenant groups. Most tenants who have participated in the program qualified for the County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, and a disproportionate number have been Black, Female heads of household, demonstrating the ways this eviction crisis uniquely impacts our most vulnerable neighbors.



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The development of JMP's program, and its successes, are in no small part due to the example and personalized support of our mediation partners in Philadelphia's Municipal Court Landlord-Tenant Diversion Program. Philadelphia's program has helped to connect landlords and tenants to approximately \$206.2 million dollars of rental assistance from the City of Philadelphia, assisting over 34,000 households. The Eviction Diversion Program has also assisted over 2,300 households and their landlords resolve their housing disputes, by utilizing the collaborative network of legal aid providers, housing counselors, and mediators.

These results are extraordinary, making Philadelphia a national model for the utilization of mediation in landlord-tenant disputes. Philadelphia's Program is a shining example of efficient, common sense use of mediation to divert landlord-tenant cases from overburdened court dockets. As a partner on the other side of the Pennsylvania, Just Mediation Pittsburgh applauds the continuation of the Philadelphia Municipal Court Landlord-Tenant Diversion Program and asks the Court grant President Judge Dugan's petition for authority to continue the program. We also ask the Court to expressly empower local President Judges throughout Pennsylvania to use local rulemaking to implement their own alternative dispute resolution procedures in residential eviction cases.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Erb", written in a cursive style.

Aaron Erb  
Executive Director  
Just Mediation Pittsburgh