SBM STATE BAR OF MICHIGAN

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To: Representative Kevin Cotter, Chair, House Judiciary
Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Peter Cunningham, Director of Governmental Relations

Date: September 12, 2013

Re: HB 4694 (Cotter), HB 4695 (Haines), HB 4696 (Walsh), HB 4697 (O'Brien)
Mental Health Courts
House Judiciary Committee Hearing

The State Bar of Michigan's Board of Commissioners unanimously **supports HB 4694 – HB 4697**. In its review, the Board considered recommendations from the Civil Procedure & Courts Committee, the Criminal Jurisprudence & Practice Committee, the Criminal Issues Initiative, and the Equal Access Initiative, all of whom supported this important legislation.

For several years the State Bar has supported the increased use of problem-solving courts, such as Mental Health Courts, as a way to not only save substantially on direct and indirect public costs, but also as way to improve the administration of justice. For these reasons the State Bar supports the House Bills 4694 – 4697.

However, the State Bar would also like to express concern about jeopardizing the success of these specialty courts by underfunding them. Successful implementation of problem-solving courts requires careful training not only of judges but also of other key players, including prosecutors, court staff, law enforcement and community health professionals, all of whom are already struggling with increased caseloads. Although Mental Health Courts have a proven track record for being cost-saving, they do require an upfront investment that we believe is necessary for their success.

Michigan has been a pioneer in the development of problem-solving courts, and our state has a cadre of successful problem-solving court judges. This legislation has the potential to help spread the use of Mental Health Courts throughout the state. This could lead to substantial savings by avoiding jail and prison expenses.

If you would like to discuss this position in further detail or have questions, please contact me directly at your convenience.