In Re: Standing Committee Recommendations for Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project

WRITTEN COMMENTS OF THE MINNESOTA PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF THE INTERIM REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINNESOTA SUPREME COURT REGARDING THE LEGAL PARAPROFESSIONAL PILOT PROJECT

I. INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Paralegal Association (MPA), submits these comments to communicate the association’s support of the Standing Committee’s recommendations regarding Minnesota’s Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Program (LPPP). MPA is a professional association founded in 1974; comprised of paralegals living and/or working in the State of Minnesota, and we are dedicated to fostering the growth and development of the paralegal profession. The members of MPA adhere to a Code of Ethics, among them achieving and maintaining a high level of competence and personal and professional integrity and striving to serve the public interests by contributing to the delivery of quality legal services and the improvement of the legal system.

II. SUPPORT FOR THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

MPA and its members have reviewed the interim report and recommendations that the Standing Committee for the Legal Paraprofessional Pilot Project submitted to the Supreme Court, regarding possible changes to the Pilot Project. Based on this report, and feedback from MPA members who are paraprofessionals in the program, MPA is in full support of the
recommendations of expanding the area of family law cases to include those where domestic or child abuse has been alleged, which includes clarifying the Supervised Practice Rules, and also adding the eligibility for those rostered legal paraprofessionals to provide advice and representation in Order for Protection and Harassment Restraining Order cases. In speaking with some rostered paraprofessionals, they have stated that their experience has seen how clients have been able to receive legal representation, whereas they would not have been able to retain nor afford an attorney, and thus been unrepresented and not had the access to justice. MPA agrees with the expansion in the area of family law cases to include those where domestic or child abuse has been alleged, and to provide advice and representation in Order for Protection and Harassment Restraining Order cases. Some of these paraprofessionals have extensive experience in dealing with these types of family law cases and situations, including some of them completing domestic abuse training and screening, as part of their requirements as a MN Rule 114 qualified neutral. As the Committee has shown, these are areas where people do not have representation, at a time in their life when it matters the most, and their lives, or children’s lives and their safety are the subject matter. MPA therefore recognizes the concerns, and sees an opportunity for the LPPP, Standing Committee, the Court, and other organizations such as MNCASA’s Sexual Violence Justice Institute (SVJI), to work together and create annual training programs for LPPPs in regard to domestic and sexual violence, or protective orders, in order to enhance the abilities of the paraprofessional, ensure best practices, and best represent the clients in these types of cases.

III. CONCLUSION

It is for these reasons that MPA respectfully requests the Supreme Court to extend the LPPP to March 31, 2024, and make the proposed amendments to Rule 12 of the Supervised
Practice Rules, per the Standing Committee’s recommendations. We thank the Standing Committee for its great efforts in their research, evaluation, and continued development of this project.

Respectfully submitted,

MINNESOTA PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION

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