Minnesota Newspaper Association
10 South Fifth Street, Suite 1105
Minneapolis, MN 55402-1036

Minnesota Broadcasters Association
408 St. Peter Street, Suite 423
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Minnesota Public Radio
480 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55101

March 3, 2022

Chair Becker-Finn and Committee Members,

On behalf of our respective associations and their members, we want to thank those of you have have raised concerns with the proposed $8 fee for access to court records on Minnesota Court Record Online (MCRO) and have authored and co-authored bills to address those concerns. We are supportive of any effort to eliminate fees restricting access to public documents.

News media and journalists rely upon full access to court records to ensure our reporting is comprehensive and accurate. The proposed fee would inflate our costs and would suppress our ability to fully report on the important issues dealt with by the court system, especially in criminal cases. It would also deter our ability to fully investigate stories. Already financially struggling local and regional news outlets would be hardest hit by the proposed fee. These organizations report stories important to their communities and are critical to American democracy. Minnesotans are best served by local and regional media with full access to public information.

The updated MCRO online court records system is well-designed and user friendly. We commend the courts for improving it. However, most states do not charge fees to fully access their online court documents. While MN courts bear the expense to design, operate, and maintain MCRO, they would not receive the benefit of the fees to offset these costs. The fees would be deposited in the State's General Fund.

In the interest of transparency in government and the public's access to information, we encourage you to eliminate the proposed MCRO fee to access court documents during the 2022 Minnesota Legislative Session.

Sincerely,

Lisa Hils, Executive Director
MN Newspapers Association

Wendy Paulson, President
MN Broadcasters Association

John Kavanagh, Sr. Counsel
Minnesota Public Radio