



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

February 27, 2023

Chair Latz and Committee Members,

On behalf of our respective associations and their members, we want to thank those of you who worked last year to repeal the \$8 fee for access to uncertified copies of court records. As the legislation failed to pass at the end of the 2022 legislative session, we greatly appreciate that this policy is again being considered by the legislature. 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. Charging fees can inflate our costs and may suppress our ability to fully investigate stories. Already financially struggling local and regional news outlets are hardest hit by the 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 online court records system is well-designed and user friendly. We commend the courts for improving it. While Minnesota courts have borne the expense to design, operate, and maintain the new system, this is not supported by the current fees in statute, which would be deposited in the State's General Fund.

S.F. 199 eliminates fees to access uncertified copies of civil and criminal court records on an online platform, which we very strongly support. However, the legislation continues to allow a fee for accessing paper copies of the same information. We urge the committee to consider eliminating this fee as well, as some people lack access to the internet or to a device that allows them to access the documents online.

In the interest of transparency in government and the public's access to information, we urge you to support S.F. 199, and further to repeal all fees to access uncertified copies of court documents.

Sincerely,

Lisa Hills, Executive Director
MN Newspaper Association

Wendy Paulson, President
MN Broadcasters Association

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