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The Honorable Wilhelmina Rolark
Chairperson, Committee on the
Judiciary
Council of the District of Columbia
District Building, Room 125
1350 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

February 19, 1985

Dear Councilmember Rolark:

The D.C. Bar's Division on District of Columbia Affairs, Division VI, urges you to support and fund the continuation of the D.C. Superior Court's Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Program. This program has been funded for the first 18 months by the American Bar Association (ABA) and continued funding is requested in the FY 1986 budget submitted by D.C. Superior Court. We understand, however, that the Mayor has not included the funds necessary to continue the program in his FY 1986 budget request. We believe that it is important to the citizens of the District of Columbia to continue this program, and that doing so is a cost-effective way of enhancing the administration of justice in the District.

The District of Columbia is one of three jurisdictions in the country in which the ABA has funded Multi-Door Courthouse programs. The others are Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Houston, Texas. The purpose of these programs is to provide alternatives to traditional litigation, by developing a broad range of dispute-resolution options, including mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. They are being established in response

The views expressed herein represent only those of Division 6: District of Columbia Affairs, of the D.C. Bar and not those of the D.C. Bar or of its Board of Governors.

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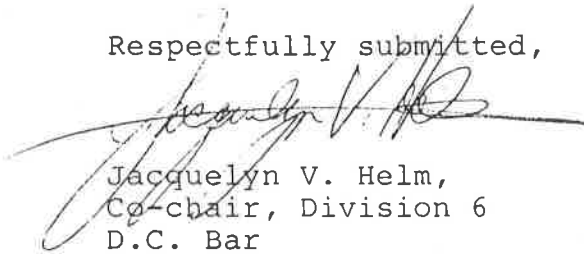
to a growing realization that traditional litigation, which resolves disputes through an adversarial, confrontational process, is not the best means for resolving all kinds of disputes, and that it is often more costly and time-consuming than other alternatives. This is particularly true when the courts are used as a forum by low and moderate income people who may be precluded from pursuing their cases to fruition by financial and time considerations. The Multi-Door pilot programs are a means by which the ABA is attempting to promote the use of alternatives to traditional litigation.

The citizens of the District of Columbia can greatly benefit from the Multi-Door Program. The program can provide faster and more effective resolution of some categories of disputes, while relieving the litigation burden on the court system. The first component of the program, which is now in place, is an Intake Center which assists citizens to analyze their disputes, provides information concerning the available options for resolving them, and helps people assess those options and choose the one best-suited to their situation. In addition, the Multi-Door Program is planning to increase the number of options that will be available to resolve disputes. In April the court will offer small claims mediation to litigants on their day of trial and to people coming into court to file small claims cases. In the fall, a new mediation program to resolve domestic relations disputes is expected to begin. Additional dispute resolution programs are being planned for the future. If we are going to keep the door of the courthouse open to all our citizens, these types of services are particularly important.

Both arbitration and mediation offer relatively speedy resolution of disputes. Mediation also involves disputants in working out solutions to their own conflicts. Since studies show that people are often far more satisfied with agreements they forge themselves, we can expect that parties will be more willing to abide by the terms of such mediated agreements. These alternative options seem particularly well-suited to resolving, among others, small claims and domestic matters, and should divert significant numbers of cases from the courts. For that reason, they should benefit not just those citizens who choose to use them, but the administration of justice in the District generally. In our view, they promise to be a most cost-effective way of unclogging the courts and increasing the availability and citizen satisfaction with their justice system.

We think that the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Program is important to the citizens of the District. It commands broad support among the lawyers and judges here. We urge the Committee and the Council to stand firmly behind this effort and to continue funding the Program.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jacquelyn V. Helm", is written over the typed name and title.

Jacquelyn V. Helm,
Co-chair, Division 6
D.C. Bar

¹We understand that the Court and the Mayor have now reached a compromise agreement to provide funding for the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Program in FY 1986. We urge the Committee to support this compromise agreement in its action on the FY 1986 budget request for D.C. Superior Court.