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Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Statement Regarding Justice Center Executive Steering Committee

CLEVELAND - October 3rd, 2022 - The CMBA issued the following statement about ongoing discussions regarding a new Cuyahoga County Justice Center and Jail:

It is beyond debate that building the next generation justice system is one of the most important issues facing Cuyahoga County today. In 2018, following years of discussions about structural and procedural deficiencies inside the County's Justice Center and Jail, Executive Budish and then-Common Pleas Administrative Judge John J. Russo signed a memorandum of understanding calling for the creation of a 12-person Justice Center Executive Steering Committee that was charged with determining whether our Justice complex should be renovated or replaced.

Nearly 5 years later, the Steering Committee has failed to develop a comprehensive plan for what should be done with **both** the Jail and the Justice Center. At tomorrow's meeting, the Steering Committee is due to consider a potential location for a new jail and a recently completed environmental study on that potential location, as well as the results of a second review of whether the existing jail should be renovated. Relocate or renovate? Even now, the debate wages on inside the Steering Committee.

Last week, both candidates vying for Cuyahoga County Executive have called for a halt to any further action. Candidate Ronayne spoke first, saying our County "should not rush to any decisions surrounding a new or renovated [jail]." Candidate Weingart followed with his own statement saying: "We must go back to the drawing board on the Jail project." Notably, both candidates limited their statements to the jail, without addressing the Justice Center which houses the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas and other court-related offices.

Our community has borne witness to five years of extensive effort by 12 of our highest-ranking public officials. During the same period, fourteen people have died while in custody at the jail. More than two million dollars has been spent on reports and recommendations from nationally respected, highly qualified professionals including those with expertise in jail and court operations. Hundreds if not thousands of stakeholders have been interviewed. Construction costs have continued to skyrocket

meaning our County will likely be facing at least a 30% cost increase compared to 2019 (at least \$150 million more) as a result of delayed decision making. To the future County Executive, we cannot afford further delay.

Once and for all, we challenge the Steering Committee to pull together to act in concert for the benefit of all of Cuyahoga County. Put an end to the protracted conversations and use the mountain of information at your disposal to finally map out a definitive plan for **both** the Jail and the Justice Center. In short: act now.

When a new County Executive is elected, he should do everything in his power to get on board to either execute the Steering Committee's plan of action or help finalize the plan, not delay the process even further.



Adrian D. Thompson, President



Rebecca Ruppert McMahon, CEO

About the CMBA

The nonprofit Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association operates as a center for legal professionalism in the region, promoting the highest ethical and professional standards. The CMBA strives to be an indispensable resource for its nearly 5,000 members and the go-to organization on issues of law and justice in Northeast Ohio. Learn more at clemetrobar.org