



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN**
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Marquette, MI 49855
(906) 226-2021

Re: *Pro Se* Prisoner Civil Rights Litigation Early Mediation Program

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

As you may know, many civil rights cases are filed *pro se* each year in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan by individuals housed in our state and federal prisons. In 2023 alone, prisoners filed 484 civil rights cases, representing nearly 30 percent of the Court's civil docket. The claims range from complaints over conditions of confinement to allegations of excessive force by prison guards.

The *Pro Se* Prisoner Civil Rights Litigation Early Mediation Program (PEM), implemented in 2018, has been instrumental in helping to resolve prisoner civil rights cases swiftly, efficiently, and fairly. With the support of our dedicated volunteers, PEM has seen remarkable success, settling more than 50 percent of all cases that have gone to mediation. But the sheer number of cases currently exceeds the capacity of our volunteers. We are seeking your assistance.

We understand that you are busy and the demands on your time are high. This letter is to explain what service as a volunteer mediator entails. As for the time commitment, each case requires a review of the parties' respective mediation statements (five-page maximum) and any attachments (also limited to five pages), followed by a morning or afternoon Zoom mediation session. Members of our PEM panel have described some of the benefits of this pro bono work as follows:

Make a Difference. You have an opportunity to make a real difference. Your participation in PEM directly impacts the lives of individuals involved in civil rights cases, providing them with a fair and efficient path to resolution. Prisoners rarely have the opportunity to speak to someone who will listen respectfully to their views and concerns. Prisoners have repeatedly expressed appreciation for the efforts of mediators, even in cases that did not settle.

Expand your skills. Serving as a PEM mediator will allow you to gain valuable experience in mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution, which can be used to benefit your own clients. Your participation will also give you access to periodic training opportunities with judges, skilled mediators, and experts in topics related to prisoner civil rights to allow you to sharpen your skills.

Contribute according to your schedule. Signing up online to conduct a mediation conference is easy. PEM mediation conferences are half-day sessions, conducted via Zoom, allowing you to participate from the location of your choice. You pick the day and time slot that works best for you. Mediations typically last less than three hours.

While you need no prior mediation training or experience, volunteers must meet the following requirements:

- Be a licensed attorney with a minimum of two years of experience;
- Be a member in good standing of this Court's bar; and
- Agree to serve as a pro bono mediator at least four times annually (the equivalent of two days a year).

All approved applicants must attend a PEM training seminar, sponsored by the Court. The next training seminar and workshop will take place in Spring 2025, and will be held via Zoom.

If you would like to volunteer, please complete the attached application, and return it to Amanda Zdarsky, our PEM Coordinator, at Amanda_Zdarsky@miwd.uscourts.gov. If you have any additional questions before you decide whether to commit, feel free to contact Amanda via email.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to serve the Court and your community.

Respectfully,



Jane M. Beckering
United States District Judge



Phillip J. Green
United States Magistrate Judge