Dear Referees:

I recently attended a lawyer image regional meeting of the State Bar of Michigan. At this meeting there was a presentation of the results of the statewide opinion survey about lawyers and the legal system. This survey was carried out in February of this year. Since we referees are "judges" according to Michigan Court Rule 9.201 (2), I believe we should be mindful of the public's attitudes toward us. Fortunately 55% of the persons surveyed had a positive attitude and 24% had a neutral or mixed attitude. Unfortunately 21% of those surveyed had a negative attitude concerning judges.

The unfavorable responses gave comments about arbitrary, corrupt or biased judges, judges being too lenient, judges being incompetent and referring to negative news coverage. I think all of us should make an effort to avoid being described as such and strive to be included among those toward which the public has a positive attitude. Those persons cite a positive experience observing judges on the bench, observing judges displaying fairness or honesty, intelligence or competence and generating positive news stories.

As you can see in the attached minutes, the Supreme Court is considering amending MCR 8.115 to prohibit referees and magistrates from wearing judicial robes. Your association is opposed to such an amendment. I will be attending a joint meeting of the PJA Rules Committee and MJA Domestic Relations Committee and Executive Board Meeting of MJA on May 20, 1997 to discuss this matter. Back in 1995 RAM conducted a survey to determine which referees wore a judicial robe while performing referee functions. In order to update the results of that survey I ask that each of you call me at 810-858-5420 and tell me, my case assistant, Karen or my voice mail your name, whether you are a juvenile referee or Friend of the Court referee and the name of your county and if you wear a judicial robe. Please call me as soon as you can so I will have this information for my May 20 meeting.

I look forward to seeing all of you at our conference on May 28-30 in Traverse City.

Very truly yours,

PHILIP G. INGRAHAM
PRESIDENT

PGI/bsm