

I am writing to express my concerns about Sections 1 and 5 of the Lighten the Load bill. I am asking that you forward this to all House Judiciary Committee members. I practice family law here in Manchester and most of my clients struggle to afford legal services. I help many individuals by providing advice because they can't afford full representation.

Section 1 of the bill would require litigants to serve copies of all motions on opposing parties. Currently the court takes care of service when there are minor children. To shift that burden to litigants, many of whom are pro se, would increase cost and complexity for unrepresented parties and may result in using the sheriff for service which can increase animosity in already tense situations. As pointed out by Attorney Patricia Benelli in her email to you, it would be better to add a fee to cover the cost of the court continuing this service.

Section 5 of the bill would move all appeals of child support cases from the family court judge to the Vermont Supreme Court. The complexity of Supreme Court appeals will be beyond the ability of many pro se litigants leaving them to either hire counsel at significant expense or abandon meritorious appeals. In my experience, the current system works well and affords litigants access to justice whether or not they can afford attorneys. I urge the committee to oppose both Section 1 and Section 5. Thank you.

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