

**From:** Bombard, Monica **On Behalf Of** Reiber, Paul  
**Sent:** Friday, April 07, 2017 11:52 AM  
**To:** JUD <JUD@vermont.gov>  
**Subject:** MEMO BELOW FROM CHIEF JUSTICE REIBER

Recent events have raised concerns among court staff about the potential impact of federal immigration enforcements efforts on our core mission.

We are all, of course, aware of the ongoing public controversy over federal immigration policy. My purpose here is not to address or debate that policy.

The goal here is much simpler, but no less urgent. It is to affirm that the Vermont judicial branch remains fully committed to ensuring that every person who lives and works in the State of Vermont retains the right to free and unfettered access to justice under the law.

It is a principle enshrined in the Constitution of the State of Vermont, as it is in the hearts and minds of its inhabitants, that all stand equal before the law and are equally entitled to its benefits and protections, as they are punishable for its violation.

Free and equal access to our courts is an essential corollary of this principle. This right finds expression in our Constitution, as well, in providing that “every person within this state ought to find a certain remedy, by having recourse to our laws, for all injuries and wrongs,” and that “every person ought to obtain [that] right freely . . . completely and without denial . . . [or] delay.”

Through the peaceful resolution of disputes our courts play a powerful—indeed indispensable—role in the preservation of public safety and the enhancement of individual freedom. The framers of our Constitution wisely understood that guaranteeing *every person* free and equal access to justice benefits *all persons*. Our courts—like our schools—are the very embodiment of our core values: equality before the law, fundamental fairness, individual dignity, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

This is precisely why the denial of access to an institution as fundamental as our courts poses a threat to the safety and well-being of this State. Fear that deters anyone, but especially the most vulnerable among our population, from using the courts to protect them from crime or domestic abuse, unfair employment practices or housing discrimination, makes all Vermonters less secure. Every person who lives and works in Vermont must feel free to use our courts without fear or hesitation.

As Chief Justice, I will continue to work with every member and employee of the judicial branch to ensure unhindered access to Vermont’s courts. I know that each of you shares this goal, and I am grateful, as always, for your tireless efforts to serve the people of Vermont.

I am confident that our partners in the executive branch—federal and state—remain equally committed to this goal, and I look forward to working cooperatively with all concerned, including state and federal law-enforcement agents, to protect every person’s constitutional right to equal access to justice