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June 11, 2015

Joseph Stanton, Clerk
Massachusetts Appeals Court
Room 1200
One Pemberton Square
Boston, MA 02108-1705

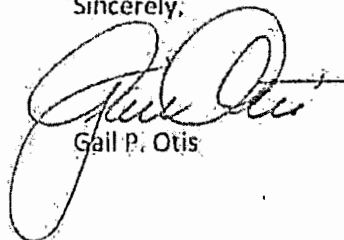
Dear Attorney Stanton:

I am unable to attend the upcoming hearing regarding public access to court records, and so I am respectfully submitting these comments for consideration on the issue.

I have been practicing in the field of family law for approximately 17.5 years, and for the past 11 years my practice has been located in Hingham, MA. Having internet access to court records would be a tremendous convenience for me in my daily practice; however, I feel that the disadvantages, and indeed, the dangers, that would result from such access by the public far outweigh the advantages. Over the recent years it has become abundantly clear that there are serious dangers in allowing easy access to information that would permit another to use the information for nefarious acts or intentions including, for example, cyberbullying, or access to addresses or financial information of litigants by abusers or stalkers or others who have no relationship whatsoever with the pending matter. Examples abound of the unauthorized access to private photos and personal information of public individuals and celebrities which has been shared on the internet resulting in tremendous embarrassment, emotional harm, and other consequences. Children with unfettered access to a computer could access documents in their parents' divorce action, or classmates of the children could do so, and the sharing of such information may cause great harm to the children and/or to the family. It is simply too easy today to use the internet to cause great harm to others through the acquisition of information and/or posting of same to the public arena.

Although most family law files in the Probate and Family Court divisional registries are available for viewing by the public at the registry, many would likely think twice before appearing at the courthouse and having to request in writing access to files, and certainly children would not have access under any circumstances. Having to go through the process of appearing to request access to the file provides an additional layer of protection against the inappropriate and/or unauthorized viewing of documents considered private, if not confidential. It is all too easy today for someone to create great mayhem with another person's information – all while never having to leave the comfort and privacy of his/her living room. For all the reasons stated, I respectfully suggest that public access to court records via the internet be restricted.

Sincerely,



Gail P. Otis