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IN THE MATTER OF:

PETITION TO AMEND THE RULES
OF THE SUPREME COURT OF
ARIZONA: RULE 24 – JURY
SELECTION

R-20-0009

I am writing for myself and the Arizona Justice Alliance (AJA). The mission statement of AJA is to identify and recommend changes to Arizona's justice-related laws and practices in order to preserve and enhance public safety, reduce prison populations and decrease corrections spending so that state resources can be invested in critical services which prevent crime, protect citizens and fulfill state priorities. We have been working in a statewide coalition since 2012.

AJA believes that racism, whether blatant or hidden, is one of the reasons our prison population is not only so large but wrongfully skewed toward certain types of people. A great deal of research, including the Harvard Implicit Bias study, has shown that consciously or unconsciously people hold negative stereotypes against people of color. Rule 24 would address some part of that bias.

During nine years as a volunteer workshop volunteer at the Perryville Women's State Prison, I observed discrimination not only toward inmates but also within the prison population itself. Staff were unnecessarily disrespectful toward inmates and notably toward the women of color. Inmates associated primarily with women of their own race. In my experience, the Perryville dynamics reflected the existing prevalent racial prejudices seen in today's society.

We urge you to not only pass Rule 24 but to broaden it to include other disfavored classes of people such as women, LGBT communities, and the mentally ill including the disabled. We look forward to moving toward a more harmonious future for all of us.

Sincerely,

Penelope Denton, Ph.D.

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