

Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.

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Michigan Pastor Denied Right to Attend His Own Hearing

A Michigan judge ruled this week that the Rev. Edward Pinkney, a Benton Harbor minister and longtime vocal community activist who recently served 13 months in jail couldn't attend his own hearing in Grand Rapids before the Michigan Court of Appeals. Rev. Pinkney who is now under 24-hour house arrest and probation for quoting the Bible was requesting to be released from his home monitoring system so he could be present for his day in court yesterday.

Pinkney's case has gained the attention of the ACLU, religious and social justice groups throughout the country who feel his treatment and sentencing of 3 to 10 years, is not only excessive, but it is also a gross violation of the minister's religious and civil rights. Before a full courtroom of supporters and Rev. Pinkney's wife, his attorneys presented their arguments and now await an Appellate Court ruling that could take months. Meanwhile, a Michigan Supreme Court ruling on whether Rev. Pinkney should be denied the right to leave his house without court approval is expected any day.

Rev. Pinkney led a successful recall election effort against a prominent politician in response to a land grab deal involving the Whirlpool Corporation. As a result of these social activist efforts, he was originally arrested for a charge of voter registration fraud and was eventually placed on probation. That probation was revoked and Rev. Pinkney was sentenced to jail because the judge perceived that Pinkney's citing of Biblical scripture (Deuteronomy) in an article he wrote questioning the ills of racism and an unjust judicial system were direct threats. As a result, the Judge ruled Pinkney forfeited his first amendment protection and sentenced him to 3 – 10 years.

Benton Harbor is the poorest community in Michigan with a long history of racial and class injustice. In the last few weeks there have been rallies of community unity and support for Rev. Pinkney and protests against the detailed and extensive list of probation conditions to which he must adhere. Not only is Pinkney confined to his home, but he also must pay the cost of his monitoring system, which is \$105 weekly. The following probation conditions exist for Rev. Pinkney. He cannot be directly involved in any community organizing. He cannot preach or speak publicly at any church. He is not allowed to leave his home without permission and his ability to speak or write publicly has been severely limited.

The Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference has been working with other organizations and persons to bring awareness about the conditions of Benton Harbor and to get support for Rev. Pinkney. Support for Rev. Pinkney and the friends of the court brief include The National Baptist Convention USA, the

Progressive National Baptist Convention, the Gamaliel Foundation, The Nation of Islam, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the National Action Network, National Black United Front and the State of the Black World.