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Director
Marc Rotenberg

To: All Concerned

From: Marc Rotenberg, CPSR

Subject: Meeting on Electronic Dissemination
of Supreme Court Opinions
Monday, January 22, from noon to 2:00 (brown bag)
CPSR Office, 1025 Conn. Ave. NW Suite 1015

I am writing to invite you to an informal meeting to discuss the status of the electronic dissemination of Supreme Court opinions.

The Court recently agreed to release opinions in machine-readable form (on floppy disk) at the time they are issued from the bench. A number of groups, particularly legal publishers, have come forward to propose various dissemination structures.

Under the current proposal, dubbed "Project Hermes," a separate computer system will be set-up in the Court with a limited number of dial-in ports. The Court will transfer the final opinion to this system. Selected distributors would then be responsible for disseminating the Court's opinions to the public. The current proposal does not include a plan for disseminating information to the non-profit/public interest community.

The purpose of this meeting is to prepare a letter to the Court and other interested organizations about the need to ensure public interest access to the Court opinions in electronic formats. If left unchallenged the Court's current plan could reinforce a disturbing trend. A recent report on legal education and the New England economy, chaired by the former governor of Vermont Thomas P. Salmon, found that the use of information technologies by smaller firms and sole practitioners was sharply constrained by their cost and a severe shortage of public facilities. CPSR hopes to encourage policies that would avoid the creation of new information age divisions between information rich and information poor.

On a related matter, PICA has now set-up a small CD-ROM library. We also recently received a CD-ROM reader from Apple with a large display screen. Those of you who came to the October meeting at the Benton Foundation may be interested in a hands-on demonstration of CD-ROM technology. It's a lot of fun.

Please give me a call (775-1588) if you have any questions or need more information.

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