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**b. Under the Michigan Constitution,  
Pension Rights Are Contractual Rights.**

The Plans seek escape from this result by asserting that under the Michigan Constitution, pension debt has greater protection than ordinary contract debt. The argument is premised on the slim reed that in the Michigan Constitution, pension rights may not be “impaired or diminished,” whereas only laws “impairing” contract rights are prohibited.

There are several reasons why the slight difference between the language that protects contracts (no “impairment”) and the language that protects pensions (no “impairment” or “diminishment”) does not demonstrate that pensions were given any extraordinary protection.

Before reviewing those reasons, however, a brief review of the history of the legal status of pension benefits in Michigan is necessary.

At common law, before the adoption of the Michigan Constitution in 1963, public pensions in Michigan were viewed as gratuitous allowances that could be revoked at will, because a retiree lacked any vested right in their continuation. In *Brown v. Highland Park*, 320 Mich. 108, 114, 30 N.W.2d 798, 800 (Mich. 1948), the Michigan Supreme Court stated:

We are convinced that the majority of cases in other jurisdictions establishes the rule that a pension granted by public authorities is not a contractual obligation, that the pensioner has no vested right, and that a pension is terminable at the will of a municipality, at least while acting within reasonable limits. At best plaintiffs in this case have an expectancy based upon continuance of existing charter provisions.

Similarly, in *Kosa v. Treasurer of State of Mich.*, 408 Mich. 356, 368-69, 292 N.W.2d 452, 459 (1980), the court observed this about the status of pension benefits before the 1963 Constitution was adopted:

Until the adoption of Const. 1963, art. 9, s 24, legislative appropriation for retirement fund reserves was considered to be an ex gratia action. Consequently, the most that could be said about “pre-con” legislative appropriations for retirees was that there was some kind of implied commitment to fund pension reserves.

*Id.* (footnote omitted).

In the 1963 Constitution, this provision enhancing the protection for pensions was included: “The accrued financial benefits of each pension plan and retirement system of the state and its political subdivisions shall be a contractual obligation thereof which shall not be diminished or impaired thereby.” Mich. Const. art. IX, § 24.

In *Kosa*, 408 Mich. at 370 n.21, 292 N.W.2d at 459, the Michigan Supreme Court quoted the following history from the constitutional convention regarding article 9, section 24:

“MR. VAN DUSEN: Mr. Chairman, if I may elaborate briefly on Mr. Brake’s answer to Mr. Downs’ question, I would like to indicate that the words ‘accrued financial benefits’ were used designedly, so that the *contractual right of the employee* would be limited to the deferred compensation embodied in any pension plan, and that we hope to avoid thereby a proliferation of litigation by individual participants in retirement systems talking about the general benefits structure, or something other than his specific right to receive benefits. It is not intended that an individual employee should, as a result of this language, be given the right to sue the employing unit to require the actuarial funding of past service benefits, or anything of that nature. *What it is designed to do is to say that when his benefits come due, he’s got a contractual right to receive them.* “And, in answer to your second question, *he has the contractual right to sue for them.* So that he has no particular interest in the funding of somebody else’s benefits as long as *he has the contractual right to sue for his.*”

“MR. DOWNS: I appreciate Mr. Van Dusen’s comments. Again, I want to see if I understand this. Then he would not have a remedy of legally forcing the legislative body each year to set aside the appropriate amount, but when the money did come due this would be a *contractual right* for which he could sue a ministerial officer that could be mandamus or enjoined; is that correct?

“MR. VAN DUSEN: That’s my understanding, Mr. Downs.”

*Id.* (emphasis added).

*Kosa* also offered an explanation for the origin of the provision. “To gain protection of their pension rights, Michigan teachers effectively lobbied for a constitutional amendment granting *contractual status* to retirement benefits.” 408 Mich. at 360, 292 N.W.2d at 455 (emphasis added).

The *Kosa* court summarized the provision, again using contract language, as follows:

To sum up, while the Legislature’s constitutional *contractual obligation* is not to impair “accrued financial benefits”, even if that obligation also related to the funding system, there would be no impairment of the *contractual obligation* because the substituted “entry age normal” system supports the benefit structure as strongly as the replaced “attained age” system.

*Id.*, 408 Mich. at 373, 292 N.W.2d at 461(emphasis added).

While counting such blessings as have come to them, public school employees are understandably still concerned about their pension security. In that regard, this opinion reminds the Legislature that the constitutional provision adopted by the people of this state is indeed a *solemn contractual obligation* between public employees and the Legislature guaranteeing that pension benefit payments cannot be constitutionally impaired.

*Id.*, 408 Mich. at 382, 292 N.W.2d at 465 (emphasis added).

More recently, in *In re Constitutionality of 2011 PA 38*, 490 Mich. 295, 806 N.W.2d 683 (2011), the Michigan Supreme Court unequivocally stated, “The obvious intent of § 24, however, was to ensure that public pensions be treated as *contractual obligations* that, once earned, could not be diminished.” *Id.* at 311, 806 N.W.2d at 693 (emphasis added).

That historical review begins to demonstrate the several reasons why the slight difference in the language that protects contracts and the language that protects pensions does not suggest that pensions were given any extraordinary protection:

**First**, the language of article IX, section 24, gives pension benefits the status of a “contractual obligation.” The natural meaning of the words “contractual obligation” is certainly inconsistent with the greater protection for which the Plans now argue.

**Second**, if the Michigan Constitution were meant to give the kind of absolute protection for which the Plans argue, the language in the article IX, section 24 simply would not have referred to pension benefits as a “contractual obligation.” It also would not have been constructed by simply copying the verb from the contracts clause - “impair” - and then adding a lesser verb - “diminish” in the disjunctive.

**Third**, linguistically, there is no functional difference in meaning between “impair” and “impair or diminish.” There certainly is a preference, if not a mandate, to give meaning to every word in written law. In *Koontz v. Ameritech Servs., Inc.*, 466 Mich. 304, 312, 645 N.W.2d 34, 39 (2002), the Michigan Supreme Court summarized the familiar command, “Courts must give effect to every word, phrase, and clause in a statute, and must avoid an interpretation that would render any part of the statute surplusage or nugatory.” The court went on to state, however, “we give undefined statutory terms their plain and ordinary meanings.” *Id.*

Under *Meridian Mut. Ins. Co. v. Kellman*, 197 F.3d 1178, 1181 (6th Cir. 1999), discussed in more detail in Part IX A, below, this Court is bound by these commands of statutory interpretation that the Michigan Supreme Court embraced in *Koontz*. But if this Court gives these terms - “diminish” and “impair” - their plain and ordinary meanings, as *Koontz* requires, those meanings would not be substantively different from each other. The terms are not

synonyms, but they cannot honestly be given meanings so different as to compel the result that the Plans now seek. “Diminish” adds nothing material to “impair.” All “diminishment” is “impairment.” And, “impair” includes “diminish.”

**Fourth**, the Plans’ argument for a greater protection is inconsistent with the Michigan Supreme Court’s interpretation of the constitutional language in *Kosa* and in *In re Constitutionality of 2011 PA 38*. Those cases also used contract language to describe the status of pensions. This is important because the Sixth Circuit has held that on questions of state law, this Court is bound to apply the holdings of the Michigan Supreme Court. See *Kirk v. Hanes Corp. of North Carolina*, 16 F.3d 705, 706 (6th Cir. 1994).

**Fifth**, an even greater narrative must be considered here, focusing on 1963. *Bekins* had long since determined that municipal bankruptcy was constitutional. That of course meant that even though states could not impair municipal contracts, federal courts could do that in a bankruptcy case. Indeed, Michigan law then allowed municipalities to file bankruptcy.<sup>24</sup>

It was within that framework of rights, expectations, scenarios and possibilities that the newly negotiated, proposed and ratified Michigan Constitution of 1963 explicitly gave accrued pension benefits the status of contractual obligations. That new constitution could have given pensions protection from impairment in bankruptcy in several ways. It could have simply prohibited Michigan municipalities from filing bankruptcy. It could have somehow created a

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<sup>24</sup> See Public Act 72 of 1939, MCL § 141.201(1) (repealed by P.A. 70 of 1982) (“Any . . . instrumentality in this state as defined in [the Bankruptcy Act of 1898 and amendments thereto] . . . may proceed under the terms and conditions of such acts to secure a composition of its debts. . . . The governing authority of any such . . . instrumentality, or the officer, board or body having authority to levy taxes to meet the obligations to be affected by the plan of composition may file the petition and agree upon any plan of composition authorized by said act of congress[.]”).

property interest that bankruptcy would be required to respect under *Butner v. United States*, 440 U.S. 48, 99 S. Ct. 914 (1979) (holding that property issues in bankruptcy are determined according to state law). Or, it could have established some sort of a secured interest in the municipality's property. It could even have explicitly required the State to guaranty pension benefits. But it did none of those.

Instead, both the history from the constitutional convention, quoted above, and the language of the pension provision itself, make it clear that the only remedy for impairment of pensions is a claim for breach of contract.

Because under the Michigan Constitution, pension rights are contractual rights, they are subject to impairment in a federal bankruptcy proceeding. Moreover, when, as here, the state consents, that impairment does not violate the Tenth Amendment. Therefore, as applied in this case, chapter 9 is not unconstitutional.

Nevertheless, the Court is compelled to comment. No one should interpret this holding that pension rights are subject to impairment in this bankruptcy case to mean that the Court will necessarily confirm any plan of adjustment that impairs pensions. The Court emphasizes that it will not lightly or casually exercise the power under federal bankruptcy law to impair pensions. Before the Court confirms any plan that the City submits, the Court must find that the plan fully meets the requirements of 11 U.S.C. § 943(b) and the other applicable provisions of the bankruptcy code. Together, these provisions of law demand this Court's judicious legal and equitable consideration of the interests of the City and all of its creditors, as well as the laws of the State of Michigan.

**IX. Public Act 436 Does Not  
Violate the Michigan Constitution.**

Section 109(c)(2) of the bankruptcy code requires that a municipality be “specifically authorized, in its capacity as a municipality or by name, to be a debtor under such chapter by State law, or by a governmental officer or organization empowered by State law to authorize such entity to be a debtor under such chapter.” 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(2). The evidence establishes that the City was authorized to file this case. The issue is whether that authorization was proper under the Michigan Constitution.

Section 18 of P.A. 436, M.C.L. § 141.1558, establishes the process for authorizing a municipality to file a case under chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code:

(1) If, in the judgment of the emergency manager, no reasonable alternative to rectifying the financial emergency of the local government which is in receivership exists, then the emergency manager may recommend to the governor and the state treasurer that the local government be authorized to proceed under chapter 9. If the governor approves of the recommendation, the governor shall inform the state treasurer and the emergency manager in writing of the decision . . . . The governor may place contingencies on a local government in order to proceed under chapter 9. Upon receipt of written approval, the emergency manager is authorized to proceed under chapter 9. This section empowers the local government for which an emergency manager has been appointed to become a debtor under title 11 of the United States Code, 11 USC 101 to 1532, as required by section 109 of title 11 of the United States Code, 11 USC 109, and empowers the emergency manager to act exclusively on the local government’s behalf in any such case under chapter 9.

M.C.L. § 141.1558(1).

On July 16, 2013, Mr. Orr gave the governor and the treasurer his written recommendation that the City be authorized to file for chapter 9 relief. Ex. 28. On July 18, 2013, the governor approved this recommendation in writing. Ex. 29. Later that day, Mr. Orr

issued a written order directing the City to file this chapter 9 case. Ex. 30. Thus the City of Detroit's bankruptcy filing was authorized under state law.

Nevertheless, several objectors assert various arguments that the City of Detroit is not authorized to file this case.

First, several objectors argue that the authorization is not valid because P.A. 436, the statute establishing the underlying procedure for a municipality to obtain authority for filing, is unconstitutional. Broadly stated, these are the challenges to P.A. 436:

The Retired Detroit Police Members Association (“RDPMA”) challenges the constitutionality of P.A. 436 on the grounds that it was enacted immediately after the referendum rejection of a similar statute, P.A. 4.

The RDPMA also asserts that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional on the grounds that the Michigan Legislature added an appropriation provision for the purpose of evading the peoples' constitutional right to referendum.

Several objectors argue that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional because it fails to protect pensions from impairment in bankruptcy.

AFSCME asserts that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional because it violates the “Strong Home Rule” provisions in the Michigan Constitution.

#### **A. The Michigan Case Law on Evaluating the Constitutionality of a State Statute.**

The validity of P.A. 436 under the Michigan Constitution is a question of state law. Determining the several constitutional challenges to P.A. 436 requires this Court to apply state law. In *Meridian Mut. Ins. Co. v. Kellman*, 197 F.3d 1178, 1181 (6th Cir. 1999), the Sixth Circuit provided this guidance on determining state law:

In construing questions of state law, the federal court must apply state law in accordance with the controlling decisions of the highest court of the state. *Erie R.R. Co. v. Tompkins*, 304 U.S. 64, 58 S. Ct. 817, 82 L. Ed. 1188 (1938). If the state’s highest court has not addressed the issue, the federal court must attempt to ascertain how that court would rule if it were faced with the issue. The Court may use the decisional law of the state’s lower courts, other federal courts construing state law, restatements of law, law review commentaries, and other jurisdictions on the “majority” rule in making this determination. *Grantham & Mann v. American Safety Prods.*, 831 F.2d 596, 608 (6th Cir.1987). A federal court should not disregard the decisions of intermediate appellate state courts unless it is convinced by other persuasive data that the highest court of the state would decide otherwise. *Commissioner v. Estate of Bosch*, 387 U.S. 456, 465, 87 S. Ct. 1776, 1782, 18 L.Ed.2d 886 (1967).

Similarly, in *Demczyk v. Mut. Life Ins. Co. of N.Y. (In re Graham Square, Inc.)*, 126 F.3d 823, 827 (6th Cir. 1997), the court stated, “Where the relevant state law is unsettled, we determine how we think the highest state court would rule if faced with the same case.”

The Michigan Supreme Court has not ruled directly on the validity P.A. 436. As a result, this Court must attempt to ascertain how that court would rule if it were faced with the issue.

In *In re Request for Advisory Opinion Regarding Constitutionality of 2011 PA 38*, 490 Mich. 295, 307-8, 806 N.W.2d 683, 692 (2011), the Michigan Supreme Court summarized its decisions on evaluating a constitutional challenge to a state law:

“Statutes are presumed to be constitutional, and courts have a duty to construe a statute as constitutional unless its unconstitutionality is clearly apparent.” *Taylor v. Gate Pharm.*, 468 Mich. 1, 6, 658 N.W.2d 127 (2003). “We exercise the power to declare a law unconstitutional with extreme caution, and we never exercise it where serious doubt exists with regard to the conflict.” *Phillips v. Mirac, Inc.*, 470 Mich. 415, 422, 685 N.W.2d 174 (2004). “Every reasonable presumption or intendment must be indulged in favor of the validity of an act, and it is only when invalidity appears so clearly as to leave no room for reasonable doubt that it violates some provision of the Constitution that a court will refuse to sustain its validity.” *Id.* at 423, 685 N.W.2d 174, quoting *Cady v. Detroit*, 289 Mich. 499, 505, 286 N.W. 805 (1939). Therefore, “the burden of proving that a statute is unconstitutional rests with

the party challenging it[.]” *In re Request for Advisory Opinion Regarding Constitutionality of 2005 Pa. 71*, 479 Mich. 1, 11, 740 N.W.2d 444 (2007)[.]

This guidance, as well as the decisions of the Michigan Supreme Court on issues relating to the right to referendum, home rule, and the pension clause, will inform this Court’s determinations on the objectors’ challenges to P.A. 436.

**B. The Voters’ Rejection of Public Act 4 Did Not Constitutionally Prohibit the Michigan Legislature from Enacting Public Act 436.**

On March 16, 2011, the governor signed P.A. 4 into law. P.A. 4 repealed P.A. 72. However, the voters rejected P.A. 4 by referendum in the November 6, 2012 election. Shortly after that election, on December 26, 2012, the governor signed P.A. 436 into law. It took effect on March 28, 2013.

The RDPMA argues that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional because it is essentially a reenactment of P.A. 4. The City and the State of Michigan assert that there are several differences between P.A. 436 and P.A. 4, such that they are not the same law.

The right of referendum is established in article 2, section 9 of the Michigan Constitution, which provides:

Sec. 9. The people reserve to themselves the power to propose laws and to enact and reject laws, called the initiative, and the power to approve or reject laws enacted by the legislature, called the referendum. The power of initiative extends only to laws which the legislature may enact under this constitution. The power of referendum does not extend to acts making appropriations for state institutions or to meet deficiencies in state funds and must be invoked in the manner prescribed by law within 90 days following the final adjournment of the legislative session at which the law was enacted. To invoke the initiative or referendum, petitions signed by a number of registered electors, not less than eight percent for initiative and five percent for referendum of the total vote cast for all candidates for governor at the last preceding general election at which a governor was elected shall be required.

Referendum, approval

No law as to which the power of referendum properly has been invoked shall be effective thereafter unless approved by a majority of the electors voting thereon at the next general election.

Mich. Const. art. II, § 9.

In *Reynolds v. Bureau of State Lottery*, 240 Mich. App. 84, 610 N.W.2d 597 (2000), the Michigan Court of Appeals considered the power of the legislature to reenact a law while a referendum process regarding that law was pending. The court explained:

[N]othing in the Michigan Constitution suggests that the referendum had a broader effect than nullification of [the 1994 act]. We cannot read into our constitution a general “preemption of the field” that would prevent further legislative action on the issues raised by the referendum. The Legislature remained in full possession of all its other ordinary constitutional powers, including legislative power over the subject matter addressed in [the 1994 act].

*Reynolds*, 240 Mich. App. at 97, 610 N.W.2d at 604-05.

This Michigan Court of Appeals decision strongly suggests that the referendum rejection of P.A. 4 did not prohibit the Michigan legislature from enacting P.A. 436, even though P.A. 436 addressed the same subject matter as P.A. 4 and contained very few changes.

As noted above, the Sixth Circuit has instructed, “A federal court should not disregard the decisions of intermediate appellate state courts unless it is convinced by other persuasive data that the highest court of the state would decide otherwise.” *Meridian Mut. Ins. Co.*, 197 F.3d at 1181. No data, let alone any persuasive data, suggests that the Michigan Supreme Court would decide this issue otherwise. Accordingly, the RDPMA’s challenge on this ground must be rejected.

**C. Even If the Michigan Legislature Did Include Appropriations Provisions in Public Act 436 to Evade the Constitutional Right of Referendum, It Is Not Unconstitutional.**

The RDPMA also contends that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional because the Michigan legislature included appropriations provisions in P.A. 436 for the sole purpose of shielding the Act from referendum. Section 34 of P.A. 436 appropriates \$780,000 for 2013 to pay the salaries of emergency managers. Section 35 of P.A. 436 appropriates \$5,000,000 for 2013 to pay professionals hired to assist emergency managers.

There certainly was some credible evidence in support of the RDPMA's assertion that the appropriations provisions in P.A. 436 were motivated by a desire to immunize it from referendum. For example, Howard Ryan testified in his deposition on October 14, 2013:

Q. I'd just like to ask a follow-up to a question counsel asked you. You said that the appropriation language was put in the - early on in the process; is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. Based on your conversations with the people at the time, was it your understanding that one or more of the reasons to put the appropriation language in there was to make sure that it could not - the new act could not be defeated by a referendum?

A. Yes.

Q. And where did you get that knowledge from?

A. Well, having watched the entire process unfold over the past two years.

Q. The Governor's office knew that that was the point of it?

A. Yes.

Q. That your department knew that that was the point of it?

A. Yes.

Q. The legislators you were dealing with knew that that was the point of it?

A. Yes.

Howard Dep. Tr. 46:1-23, Oc. 14, 2013.<sup>25</sup>

Other evidence in support includes: a January 31, 2013 e-mail addressed from Mr. Orr to partners at Jones Day, in which he observed that P.A. 436 “is a clear end-around the prior initiative” to repeal the previous Emergency Manager statute, Public Act 4, “that was rejected by the voters in November.” Ex. 403 (Dkt. #509-3) According to Mr. Orr “although the new law provides the thin veneer of a revision (sic) it is essentially a redo of the prior rejected law and appears to merely adopt the conditions necessary for a chapter 9 filing.” Ex. 403. (Dkt. #509-3)

There are, however, several difficulties with the RDPMA’s argument.

The Court must conclude that the Michigan Supreme Court would not, if faced with this issue, hold that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional. In *Michigan United Conservation Clubs v. Secretary of State*, 464 Mich. 359, 367, 630 N.W.2d 297, 298 (2001), that court concisely held that a public act with an appropriations provision is not subject to referendum, regardless of motive. Concurring, Chief Justice Corrigan added that even if the motive of a legislative body could be discerned as opposed to the motives of individual legislators, “This Court has repeatedly held that courts must not be concerned with the alleged motives of a legislative body in enacting a law, but only with the end result—the actual language of the legislation.” *Id.* at 367.

Similarly, in *Houston v. Governor*, 491 Mich. 876, 877, 810 N.W.2d 255, 256 (2012), the Michigan Supreme Court stated, “[T]his Court possesses no special capacity, and there are no legal standards, by which to assess the political propriety of actions undertaken by the legislative

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<sup>25</sup> The parties agreed to use Ryan’s deposition testimony in lieu of live testimony. However, in the pre-trial order the City had objected to this portion of testimony on the grounds of speculation, hearsay, format and foundation. (Dkt. #1647 at 118) Those objections are overruled.

branch. Instead, it is the responsibility of the democratic, and representative, processes of government to check what the people may view as political or partisan excess by their Legislature.”

In *People v. Gibbs*, 186 Mich. 127, 134-35, 152 N.W. 1053, 1055 (1915), the Michigan Supreme Court stated, “Courts are not concerned with the motives which actuate the members of the legislative body in enacting a law, but in the results of their action. Bad motives might inspire a law which appeared on its face and proved valid and beneficial, while a bad and invalid law might be, and sometimes is, passed with good intent and the best of motives.” See also *Kuhn v. Dep’t of Treasury*, 384 Mich. 378, 383-84, 183 N.W.2d 796, 799 (1971).

Finally, it must also be noted that on November 8, 2013, the Sixth Circuit vacated pending rehearing *en banc* the decision on which the RDPMA heavily relies. *City of Pontiac Retired Employees Assoc. v. Schimmel*, 726 F.3d 767 (6th Cir. 2013).

Accordingly, the Court concludes that P.A. 436 is not unconstitutional as a violation of the right to referendum in article II, section 9 of the Michigan Constitution.

#### **D. Public Act 436 Does Not Violate the Home Rule Provisions of the Michigan Constitution.**

Certain objectors argue that P.A. 436 violates Article VII, Section 22 of the Michigan Constitution, which states:

Under general laws the electors of each city and village shall have the power and authority to frame, adopt and amend its charter, and to amend an existing charter of the city or village heretofore granted or enacted by the legislature for the government of the city or village. Each such city and village shall have power to adopt resolutions and ordinances relating to its municipal concerns, property and government, subject to the constitution and law. No enumeration of powers granted to cities and villages in this constitution shall limit or restrict the general grant of authority conferred by this section.

The argument is that the appointment of an emergency manager for a municipality under P.A. 436 is inconsistent with the right of the electors to adopt and amend the City charter and the city's right to adopt ordinances. AFSCME asserts that "Michigan is strongly committed to the concept of home rule[.]" AFSCME Amended Objection at 75-91. (Dkt. #1156) "This 'strong home rule' regime reflects a bedrock principle of state law, . . . all officers of cities are to 'be elected by the electors thereof, or appointed by such authorities thereof' not by the central State Government." *Id.* (citing *Brouwer v. Bronkema*, 377 Mich. 616, 141 N.W.2d 98 (1966)). AFSCME further asserts that in authorizing the appointment of an emergency manager with broad powers that usurp the powers of elected officials, "PA 436 offends the 'strong home rule' of Detroit and that the Emergency Manager is not lawfully authorized to file for bankruptcy on behalf of the City or to act as its representative during chapter 9 proceedings." AFSCME Amended Objection at 75-91. (Dkt. #1156)

AFSCME's argument fails for the simple reason that the broad authority the Michigan Constitution grants to municipalities is subject to constitutional and statutory limits. This constitutional provision itself embodies that principle. It states, "Each such city and village shall have power to adopt resolutions and ordinances relating to its municipal concerns, property and government, *subject to the constitution and law.*" Mich. Const. art. VII, § 22 (emphasis added).

State law recognizes the same limitation on local government authority:

Each city may in its charter provide:

(3) Municipal powers. For the exercise of all municipal powers in the management and control of municipal property and in the administration of the municipal government, whether such powers be expressly enumerated or not; for any act to advance the interests of the city, the good government and prosperity of the municipality and its inhabitants and through its regularly constituted authority to pass all laws and ordinances relating to its municipal concerns *subject to the constitution and general laws of this state.*

M.C.L. § 117.4j(3) (emphasis added).

Similarly, M.C.L. § 117.36, states, “No provision of any city charter shall conflict with or contravene the provisions of any general law of the state.”

Indeed, § 1-102 of the Charter of the City of Detroit states: “The City has the comprehensive home rule power conferred upon it by the Michigan Constitution, *subject only to the limitations on the exercise of that power contained in the Constitution or this Charter or imposed by statute.*” *Id.* (emphasis added). See *Detroit City Council v. Mayor of Detroit*, 283 Mich. App. 442, 453, 770 N.W.2d 117, 124 (Mich. Ct. App. 2009) (“The charter itself thus recognizes that it is subject to limitations imposed by statute.”).

“Municipal corporations have no inherent power. They are created by the state and derive their authority from the state.” *Bivens v. Grand Rapids*, 443 Mich. 391, 397, 505 N.W.2d 239, 241 (1993).

The Michigan case law establishes that the powers granted to municipalities by the “home rule” sections of the Michigan Constitution are subject to the limits of the power and authority of the State to create laws of general concern. *Brimmer v. Village of Elk Rapids*, 365 Mich. 6, 13, 112 N.W.2d 222, 225 (1961).

“Municipal corporations are state agencies, and, subject to constitutional restrictions, the Legislature may modify the corporate charters of municipal corporations at will. 12 C.J. [p.] 1031. Powers are granted to them as state agencies to carry on local government. The state still has authority to amend their charters and enlarge or diminish their powers.” [1] *Cooley*, Const. Lim. (8th Ed.), [p.] 393. \* \* \* Its powers are plenary.

*City of Hazel Park v. Mun. Fin. Comm’n*, 317 Mich. 582, 599-600, 27 N.W.2d 106, 113-14 (1947).

The Home Rule provision of the constitution does not deprive the legislature of its power to enact laws affecting municipalities operation under that provision except as to matters of purely local

concern. . . . *The right to pass general laws is still reserved to the l[e]gisature of the state, and consequently it is still competent for the state through the law making body to enact measures pursuant to the police power or pursuant to other general powers inherent in the state and to require municipalities to observe the same.*

*Local Union No. 876, Int'l Bhd. of Elec. Workers v. State of Mich. Labor Mediation Bd.*, 294 Mich. 629, 635-36, 293 N.W. 809, 811 (1940) (emphasis added). *See also Mack v. City of Detroit*, 467 Mich. 186, 194, 649 N.W.2d 47, 52 (2002); *American Axle & Mfg., Inc. v. City of Hamtramck*, 461 Mich. 352, 377, 604 N.W.2d 330, 342 (2000) (In *Harsha* we held that “the legislature might modify the charters of municipal corporations at will and that the State still retained authority to amend charters and enlarge and diminish their powers.”); *Board of Trustees of Policemen & Firemen Retirement System v. City of Detroit*, 143 Mich. App. 651, 655, 373 N.W.2d 173, 175 (Mich. Ct. App. 1985) (“Where a city charter provision conflicts with general statutory law, the statute controls in all matters which are not of purely local character.”); *Oakland Cnty. Board of Cnty. Road Comm'rs v. Mich. Prop. & Cas. Guar. Ass'n*, 456 Mich. 590, 609, 575 N.W.2d 751, 760 (1998) (“Like a municipal corporation, the road commission’s existence is entirely dependent on the legislation that created it, and the Legislature that may also destroy it.”).

AFSCME asserts that P.A. 436 is a “local law” because it gives the emergency manager broad authority to pass local legislation, and that therefore it violates article IV, section 29 of the Michigan Constitution. That section provides, in pertinent part, “The legislature shall pass no local or special act in any case where a general act can be made applicable[.]”

One plain difficulty with this argument is that this provision of the Michigan Constitution constrains the Michigan Legislature, not the emergency manager.

In defining a general law, the Michigan Supreme Court has stated, “A general law is one which includes all persons, classes and property similarly situated and which come within its

limitations.” *Am. Axle & Mfg., Inc. v. City of Hamtramck*, 461 Mich. 352, 359 n.5, 604 N.W.2d 330, 334 (2000) (citing *Tribbett v. Village of Marcellus*, 294 Mich. 607, 618, 293 N.W. 872 (1940), quoting *Punke v. Village of Elliott*, 364 Ill. 604, 608-9, 5 N.E.2d 389, 393 (1936)).

Clearly, P.A. 436 is a general law, potentially applicable to all municipalities similarly situated within the State of Michigan. According to its preamble, its purposes are: “to safeguard and assure the financial accountability of local units of government and school districts; to preserve the capacity of local units of government and school districts to provide or cause to be provided necessary services essential to the public health, safety and welfare[.]”

Accordingly, the Court finds that P.A. 436 does not violate the home rule provisions of the Michigan Constitution.

#### **E. Public Act 436 Does Not Violate the Pension Clause of the Michigan Constitution.**

Many objectors argue that the bankruptcy authorization section of P.A. 436, M.C.L. § 141.1558, does not conform to the requirements of the pension clause of the Michigan Constitution and is therefore unconstitutional. Accordingly, the objectors argue that P.A. 436 cannot provide the basis for authorization as required by 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(2).

As noted, the premise of this argument is that under the Michigan constitution, pension benefits are entitled to greater protection than contract claims. That premise, however, is the same as the premise of the argument that chapter 9 is unconstitutional as applied in this case.

In Part VIII C 5 b, above, the Court rejected this argument, concluding that pension benefits are a contractual obligation of the municipality.

It follows that if a state consents to a municipal bankruptcy, no state law can protect contractual pension rights from impairment in bankruptcy, just as no law could protect any other types of contract rights. Accordingly, the failure of P.A. 436 to protect pension rights in a

municipal bankruptcy does not make that law inconsistent with the pension clause of the Michigan Constitution any more than the failure of P.A. 436 to protect, for example, bond debt in bankruptcy is inconsistent with the contracts clause of the Michigan Constitution. For this purpose, the parallel is perfect.

Stated another way, state law cannot reorder the distributional priorities of the bankruptcy code. If the state consents to a municipal bankruptcy, it consents to the application of chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code. This point was driven home in the *Stockton* case:

A state cannot rely on the § 903 reservation of state power to condition or to qualify, i.e. to “cherry pick,” the application of the Bankruptcy Code provisions that apply in chapter 9 cases after such a case has been filed. *Mission Indep. School Dist. v. Texas*, 116 F.2d 175, 176–78 (5th Cir. 1940) (chapter IX); *Vallejo*, 403 B.R. at 75–76; *In re City of Stockton*, 475 B.R. 720, 727–29 (Bankr. E.D. Cal. 2012) (“*Stockton I*”); *In re Cnty. of Orange*, 191 B.R. 1005, 1021 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1996).

While a state may control prerequisites for consenting to permit one of its municipalities (which is an arm of the state cloaked in the state’s sovereignty) to file a chapter 9 case, it cannot revise chapter 9. *Stockton I*, 475 B.R. at 727–29. *For example, it cannot immunize bond debt held by the state from impairment. Mission Indep. School Dist.*, 116 F.2d at 176–78.

478 B.R. at 16-17 (emphasis added).

For these reasons, the Court concludes that P.A. 436 does not violate the pension clause of the Michigan Constitution.

**X. Detroit’s Emergency Manager Had Valid Authority to File This Bankruptcy Case Even Though He Is Not an Elected Official.**

AFSCME and most of the individual objectors argue that the emergency manager did not have valid authority to file this bankruptcy case because he is not an elected official. The Court concludes that this argument is similar to, or the same as, the argument that AFSCME made that P.A. 436 violates the home rule provisions of the Michigan Constitution. See Part IX D above.

Accordingly, for the reasons stated in that Part, AFSCME's argument on this point is rejected. The Court concludes that the emergency manager's authorization to file this bankruptcy case under P.A. 436 was valid under the Michigan Constitution, even though he was not an elected official.

**XI. The Governor's Authorization to File This Bankruptcy Case Was Valid Under the Michigan Constitution Even Though the Authorization Did Not Prohibit the City from Impairing Pension Rights.**

P.A. 436 permits the governor to "place contingencies on a local government in order to proceed under chapter 9." M.C.L. § 141.1558(1). The governor did not place any contingencies on the bankruptcy filing in this case. Ex. 29 at 4. The governor's letter did, however, state "Federal law already contains the most important contingency – a requirement that the plan be legally executable." Ex. 29 at 4.

Several of the objectors argue that the pension clause of the Michigan Constitution, article IX, section 24, obligated the governor to include a condition in his authorization that would prohibit the City from impairing pension benefits in this bankruptcy case.

In Part IX E, above, the Court concluded that any such contingency in the law itself would be ineffective and potentially invalid. For the same reason, any such contingency in the governor's authorization letter would have been invalid, and may have rendered the authorization itself invalid under 11 U.S.C. § 109(c).

Accordingly, this objection is overruled. The Court concludes that the governor's authorization to file this bankruptcy case under P.A. 436 was valid under the Michigan Constitution.

**XII. The Judgment in *Webster v. Michigan* Does Not Preclude the City from Asserting That the Governor’s Authorization to File This Bankruptcy Case Was Valid.**

**A. The Circumstances Leading to the Judgment**

On July 3, 2013, Gracie Webster and Veronica Thomas filed a complaint against the State of Michigan, Governor Snyder and Treasurer Dillon in the Ingham County Circuit Court. They sought a declaratory judgment that P.A. 436 is unconstitutional because it permits accrued pension benefits to be diminished or impaired in violation of article IX, section 24 of the Michigan Constitution. (Dkt. #1219) The complaint also sought a preliminary and permanent injunction enjoining Governor Snyder and State Treasurer Dillon from authorizing the Detroit emergency manager to commence proceedings under chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code.

On Thursday, July 18, 2013, the state court held a hearing, apparently jointly on a similar complaint filed by the General Retirement System of the City of Detroit. According to the transcript of the hearing, it began at 4:15 p.m. Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr. 4:2, July 18, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-9) Almost immediately, counsel for the plaintiffs advised the court that the City had already filed its bankruptcy case. Hrg Tr. 6:2-9. (It was filed at 4:06 p.m. on that day.) As a result, counsel asked for an expedited process. Hrg Tr. 7:8-18. The court responded, “I plan on making a ruling Monday. I could make a ruling tomorrow, if push came to shove, but Monday probably would be soon enough. I am confident that the bankruptcy court won’t act as quickly as I will.” Hrg Tr. 7:23-8:2.

The plaintiff’s attorneys then asked that the hearing on their request for a preliminary injunction be advanced from the following Monday, which is when it had been set. Hrg Tr. 8:13-22. Counsel observed that it had been briefed by both sides. Hrg Tr. 9:1-10. After the Court confirmed through its law clerk that in fact the bankruptcy case had been filed, Hrg Tr.10:9-10, counsel asked to amend its requested relief so that the governor and the emergency

manager would be enjoined from taking any further action in the bankruptcy proceeding. Hrg Tr. 10:11-17. The court responded, “Granted, as to all your requests. How soon are you going to present me with an order?” Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr. 11:1-4, July 18, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-9).

At this point, it must be observed that the judge granted this extraordinary relief with no findings and without giving the state’s representative any opportunity to be heard.

In any event, the plaintiffs’ counsel then used a previously prepared proposed order in the case that the General Retirement System filed and modified it extensively in handwriting, most of which was legible, to change the parties, the case number, and the ordering provisions. Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr.15:7-15, July 18, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-9) It states that it was signed at 4:25 p.m., which was 10 minutes after the hearing began. Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr. 17:4-5, July 18, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-9)

A further hearing was held the next day, beginning at 11:25 a.m., on the plaintiffs’ request to amend the order of the previous afternoon. Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr. 4:2, July 19, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-10) The plaintiffs’ counsel had also filed a motion that morning for a declaratory judgment and asked the court to consider it. Hrg Tr.8:2-13 The state’s attorney then agreed to allow the court to consider it. Hrg Tr. 8:24-25. The judge then addressed the parties. This portion of the transcript is quoted at length here because it is necessary to demonstrate an important point in section B, below, concerning Congress’ purpose in granting exclusive jurisdiction to the bankruptcy court over all issues that concern the validity of a bankruptcy filing:

You know what we’re doing? We are under siege here. Well, we aren’t; I’m not. Technically I am through paper, but all of you are. Detroit is. The State is. So I’m not going to go through the usual court rules and the time and all of that. You are all going to

spend your weekend doing what lawyers do, and that's a lot of homework because we're going to have that hearing Monday unless you're asking me to do it now.

I'm going to hear everything because we're not going to piecemeal this. You all know the case. I know the case: I've done the homework. I don't think myself or my staff got any sleep last night. We've been doing research. I bet if I called all of your wives and asked if you got any sleep, they'd be saying, "No. When is my husband going to get some sleep," right? So we're going to have a hearing, and I don't care if it's today or Monday. I'll come here Saturday, if you would like. I don't care. Let's get some answers, let's get a bottom line, and let's get this moving to the Court of Appeals because that's where you all are headed. I don't care what side you're on. Someone is going up, right? So I have answers for you. Tell me your story. I've got the solution. You might not like it.

Can we move on?

Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr. 11:7-12:5, July 19, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-10)

The attorneys then agreed and argued the merits. The judge then stated her decision to grant the declaratory relief that the plaintiffs requested. Case No.13-734-CZ, Hrg Tr.33:18-35:19, July 19, 2013. (Dkt. #1219-10)

Later that day, the court entered an "Order of Declaratory Relief." This is the judgment on which the objecting parties rely in asserting their preclusion argument. The judgment is quoted at length here to demonstrate both its scope and its intended impact on this bankruptcy case:

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED:

PA 436 is unconstitutional and in violation of Article IX Section 24 of the Michigan Constitution to the extent that it permits the Governor to authorize an emergency manager to proceed under Chapter 9 in any manner which threatens to diminish or impair accrued pension benefits; and PA 436 is to that extent of no force or effect;

The Governor is prohibited by Article IX Section 24 of the Michigan Constitution from authorizing an emergency manager

under PA 436 to proceed under Chapter 9 in a manner which threatens to diminish or impair accrued pension benefits, and any such action by the Governor is without authority and in violation of Article IX Section 24 of the Michigan Constitution.

On July 16, 2013, City of Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr submitted a recommendation to Defendant Governor Snyder and Defendant Treasurer Dillon pursuant to Section 18(1) of PA 436 to proceed under Chapter 9, which together with the facts presented in Plaintiffs' filings, reflect that Emergency Manager Orr intended to diminish or impair accrued pension benefits if he were authorized to proceed under Chapter 9. On July 18, 2013, Defendant Governor Snyder approved the Emergency Manager's recommendation without placing any contingencies on a Chapter 9 filing by the Emergency Manager; and the Emergency Manager filed a Chapter 9 petition shortly thereafter. By authorizing the Emergency Manager to proceed under Chapter 9 to diminish or impair accrued pension benefits, Defendant Snyder acted without authority under Michigan law and in violation of Article IX Section 24 of the Michigan Constitution.

In order to rectify his unauthorized and unconstitutional actions described above, the Governor must (1) direct the Emergency Manager to immediately withdraw the Chapter 9 petition filed on July 18, and (2) not authorize any further Chapter 9 filing which threatens to diminish or impair accrued pension benefits.

A copy of this Order shall be transmitted to President Obama.<sup>26</sup>

Order of Declaratory Judgment, *Webster v. State of Michigan*, No. 13-734-CZ (July 19, 2013).  
(Dkt. #1219-8)

In their eligibility objections in this case, several of the objectors assert that this judgment is binding upon the City under the principles of *res judicata* or collateral estoppel. Specifically, they contend that this judgment precludes the City from asserting that P.A. 436 is constitutional and that the governor properly authorized this bankruptcy filing. In the alternative, these parties

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<sup>26</sup> The order had been prepared by plaintiffs' counsel before the hearing and was provided to the judge at its conclusion. However, this last sentence of the judgment was handwritten, apparently by the judge herself.

assert that the judgment is at least a persuasive indication of what the Michigan Supreme Court would hold on the issue of the constitutionality of P.A. 436.

The Court concludes that it is neither.

**B. The Judgment Is Void Because It Was  
Entered After the City Filed Its Petition.**

There is a fundamental reason to deny the declaratory judgment any preclusive effect in this bankruptcy case.

Upon the City’s bankruptcy filing, federal law - specifically, 28 U.S.C. § 1334(a) - gave this Court exclusive jurisdiction to determine all issues relating to the City’s eligibility to be a chapter 9 debtor. That provision states, “[T]he district courts shall have original and exclusive jurisdiction of all cases under title 11.” 28 U.S.C. § 1334(a). The Sixth Circuit has explained:

Several factors highlight the exclusively federal nature of bankruptcy proceedings. The Constitution grants Congress the authority to establish “uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies.” U.S. Const. art. I, § 8. Congress has wielded this power by creating comprehensive regulations on the subject and by vesting exclusive jurisdiction over bankruptcy matters in the federal district courts.

*Pertuso v. Ford Motor Credit Co.*, 233 F.3d 417, 425 (6th Cir. 2000). The court went on to quote this from *MSR Exploration, Ltd. v. Meridian Oil, Inc.*, 74 F.3d 910, 914 (9th Cir.1996):

[A] mere browse through the complex, detailed, and comprehensive provisions of the lengthy Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. §§ 101 et seq., demonstrates Congress’s intent to create a whole system under federal control which is designed to bring together and adjust all of the rights and duties of creditors and embarrassed debtors alike.

*Pertuso*, 233 F.3d at 417.

The wisdom of this grant of exclusive jurisdiction lies in the absolute necessity that any bankruptcy petition be filed, considered, and adjudicated in one court. Foreclosing the

opportunity for parties to litigate a bankruptcy petition in multiple courts eliminates the likely consequence of a confused and chaotic race to judgment, and of the associated multiplication of expenses. It also eliminates the potential for inconsistent outcomes.

Indeed, the necessity to prohibit such collateral attacks on a bankruptcy petition is grounded in the uniformity requirement of Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution, as the Ninth Circuit has observed:

Filings of bankruptcy petitions are a matter of exclusive federal jurisdiction. State courts are not authorized to determine whether a person's claim for relief under a federal law, in a federal court, and within that court's exclusive jurisdiction, is an appropriate one. Such an exercise of authority would be inconsistent with and subvert the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal courts by allowing state courts to create their own standards as to when persons may properly seek relief in cases Congress has specifically precluded those courts from adjudicating. . . . *The ability collaterally to attack bankruptcy petitions in the state courts would also threaten the uniformity of federal bankruptcy law, a uniformity required by the Constitution.*

*Gonzales v. Parks*, 830 F.2d 1033, 1035 (9th Cir. 1987) (emphasis added). The Ninth Circuit continued, “A Congressional grant of exclusive jurisdiction to the federal courts includes the implied power to protect that grant.” *Id.* at 1036. “A state court judgment entered in a case that falls within the federal courts' exclusive jurisdiction is subject to collateral attack in the federal courts.” *Id.*

The Court recognizes that Congress has granted to other courts concurrent jurisdiction over certain proceedings related to the bankruptcy case. 28 U.S.C. § 1334(b) provides, “[T]he district courts shall have original but not exclusive jurisdiction of all civil proceedings arising under title 11, or arising in or related to cases under title 11.” However, it is not argued that this subsection applies here, and for good reason. It does not. Referring to 28 U.S.C. § 1334(b), the Ninth Circuit stated in *Gruntz v. Cnty. of Los Angeles (In re Gruntz)* 202 F.3d 1074, 1083 (9th

Cir. 2000) (en banc), “[N]othing in that section vests the states with any jurisdiction over a core bankruptcy proceeding[.]”

Indeed, 28 U.S.C. § 1334(b) only demonstrates that Congress knew precisely how to draw the line between those matters that should be within the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal bankruptcy court and those matters over which the jurisdiction could be shared. By denying effect to the Ingham County Circuit Court judgment in this case, this Court is enforcing that line.

The Court therefore concludes that upon the filing of this case at 4:06 p.m. on July 18, 2013, the Ingham County Circuit Court lost the jurisdiction to enter any order or to determine any issue pertaining to the City’s eligibility to be a chapter 9 debtor.

The Sixth Circuit has held that a state court judgment entered without jurisdiction is void *ab initio*. *Twin City Fire Ins. Co. v. Adkins*, 400 F.3d 293, 299 (6th Cir. 2005) (“Where a federal court finds that a state-court decision was rendered in the absence of subject matter jurisdiction or tainted by due process violations, it may declare the state court’s judgment void *ab initio* and refuse to give the decision effect in the federal proceeding.”)

Accordingly, the state court’s “Order of Declaratory Judgment” on which the objectors rely here is therefore void and of no effect, and does not preclude the City from asserting its eligibility in this Court in this case.

**C. The Judgment Is Also Void Because It Violated the Automatic Stay.**

11 U.S.C. § 362(a)(3) provides that “a petition filed under section 301 . . . operates as a stay, applicable to all entities, of . . . any act . . . to exercise control over property of the estate[.]”

11 U.S.C. § 902(1) states, “In this chapter ‘property of the estate’, when used in a section that is made applicable in a case under this chapter by section 103(e) or 901 of this title, means property of the debtor[.]”

The Sixth Circuit has held, “[A]n action taken against a nondebtor which would inevitably have an adverse impact upon the property of the estate must be barred by the [§ 362(a)(3)] automatic stay provision.” *Amedisys, Inc. v. Nat’l Century Fin. Enters., Inc.* (*In re Nat’l Century Fin. Enters., Inc.*), 423 F.3d 567, 578 (6th Cir. 2005) (quoting *Licensing by Paolo, Inc. v. Sinatra (In re Gucci)*, 126 F.3d 380, 392 (2d Cir. 1997). See also *Patton v. Bearden*, 8 F.3d 343, 349 (6th Cir. 1993).

The thrust of the plaintiffs’ case in *Webster v. Michigan* was to protect the plaintiffs’ pension rights by prohibiting a bankruptcy case which might allow the City to use its property in a way that might impair pensions. It does not matter that neither the City nor its officers were defendants. The suit was clearly an act to exercise control over the City’s property. Accordingly, it was stayed under 11 U.S.C. § 362(a)(3) and the state court’s “Order of Declaratory Relief” was entered in violation of the stay.<sup>27</sup>

In *Easley v. Pettibone Mich. Corp.*, 990 F.2d 905, 911 (6th Cir. 1993), the court stated, “In summary, we hold that actions taken in violation of the stay are invalid and voidable and shall be voided absent limited equitable circumstances.”

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<sup>27</sup> The Retirement Systems argue that there was no bankruptcy stay applicable to the state court litigation until July 25, 2013 when this Court entered an order extending the automatic stay to certain state officers. That order specifically included these state court cases as examples of cases that were included in the extended stay. Retirement Systems Br. at 51. (Dkt. #519)

That order, however, did not preclude the City from arguing later that the stay of 11 U.S.C. § 362(a)(3) applied as of the bankruptcy filing. Indeed, at the hearing on the motions that resulted in these orders, the Court expressly stated: “The Court is not ruling on whether any orders entered by the state court after this bankruptcy case was filed violated the automatic stay.” Hrg. Tr. 84:10-16, July 24, 2013. (Dkt. #188)

That issue is now squarely before the Court. For the reasons stated in the text, the Court concludes that the automatic stay of § 362(a)(3) was applicable to the Flowers, Webster and General Retirement Systems state court cases from the moment the City filed its bankruptcy petition.

In this case, no equitable circumstances suggest any reason to find that the state court's order should not be voided. Instead, equitable circumstances suggest that it should be voided. When the plaintiffs' counsel appeared in the state court on July 18 and 19, 2013, they knew that the City had filed its bankruptcy petition, as did the judge. The record of those proceedings establishes beyond doubt that the proceedings were rushed in order to achieve a prompt dismissal of the bankruptcy case. The protection that the stay of 11 U.S.C. § 362(a) affords is for the benefit of both the debtor and all creditors. *St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co. v. Labuzan*, 579 F.3d 533, 541 (5th Cir. 2009); *Johnson v. Smith (In re Johnson)*, 575 F.3d 1079, 1083 (10th Cir. 2009). Condoning the actions that the plaintiffs took in this case would open the floodgates to similar actions by creditors in other bankruptcy cases and thereby vitiate that important protection.

Accordingly, the Court concludes that the judgment in *Webster* is void because its entry violated the automatic stay of 11 U.S.C. § 362(a)(3) and no equitable circumstances suggest that it should not be voided. For this additional reason, that judgment does not preclude the City from asserting its eligibility in this Court in this case.

#### **D. Other Issues**

The City disputes the application of *res judicata* and collateral estoppel on several other grounds. Specifically, it contends that the two hearings that resulted in the *Webster* judgment were confused and hurried. It also disputes whether the State was given a full and fair opportunity to be heard, and whether the judgment is binding on it, as it was not a party to the suit.

The Court concludes that in light of its conclusions that the state court lacked jurisdiction and that its judgment is void, it is unnecessary to decide these issues.

Nevertheless, the Court does comment that the transcripts of the two post-petition state court hearings on July 18 and 19, 2013 reflect a very chaotic and disorderly “race to judgment.” (Dkt. #1219-9; Dkt. #1219-10) Those proceedings are perfect examples of the very kind of litigation the Congressional grant of exclusive jurisdiction in bankruptcy to one court was designed to control and eliminate. Moreover, respect for the extraordinary gravity of the issues presented, as well as for the defendants in the case, would certainly have mandated a much more considered and deliberative judicial process. Actually, so does respect for the plaintiffs, and for the City’s other 100,000 creditors.

Finally, for the reasons stated in Part IX, above, the reasoning in the *Webster* declaratory judgment is neither persuasive nor at all indicative of how the Michigan Supreme Court would rule.

This objection to the City’s eligibility is rejected.

### **XIII. The City Was “Insolvent.”**

To be eligible for relief under chapter 9, the City must establish that it is “insolvent.” 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(3). Several individual objectors and AFSCME challenge the City’s assertion that it is insolvent.

#### **A. The Applicable Law**

For a municipality, the bankruptcy code defines “insolvent” as a “financial condition such that the municipality is-- (i) generally not paying its debts as they become due unless such debts are the subject of a bona fide dispute; or (ii) is unable to pay its debts as they become due.” 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(C).

The test under the first prong “looks to current, general non-payment.” The test under the second prong “is an equitable, prospective test looking to future inability to pay.” *Hamilton*

*Creek Metro. Dist. v. Bondholders Colo. Bondshares (In re Hamilton Creek Metro. Dist.)*, 143 F.3d 1381, 1384 (10th Cir. 1998); *see also In re City of Stockton*, 493 B.R. 772, 788 (Bankr. E.D. Cal. 2013) (“Statutory construction rules likewise point to a temporal aspect as the § 101(32)(C)(ii) phrase ‘as they become due’ must mean something different than its § 101(32)(C)(i) partner ‘generally not paying its debts.’”).

A payment is “due” under the first prong if it is “presently, unconditionally owing and presently enforceable.” *Hamilton Creek*, 143 F.3d at 1385. When a municipality is unable to meet its presently enforceable debts, it is said to be “cash insolvent.” *See Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 789.

When considering the second prong, courts take into account broader concerns, such as longer term budget imbalances and whether the City has sufficient resources to maintain services for the health, safety, and welfare of the community. *Id.*; *see also In re Boise Cnty.*, 465 B.R. 156, 172 (Bankr. D. Idaho 2011) (“The test under § 101(32)(C)(ii) is a prospective one, which requires the petitioner to prove as of the petition date an inability to pay its debts as they become due in its current fiscal year, or, based on an adopted budget, in its next fiscal year.”)

Although each test focuses on the City’s ability to meet its financial obligations at different points in time, both are to be applied as of the time of the chapter 9 filing. *Hamilton Creek*, 143 F.3d at 1384-85 (citing *In re Town of Westlake*, 211 B.R. 860, 866 (Bank. N.D. Tex. 1997)).

Finally, the Court notes that “the theme underlying the two alternative definitions of municipal insolvency in § 101(32)(C) is that a municipality must be in bona fide financial distress that is not likely to be resolved without use of the federal exclusive bankruptcy power to impair contracts.” *Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 788.

## B. Discussion

The Court finds that the City of Detroit was, and is, insolvent under both definitions in 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(C). The Court has already detailed the enormous financial distress that the City faced as of July 18, 2013 and will not repeat that here. See Part III A, above.

### 1. The City Was “Generally Not Paying Its Debts As They Become Due.”

Specifically, in May 2013, the City deferred payment on approximately \$54,000,000 in pension contributions. On June 30, 2013, it deferred an additional \$5,000,000 fiscal year-end payment. Ex. 43 at 8. The City also did not make a scheduled \$39,700,000 payment on its COPs on June 14, 2013. Ex. 43 at 8. It was also spending much more money than it was receiving, and only making up the difference through expensive and even catastrophic borrowings. See Part III A 5, 8 and 9, above.

These facts establish that the City was “generally not paying its debts as they become due,” as of the time of the filing. 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(C)(i).

AFSCME asserts that this was “[t]he purposeful refusal to make a few payments comprising a relatively small part of the City’s budget.” AFSCME Pre-Trial Br. at 51. (Dkt. #1227)

The Court must reject this assertion. The evidence established that the nearly \$40,000,000 pension-related COPs default was particularly serious because it put in jeopardy the City’s access to its casino tax revenue, which was one of the City’s few reliable sources of income. Eligibility Trial Tr. 185:16-186:23, Oct. 24, 2013. (Dkt. #1490)

Moreover, the City was operating on a “razor’s edge” for several months prior to June 2013. Eligibility Trial Tr. 189:9-10, Oct. 24, 2013. (Dkt. #1490)

As of May 2013, the City stopped paying its trade creditors to avoid running out of cash. Eligibility Trial Tr. 189:14-15, Oct. 24, 2013. (Dkt. #1490) But for these and other deferments, the City would have completely run out of cash by the end of 2013. Ex. 75 at 2.

**2. The City Is Also “Unable to  
Pay Its Debts As They Become Due.”**

The evidence was overwhelming that the City is unable to pay its debts as they become due.

The evidence established that there are many, many services in the City which do not function properly as a result of the City’s financial state. The facts found in Parts III B 6-12, above, further firmly support this conclusion.

Most powerfully, however, the testimony of Chief Craig established that the City was in a state of “service delivery insolvency” as of July 18, 2013, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. He testified that the conditions in the local precincts were “deplorable.” Eligibility Trial Tr. 189:4-6, Oct. 25, 2013. (Dkt. #1501) “If I just might summarize it in a very short way, that everything is broken, deplorable conditions, crime is extremely high, morale is low, the absence of leadership.” Tr. 188:5-7 He described the City as “extremely violent,” based on the high rate of violent crime and the low rate of “clearance” of violent crimes. Tr. 190:11-191:25. He stated that the officers’ low morale is due, at least in part, to “the fact that they had lost ten percent pay; that they were forced into a 12-hour work schedule,” and because there was an inadequate number of patrolling officers, and their facilities, equipment and vehicles were in various states of disrepair and obsolescence. Eligibility Trial Tr. 192:20-193:3, 197:21-23, 198:10-199:18, Oct. 25, 2013. (Dkt. #1501)

In *Stockton*, the Court observed:

While cash insolvency—the opposite of paying debts as they become due—is the controlling chapter 9 criterion under § 101(32)(C), longer-term budget imbalances [budget insolvency] and the degree of inability to fund essential government services [service delivery insolvency] also inform the trier of fact’s assessment of the relative degree and likely duration of cash insolvency.

478 B.R. at 789.

Service delivery insolvency “focuses on the municipality’s ability to pay for all costs of providing services at the level and quality that are required for the health, safety, and welfare of the community.” *Id.* at 789. Indeed, while the City’s tumbling credit rating, its utter lack of liquidity, and the disastrous COPs and swaps deal might more neatly establish the City’s “insolvency” under 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(C), it is the City’s service delivery insolvency that the Court finds most strikingly disturbing in this case.

### 3. The City’s “Lay” Witnesses

The objecting parties argue the City failed to establish its insolvency because it failed to present expert proof on this issue. *See* AFSCME Pre-Trial Br. at 52. (Dkt. # 1227) (“Courts in the non-chapter 9 context note that ‘it is generally accepted that whenever possible, a determination of insolvency should be based on . . . expert testimony . . .’” (citing *Brandt v. Samuel, Son & Co., Ltd. (In re Longview Aluminum, L.L.C.)*, No. 03B12184, 2005 WL 3021173, at \*6 (Bankr. N.D. Ill. July 14, 2005)). This argument arises from the fact that the City mysteriously declined to qualify its financial analysts as expert witnesses.

At trial, upon the request of the City, the Court determined that under Rule 701, F.R.E., these witnesses - Charles Moore, Ken Buckfire and Gaurav Malhotra - could testify as lay witnesses regarding the City’s finances and their projections of the City’s finances in the future. Eligibility Trial Tr. 39:20-49:8, Oct. 25, 2013. (Dkt. #1501) The Court also admitted extensive

documentary evidence of the analysts' observations and projections. Tr. 49:5-8. These determinations were based upon the Court's finding that the financial consultants "had extensive personal knowledge of the City's affairs that they acquired during . . . the course of their consulting work with the city." Eligibility Trial Tr. 48:14-19, Oct. 25, 2013. (Dkt. #1501); *see, e.g., JGR, Inc. v. Thomasville Furniture Indus., Inc.*, 370 F.3d 519, 525-26 (6th Cir. 2004); *DIJO, Inc. v. Hilton Hotels Corp.*, 351 F.3d 679, 685-87 (5th Cir. 2003) (discussing *In re Merritt Logan, Inc.*, 901 F.2d 349 (3rd Cir. 1990) and *Teen-Ed, Inc. v. Kimball Int'l, Inc.*, 620 F.2d 399 (3rd Cir. 1980)). While the Court questions the City's strategy here, it is clear from these cases that there is nothing improper about the City's decision not to qualify these witnesses as experts, even though it likely could have.

The witnesses testified reliably and credibly regarding their personal knowledge of the City's finances and the basis for their knowledge. In these circumstances, the Court must reject AFSCME's argument that expert testimony is essential for a finding of insolvency under 11 U.S.C. §§ 109(c)(3) and 101(32)(C).

#### **4. The City's Failure to Monetize Assets**

Finally, the objecting parties assert that the City could have, and should have, monetized a number of its assets in order to make up for its severe cash flow insolvency. *See e.g., AFSCME Pre-Trial Br. at 53.* (Dkt. #1227)

However, Malhotra credibly established that sales of City assets would not address the operational, structural financial imbalance facing the City. Eligibility Trial Tr. 85:2-86:12, Oct. 25, 2013. (Dkt. #1501) Buckfire also testified similarly. Tr. 197:19-204:14. The undisputed evidence establishes that the "City's expenditures have exceeded its revenues from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2012 by an average of \$100 million annually." Ex. 75 at 2.

When the expenses of an enterprise exceed its revenue, a one-time infusion of cash, whether from an asset sale or a borrowing, only delays the inevitable failure, unless in the meantime the enterprise sufficiently reduces its expenses and enhances its income. The City of Detroit has proven this reality many times.

In any event, when considering selling an asset, the enterprise must take extreme care that the asset is truly unnecessary in enhancing its operational revenue.

For these reasons, the Court finds that the City has established that it is insolvent as 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(3) requires and as 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(C) defines that term.

#### **XIV. The City Desires to Effect a Plan to Adjust Its Debts.**

To establish its eligibility for relief under chapter 9, the City must establish that it desires to effect a plan to adjust its debts. 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(4).

##### **A. The Applicable Law**

In *Int'l Ass'n of Firefighters, Local 1186 v. City of Vallejo (In re City of Vallejo)*, 408 B.R. 280 (B.A.P. 9th Cir. 2009), the Bankruptcy Appellate Panel surveyed the case law under § 109(c)(4):

Few published cases address the requirement that a chapter 9 petitioner “desires to effect” a plan of adjustment. Those cases that have considered the issue demonstrate that no bright-line test exists for determining whether a debtor desires to effect a plan because of the highly subjective nature of the inquiry under § 109(c)(4). *Compare In re County of Orange*, 183 B.R. 594, 607 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1995) (proposal of a comprehensive settlement agreement among other steps taken demonstrated efforts to resolve claims which satisfied § 109(c)(4)) *with In re Sullivan County Reg'l Refuse Disposal Dist.*, 165 B.R. 60, 76 (Bankr. D.N.H. 1994) (post-petition submission of a draft plan of adjustment met § 109(c)(4)).

Petitioners may satisfy the subjective requirement with direct and circumstantial evidence. They may prove their desire by attempting to resolve claims as in *County of Orange*; by submitting a draft plan of adjustment as in *Sullivan County*; or by other evidence customarily submitted to show intent. See *Slatkin*, 525 F.3d at 812. The evidence needs to show that the “purpose of the filing of the chapter 9 petition not simply be to buy time or evade creditors.” See *Collier* ¶ 109.04[3][d], at 109–32.

*Local 1186*, 408 B.R. at 295.

In *Stockton*, the court expanded:

The cases equate “desire” with “intent” and make clear that this element is highly subjective. *E.g.*, *In re City of Vallejo*, 408 B.R. 280, 295 (9th Cir. BAP 2009).

At the first level, the question is whether the chapter 9 case was filed for some ulterior motive, such as to buy time or evade creditors, rather than to restructure the City’s finances. *Vallejo*, 408 B.R. at 295; 2 *Collier on Bankruptcy* ¶ 109.04[3][d], at p. 109–32 (Henry J. Sommer & Alan N. Resnick eds. 16th ed. 2011) (hereafter “*Collier*”).

Evidence probative of intent includes attempts to resolve claims, submitting a draft plan, and other circumstantial evidence. *Vallejo*, 408 B.R. at 295.

493 B.R. at 791. See also *City of San Bernardino, Cal.*, 2013 WL 5645560, at \*8-12 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 2013); *In re Boise County*, 465 B.R. 156, 168 (Bankr. D. Idaho 2011); *In re New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. 256, 272 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2010).

“Since that ‘plan’ is to be effected by an entity seeking relief under Chapter 9, it is logical to conclude that the ‘plan’ referred to in section 109(c)(4) is a ‘plan for adjustment of the debtor’s debts’ within the meaning of section 941 of the Bankruptcy Code.” *In re Cottonwood Water and Sanitation Dist., Douglas County, Colo.*, 138 B.R. 973, 975 (Bankr. D. Colo. 1992).

## **B. Discussion**

Several objectors asserted that the City does not desire to effect a plan to adjust its debts.

The Court concludes that the evidence overwhelmingly established that the City does desire to effectuate a plan in this case. Mr. Orr so testified. Eligibility Trial Tr. 43:1-47:13, October 28, 2013. (Dkt. #1502) More importantly, before filing this case, Mr. Orr did submit to creditors a plan to adjust the City's debts. Ex. 43. Plainly, that plan was not acceptable to any of the City's creditors. It may not have been confirmable under 11 U.S.C. § 943, although it is not necessary to resolve that question at this time. Still, it was evidence of the City's desire and intent to effect a plan. There is simply no evidence that the City has an ulterior motive in pursuing chapter 9, such as to buy time or to evade creditors.

Indeed, the objecting creditors do not contend that there was any such ulterior motive. They assert no desire on the part of the City or its emergency manager to buy time or evade creditors. Rather, their argument is that the plan that the emergency manager has stated he intends to propose in this case is not a confirmable plan. It is not confirmable, they argue, because it will impair pensions in violation of the Michigan Constitution.

Certainly the evidence does establish that the emergency manager intends to propose a plan that impairs pensions. The Court has already so found. See Part VIII C 1, above. Nevertheless, the objectors' argument must be rejected. As established in Part VIII C 5, above, a chapter 9 plan may impair pension rights. The emergency manager's stated intent to propose a plan that impairs pensions is therefore not inconsistent with a desire to effect a plan.

Accordingly, the Court finds that the City does desire to effect a plan, as 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(4) requires.

## **XV. The City Did Not Negotiate with Its Creditors in Good Faith.**

### **A. The Applicable Law**

The fifth requirement for eligibility is found in § 109(c)(5).

An entity may be a debtor under chapter 9 of this title if and only if such entity—

...

(5)(A) has obtained the agreement of creditors holding at least a majority in amount of the claims of each class that such entity intends to impair under a plan in a case under such chapter;

(B) has negotiated in good faith with creditors and has failed to obtain the agreement of creditors holding at least a majority in amount of the claims of each class that such entity intends to impair under a plan in a case under such chapter;

(C) is unable to negotiate with creditors because such negotiation is impracticable; or

(D) reasonably believes that a creditor may attempt to obtain a transfer that is avoidable under section 547 of this title.

11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(5).

This section was enacted because Congress recognized that municipal bankruptcy is a drastic step and should only be taken as a last resort. *In re Sullivan Cnty. Reg'l Refuse Disposal Dist.*, 165 B.R. 60, 78 (Bankr. D.N.H. 1994); 5 Norton Bankr. L. & Prac. 3d § 90:25 (“It is the policy of the Bankruptcy Code that a Chapter 9 filing should be considered only as a last resort, after an out-of-court attempt to avoid bankruptcy has failed.”) Therefore, it added a requirement for pre-bankruptcy negotiation to attempt to resolve disputes.

Because § 109(c)(5) is written in the disjunctive, a debtor has four options to satisfy the requirement for negotiation: “[1] it may obtain the agreement of creditors holding a majority in amount of claims in each class [; (2)] it may show that it has negotiated with its creditors in good faith but has failed to obtain their agreement [; (3)] it may show that it is unable to negotiate with creditors because negotiation is impracticable [; or (4)] it may demonstrate that it reasonably believe[s] that a creditor may attempt to obtain a preferential transfer.” *In re Ellicott Sch. Bldg. Auth.*, 150 B.R. 261, 265–66 (Bankr. D. Colo.1992).

*In re Valley Health Sys.*, 383 B.R. 156, 162-63 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 2008).

The City of Detroit asserts that it has met the requirements of § 109(c)(5)(B) or, in the alternative, § 109(c)(5)(C). City’s Reply to Objections at 45-49; (Dkt. #765) City’s Pre-trial Br. at 49-67. (Dkt. #1240)

The Court finds the recent case, *In re Mendocino Coast Recreation & Park Dist.*, 12-CV-02591-JST, 2013 WL 5423788 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 27, 2013), persuasive on this issue. In that case, the district court for the Northern District of California noted:

[T]he Bankruptcy Court identified two lines of authority about 109(c)(5)(B)'s requirements. The less restrictive view, adopted by the editors of Collier, is that the debtor need not attempt to negotiate any specific plan of adjustment. *Id.* (citing 2-109 Collier on Bankruptcy ("Collier"), ¶ 109.04[3][e][ii] (16th ed.)). As the Bankruptcy Court saw the more restrictive view, adopted by *In re Cottonwood Water and Sanitation Dist.* ("Cottonwood"), 138 B.R. 973, 975 (Bankr. D. Colo.1992) and by dicta in *Vallejo*, 408 B.R. at 297, the debtor must negotiate over "the possible terms of a plan," "at least in concept."

*Mendocino Coast*, 2013 WL 5423788 at \*2. After a thorough analysis of the legislative history of § 109(c)(5)(B), the court was "persuaded by the *Cottonwood* view that Section 109(c)(5)(B) requires municipalities not just to negotiate generally in good faith with their creditors, but also to negotiate in good faith with creditors over a proposed plan, at least in concept, for bankruptcy under Chapter 9." *Mendocino Coast*, 2013 WL 5423788 at \*5. This Court is also persuaded by that analysis.

*Mendocino Coast* also considered how the § 109(c)(5)(B) process compares to analogous provisions in other chapters of the bankruptcy code. The court looked to 11 U.S.C. §§ 1113(b) & (c) and 1114(f)(1), which require debtors to negotiate regarding the post-petition rejection of collective bargaining agreements and pension plans in chapter 11 proceedings. The court stated:

[T]he appropriate standard to apply [under Section 109(c)(5)] is one that is "at least as stringent as those under §§ 1113 and 1114." 1 Norton Bankr. L. & Prac. 3d § 17:8, n.19. Those statutes require courts to, inter alia, determine whether the parties "[met] to confer in good faith in attempting to reach mutually satisfactory modifications," determine whether unions have rejected proposals "without good cause," and "balance . . . the equities." 11 U.S.C. § 1113(b)(2) & (c). In doing so, courts commonly assess both parties' conduct in negotiations.

*Mendocino Coast*, 2013 WL 5423788 at \*7. The Court reached two conclusions regarding § 109(c)(5)(B):

First, courts may consider, based on the unique circumstances of each case and applying their best judgment, whether a debtor has satisfied an obligation to have “negotiated in good faith.” Second, while the Bankruptcy Code places the overwhelming weight of its burdens on petitioners, the provisions that call for negotiation contemplate that at least some very minimal burden of reciprocity be placed on parties with whom a debtor must negotiate.

*Mendocino Coast*, 2013 WL 5423788 at \*7.

*Mendocino Coast* recognized that its case did not present the issue “of what must occur in a negotiation that satisfies 109(c)(5)(B). It presents the issue of what information, if missing from the debtor’s first attempt to negotiate, bars a municipality from filing Chapter 9 even if a creditor rejects the overture and declines to negotiate.” *Id.* at \*8.

This Court faces the same question, and therefore finds *Mendocino Coast*’s analysis very useful, although on the facts of this case the Court ultimately reaches the opposite conclusion.

While recognizing that a determination of what qualifies as a good-faith effort to begin negotiation can depend on several factors, *Mendocino Coast* was able to make its determination upon consideration of three factors.

First, the greater the disclosure about the proposed bankruptcy plan, the stronger the debtor’s claim to have attempted to negotiate in good faith. A creditor might be justified in rejecting the overture of a debtor proposing a frivolous or unclearly described adjustment plan, but a creditor is less justified in ignoring a substantive proposal.

...

Second, the municipality’s need to immediately disclose classes of creditors and their treatment in the first communication will depend upon how material that information would be to the creditor’s decision about whether to negotiate.

...

Third, the creditor’s response, and the amount of time the creditor has had to respond, may also be factors. If a creditor has had a relatively short time to respond to the municipality’s offer to

negotiate, a lack of detail in the opening communication might weigh against a municipality rushing to file. On the other hand, where a creditor has been apprised of the possibility of a debt adjustment and declined to respond after a reasonable period of time, or where the creditor has explicitly responded with a refusal to negotiate, its position as an objector is significantly weakened.

*Mendocino Coast*, 2013 WL 5423788 at \*8-9.

## **B. Discussion**

In the present case, the City of Detroit argues that the June 14, 2013 proposal to creditors, along with its follow up meetings, was a good-faith effort to begin negotiations, and that the creditors refused to respond. It asserts, therefore, it has satisfied 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(5)(B). City's Reply to Objections at 54-58. (Dkt. # 765)

The Court concludes, however, that the June 14 Proposal to Creditors and the follow up meetings were not sufficient to satisfy the requirements of 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(5)(B). The first and third factors cited by *Mendocino Coast* weigh heavily against finding that the City's initial efforts satisfied the requirement of good faith negotiation. The Proposal to Creditors did not provide creditors with sufficient information to make meaningful counter-proposals, especially in the very short amount of time that the City allowed for the "discussion" period.

The City's proposal to creditors is a 128 page document. Ex. 43. The City invited many creditors or "stakeholders" to the meeting on June 14, 2013, when it presented the proposal. Its presentation was a 120 deck powerpoint presentation, providing information regarding the financial condition of the City and proposing across the board reductions in creditor obligations.

The restructuring proposal began on page 101. Addressed on page 109 are the proposed treatment of the unsecured general obligation bonds, the claims of service corporations on account of the COPs, the claims for unfunded OPEB liabilities, the claims for unfunded pension

liabilities and the claims on account of other liabilities. Ex. 43. Charitably stated, the proposal is very summary in nature.

For example, the proposed treatment for underfunded pension liabilities is three bullet points in length. The first bullet point states that the underfunding is approximately \$3.5B. The second bullet point states, “Claims for the underfunding will be exchanged for a pro rata (relative to all unsecured claims) principal amount of new Notes.” The third bullet point states, “Because the amounts realized on the underfunding claims will be substantially less than the underfunding amount, there must be significant cuts in accrued, vested pension amounts for both active and currently retired persons.” Ex. 43 at 109.

This is simply not enough information for creditors to start meaningful negotiations. Brad Robins, of Greenhill & Co. LLC, financial advisor to the Retirement Systems, testified, “The note, itself, I thought was not really a serious proposal but maybe a place holder, [because it had] no maturity, no obligation for the City to pay.” Eligibility Trial Tr. 129:1-11, Nov. 7, 2013. (Dkt. #1681)

The City asserts that it provided supporting data in an “electronic data room.” However, several witnesses testified that the data room did not contain all the necessary data to make a meaningful evaluation of the proposal to creditors. Brad Robins testified that the data room was missing “lots of information: value of assets, different projections and build-ups.” Eligibility Trial Tr. 133:7-10, Nov. 7, 2013. (Dkt. #1681) He felt that prior to the filing date, Greenhill was not given complete information to fully evaluate what was laid out in the June 14, 2013 proposal. Eligibility Trial Tr. 135:17-20, Nov. 7, 2013. (Dkt. #1681) Mark Diaz testified that he made a request to the City for additional information and did not receive a response. Eligibility Trial Tr. 192:1-5, Nov. 7, 2013. (Dkt. #1681)

Moreover, the City conditioned access to the data room on the signing of a confidentiality and release agreement. This created an unnecessary hurdle for creditors.

The creditors simply cannot be faulted for failing to offer counter-proposals when they did not have the necessary information to evaluate the City's vague initial proposal.

The proposal for creditors provided a calendar on page 113. Ex. 43. It allotted one week, June 17, 2013 through June 24, 2013, for requests for additional information. Initial rounds of discussions with stakeholders were scheduled for June 17, 2013 through July 12, 2013. The evaluation period was scheduled to be July 15, 2013 through July 19, 2013. This calendar was very tight and it did not request counter-proposals or provide a deadline for submitting them.

The City filed its bankruptcy on July 18, 2013, the day before the end of the evaluation period. Although the objecting creditors argue that in hindsight the bankruptcy filing was a forgone conclusion, they argue that the initial proposal did not make clear the City's intention to file. Regardless, the time available for creditor negotiations was approximately thirty days. Given the extraordinary complexities of the case, that amount of time is simply far too short to conclude that such a vague proposal to creditors rises to the level required to shift the burden to objectors to make counter-proposals.

In addition to the lack of detail in the initial proposal and the short response time, the Court notes that two additional factors support its conclusion.

First, the City affirmatively stated that the meetings were not negotiations. Eligibility Trial Tr. 188:22-24, 189:1-3, Nov. 7, 2013; (Dkt. #1681) Orr Dep. Tr. 129:14-18, 262:1-25, Sept. 16, 2013. The City asserts this was to clarify that the City was not waiving the suspension of collective bargaining under P.A. 436. Orr Dep. Tr. 264:23-265:7, Sept. 16, 2013 (Dkt. #1159-B); Orr Dep. Tr. 63:21-64.20, Oct. 28, 2013. (Dkt. # 1502) This explanation is inadequate,

bordering on disingenuous. The City simply cannot announce to creditors that meetings are not negotiations and then assert to the Court that those same meetings amounted to good faith negotiations.

Second, the format of the meetings was primarily presentational, to different groups of creditors with different issues, and gave little opportunity for creditor input or substantive discussion. Eligibility Trial Tr. 145:7-146:3, Nov. 4, 2013. (Dkt. #1683) For example, at the end of the June 14, 2013 meeting, creditors were permitted to submit questions via notecard. Shirley Lightsey attended the June 20, 2013, July 10, 2013 and July 11, 2013 meetings and testified that there was no opportunity to meet in smaller groups to discuss retiree-specific issues. Eligibility Trial Tr.108:19-20, 109:22-23, 111:1-3, Nov. 4, 2013. (Dkt. #1683) Mark Diaz, President of the Detroit Police Officers Association, testified there was no back and forth discussion. Eligibility Trial Tr. 187:22-25, 189:1-3, Nov. 7, 2013. (Dkt. #1681)

The City argues that these meetings were intended to start negotiations and that they expected counter-proposals from the creditors. Even as a first step, these meetings failed to reach a level that would justify a finding that negotiations had occurred, let alone good faith negotiations. Moreover, the Court finds that the lack of negotiations were not due to creditor recalcitrance. Accordingly, the Court concludes that the City has not established by a preponderance of the evidence that it has satisfied the requirement of 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(5)(B).

**XVI. The City Was Unable to Negotiate with Creditors  
Because Such Negotiation Was Impracticable.**

**A. The Applicable Law**

Nevertheless, the Court finds that negotiations were in fact, impracticable, even if the City had attempted good faith negotiations. “[I]mpracticability of negotiations is a fact-sensitive inquiry that ‘depends upon the circumstances of the case.’” *In re New York City Off-Track*

*Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. 256, 276-77 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2010) (quoting *In re City of Vallejo*, 408 B.R. at 298); *In re Valley Health Sys.*, 383 B.R. 156, 162-63 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 2008) (“There is nothing in the language of section 109(c)(5)(C) that requires a debtor to either engage in good faith pre-petition negotiations with its creditors to an impasse or to satisfy a numerosity requirement before determining that negotiation is impracticable under the specific facts and circumstances of a case.”). See also *In re Hos. Auth. Pierce County*, 414 B.R. 702, 713 (Bankr. W.D. Wash. 2009) (“Whether negotiations with creditors is impracticable depends on the circumstances of the case.”).

“Impracticable” means “not practicable; incapable of being performed or accomplished by the means employed or at command; infeasible.” Webster’s New International Dictionary 1136 (3d ed. 2002). In the legal context, “impracticability” is defined as “a fact or circumstance that excuses a party from performing an act, esp. a contractual duty, because (though possible) it would cause extreme and unreasonable difficulty.” Black’s Law Dictionary 772 (8th ed. 2004).

*In re Valley Health Sys.*, 383 B.R. at 163.

Congress adopted § 109(c)(5)(C) specifically “to cover situations in which a very large body of creditors would render pre-filing negotiations impracticable.” *In re Cnty. of Orange*, 183 B.R. 594, 607 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1995) (quoting *In re Sullivan County Reg’l Refuse Disposal Dist.*, 165 B.R. at 79 n. 55.) See also *In re New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. at 276-77; 2 Collier on Bankruptcy ¶ 109.04[3][e][iii]. “The impracticality requirement may be satisfied based on the sheer number of creditors involved.” *Cnty. of Orange*, 183 B.R. at 607. See *In re Villages at Castle Rock Metro. Dist. No. 4*, 145 B.R. 76, 85 (Bankr. D. Colo. 1990) (“It certainly was impracticable for [debtor] to have included several hundred Series D Bondholders in these conceptual discussions.”); *Valley Health Sys.*, 383 B.R. at 165 (finding that the requirement of § 109(c)(5)(C) was met where the debtor’s petition disclosed not more than 5,000

creditors holding claims in excess of \$100,000,000); *In re Pierce Cnty. Hous. Auth.*, 414 B.R. 702, 714 (Bankr. W.D. Wash. 2009) (over 7,000 creditors and parties in interest were set forth on the mailing matrix).

## **B. Discussion**

The list of creditors for the City of Detroit is over 3500 pages. Ex. 64 (Dkt. #1059) It lists over 100,000 creditors. It is divided into fifteen schedules including the following classifications: Long-Term Debt; Trade Debt, Employee Benefits; Pension Obligations, Non-Pension Retiree Obligations; Active Employee Obligations; Workers' Compensation; Litigation and Similar Claims; Real Estate Lease Obligations; Deposits; Grants; Pass-Through Obligations, Obligations to Component Units of the City; Property Tax-Related Obligations; Income Tax-Related Obligations. Ex. 64 at 2-3. (Dkt. #1059) The summary of schedules provided with the list estimates the amount of claims and percent total for each schedule where sufficient information is available to determine those amounts. (Dkt. #1059-1) Some schedules such as Workers' Compensation and Litigation and Similar Claims do not have amounts listed because they are unliquidated, contingent and often disputed claims.

Long term debt, including bonds, notes and loans, capital lease, and obligations arising under the COPs and swaps, is listed at over \$8,700,000,000 or approximately 48.52% of the City's total debt. Within this category are several series of bonds where individual bondholders are not identified. Many of these bondholders are not represented by any organization. Ex. 28 at 10.

As noted above, pension obligations are estimated at almost \$3,500,000,000 or 19.33% of the City's total debt. The City estimates over 20,000 individual retirees are owed pension funds.

Ex. 28 at 9. OPEB amounts are estimated at approximately \$5,700,000,000 or 31.81% of the City's total debt.

The Court is satisfied that when Congress enacted the impracticability section, it foresaw precisely the situation facing the City of Detroit. It has been widely reported that Detroit is the largest municipality ever to file bankruptcy. Indeed, one of the objectors stated that it is “by far the largest and most economically significant city ever to file for chapter 9 bankruptcy.” AFSCME’s Supplemental Br. on Good Faith Negotiations at 7. (Dkt. #1695) The sheer size of the debt and number of individual creditors made pre-bankruptcy negotiation impracticable – impossible, really.

There are, however, several other circumstances that also support a finding of impracticability.

First, although several unions have now come forward to argue that they are the “natural representatives of the retirees,” those same unions asserted in response to the City’s pre-filing inquires that they did not represent retirees. Ex. 32. For example, in a May 22, 2013 letter, Robyn Brooks, the President of UAW Local 2211, stated, “This union does not, however, represent current retirees and has no authority to negotiate on their behalf.” John Cunningham sent the same response on behalf of UAW Locals 412 and 212. In a May 27, 2013 letter, Delia Enright, President of AFSCME Local 1023, stated, “Please be advised that in accordance with Michigan law, I have no authority in which to renegotiate the Pension or Medical Benefits that retired members of our union currently receive.” Several other union representatives sent similar responses.

These responses sent a clear message to the City that the unions would not negotiate on behalf of the retirees. See *Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 794 (“it is impracticable to negotiate with 2,400 retirees for whom there is no natural representative capable of bargaining on their behalf.”).

Several voluntary associations, including the RDPMA, the Detroit Retired City Employees (“DRCEA”), and the Retired Detroit Police and Fire Fighters Association (“RDPFFA”), assert that they are the natural representatives of retirees. However, none assert that they can bind individual retirees absent some sort of complex class action litigation. Ex. 301 at ¶ 6; (Dkt. # 497-2) Eligibility Trial Tr. 115:15-22, Nov. 4, 2013; (Dkt. #1683) Ex. 302 at ¶6; (Dkt. #497-3) Eligibility Trial Tr.164:1-8, Nov. 4, 2013. (Dkt. #1683) Ultimately “it would be up to the individual members of the association to decide if they would accept or reject” an offer. Eligibility Trial Tr. 157:1-4, Nov. 4, 2013. (Dkt. #1683)

Further, several witnesses who testified on behalf of the retiree associations made it clear that they would not have negotiated a reduction in accrued pension benefits because they consider them to be fully protected by state law. As Shirley Lightsey testified, “The DRCEA would not take any action to solicit authority from its membership to reduce pension benefits because they’re protected by the Michigan Constitution.” Eligibility Trial Tr. 125:3-7, Nov. 4, 2013. (Dkt. #1683)

The answers to interrogatories from both organizations reveal a similar inflexibility. “[T]he purpose of the RDPFFA has always been and remains to protect and preserve benefits of retirees, not to reduce such benefits.” Ex. 83, Answers to Interrogatories No. 4. See also Answer to Interrogatories No. 6 for similar statement by DRCEA.

Indeed, as noted above, within two weeks of the June 14, 2013 meeting, some retirees had filed lawsuits attempting to block this bankruptcy based on their state law position. (*Flowers v. Synder*, No. 13-729-CZ July 3, 2013; *Webster v. Synder* No. 13-734-CZ July 3, 2013)

It is impracticable to negotiate with a group that asserts that their position is immutable. *See Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 794 (Bankr. E.D. Cal. 2013) (“it is impracticable to negotiate with a stone wall.”).

The Court concludes that the position of the several retiree associations that they would never negotiate a reduction in accrued pension benefits made negotiations with them impracticable.

Finally, the City has sufficiently demonstrated that time was quickly running out on its liquidity. Ex. 9. (Dkt. #12) The Court therefore rejects the objectors’ assertions that the City manufactured any time constraints in an attempt to create impracticability. Throughout the pertinent time periods, the City was in a financial emergency.

Courts also frequently find that negotiations are impracticable where pausing to negotiate before filing for chapter 9 protection would put the debtor’s assets at risk. *See, e.g., In re Valley Health Sys.*, 383 B.R. at 163 (“Negotiations may also be impracticable when a municipality must act to preserve its assets and a delay in filing to negotiate with creditors risks a significant loss of those assets.”); 2 Collier on Bankruptcy ¶ 109.04[3][e][iii] (“[W]here it is necessary to file a chapter 9 case to preserve the assets of a municipality, delaying the filing to negotiate with creditors and risking, in the process, the assets of the municipality makes such negotiations impracticable.”).

*In re New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. at 276-77.

The majority of the City’s debt is bond debt and legacy debt. Neither the pension debt nor the bond debt are adjustable except through consent or bankruptcy. Negotiations with retirees and bondholders were impracticable due to the sheer number of creditors, and because many of the retirees and bondholders have no formal representatives who could bind them, or

even truly negotiate on their behalf. Additionally, the Court finds that the City’s fiscal crisis was not self-imposed and also made negotiations impracticable.

Accordingly, the Court finds that pre-filing negotiations were impracticable. The City has established by a preponderance of the evidence that it meets the requirements of 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(5)(C).

### **XVII. The City Filed Its Bankruptcy Petition in Good Faith.**

The last requirement for eligibility is set forth in 11 U.S.C. § 921(c), which provides, “After any objection to the petition, the court, after notice and a hearing, may dismiss the petition if the debtor did not file the petition in good faith or if the petition does not meet the requirements of this title.”

Unlike the eligibility requirements in § 109(c), “the court’s power to dismiss a petition under § 921(c) is permissive, not mandatory.” *In re Pierce Cnty. Hous. Auth.*, 414 B.R. 702, 714 (Bankr. W.D. Wash. 2009) (citing 6 Collier on Bankruptcy ¶ 921.04[4], at 921-7); *In re Cnty. of Orange*, 183 B.R. 594, 608 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1995) (citing *In re Sullivan Cnty. Reg. Refuse Disposal Dist.*, 165 B.R. 60, 79 (Bankr. D.N.H. 1994)) (“the court has discretion to dismiss a petition if it finds that the petition was not filed in good faith”).

The City’s alleged bad faith in filing its chapter 9 petition was a central issue in the eligibility trial. Indeed, in one form or another, all of the objecting parties have taken the position that the City did not file its chapter 9 petition in good faith and that this Court should exercise its discretion under 11 U.S.C. § 921(c) to dismiss the case.

### A. The Applicable Law

“Good faith in the chapter 9 context is not defined in the Code and the legislative history of [section] 921(c) sheds no light on Congress’ intent behind the requirement.” *In re New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. 256, 278-79 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 2010) (quoting *In re Cnty. of Orange*, 183 B.R. at 608) (quotation marks omitted).

In *Stockton*, the Court found:

Relevant considerations in the comprehensive analysis for § 921 good faith include whether the City’s financial problems are of a nature contemplated by chapter 9, whether the reasons for filing are consistent with chapter 9, the extent of the City’s prepetition efforts to address the issues, the extent that alternatives to chapter 9 were considered, and whether the City’s residents would be prejudiced by denying chapter 9 relief.

*Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 794.

Similarly, the court in *New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. at 279 (quoting 6 Collier on Bankruptcy ¶ 921.04[2]), stated:

The leading treatise lists six different factors that the courts may examine when determining whether a petition under chapter 9 was filed in good faith: (i) the debtor’s subjective beliefs; (ii) whether the debtor’s financial problems fall within the situations contemplated by chapter 9; (iii) whether the debtor filed its chapter 9 petition for reasons consistent with the purposes of chapter 9; (iv) the extent of the debtor’s prepetition negotiations, if practical; (v) the extent that alternatives to chapter 9 were considered; and (vi) the scope and nature of the debtor’s financial problems.

The essence of this good faith requirement is to prevent abuse of the bankruptcy process. *In re Villages at Castle Rock Metro. Dist. No. 4*, 145 B.R. at 81.

In conducting its good faith analysis, the Court must consider the broad remedial purpose of the bankruptcy code. *See, e.g., Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 794; *see also In re Mount Carbon Metro. Dist.*, 242 B.R. 18, 32 (Bankr. D. Colo. 1999) (“The purpose of reorganization under

Chapter 9 is to allow municipalities created by state law to adjust their debts through a plan voted on by creditors and approved by the bankruptcy court.”).

Indeed, “if all of the eligibility criteria set forth in § 109(c) as described above are satisfied, it follows that there should be a strong presumption in favor of chapter 9 relief.” *Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 794. This Court agrees with the analysis set forth in the *Stockton* case on the issue of good faith under § 921(c):

The quantum of evidence that must be produced to rebut the § 921(c) good faith presumption is appropriately evaluated in light of, first, the policy favoring the remedial purpose of chapter 9 for those entities that meet the eligibility requirements of § 109(c) and, second, the risk that City residents will be prejudiced if relief nevertheless is denied.

*Stockton*, 493 B.R. at 795.

## **B. Discussion**

As explained below, the Court finds that the totality of the circumstances, coupled with the presumption of good faith that arises because the City has proven each of the elements of eligibility under § 109(c)(3), establishes that the City filed its petition in good faith under § 921(c).

### **1. The Objectors’ Theory of Bad Faith**

In section 3, below, the Court will review the factors upon which it relies in finding that the City filed this case in good faith. First, however, it is crucial to this process for the Court to give voice to what it understands is the narrative giving rise to the objecting parties’ argument that the City of Detroit did not file this case in good faith. The Court will then, in section 2, explain that there is some support in the record for that narrative.

It must be recognized that the narrative that the Court describes here is a composite of the objecting parties' positions and presentations on this issue. No single objecting party neatly laid out this precise version with all of the features described here. Moreover, it includes the perceptions of the objecting parties whose objections were filed by attorneys, as well as the many objecting parties who filed their objections without counsel. Naturally, these views on this subject were numerous, diverse, and at times inconsistent.

The Court will use an italics font for its description of this narrative, not to give it emphasis, but as a reminder that these are **not** the Court's findings. As noted, this is only the Court's perception of a composite narrative that appears to ground the objectors' various bad faith arguments:

*According to this composite narrative of the lead-up to the City of Detroit's bankruptcy filing on July 18, 2013, the bankruptcy was the intended consequence of a years-long, strategic plan.*

*The goal of this plan was the impairment of pension rights through a bankruptcy filing by the City.*

*Its genesis was hatched in a law review article that two Jones Day attorneys wrote. This is significant because Jones Day later became not only the City's attorneys in the case, but is also the law firm from which the City's emergency manager was hired. The article is Jeffrey B. Ellman; Daniel J. Merrett, Pensions and Chapter 9: Can Municipalities Use Bankruptcy to Solve Their Pension Woes?, 27 EMORY BANKR. DEV. J. 365 (2011). It laid out in detail the legal roadmap for using bankruptcy to impair municipal pensions.*

*The plan was executed by the top officials of the State of Michigan, including Governor Snyder and others in his administration, assisted by the state's legal and financial consultants - the Jones Day law firm and the Miller Buckfire investment banking firm. The goals of the plan also included lining the professionals' pockets while extending the power of state government at the expense of the people of Detroit.*

*Always conscious of the hard-fought and continuing struggle to obtain equal voting rights in this country and an equal opportunity to partake of the country's abundance, some who hold to this narrative also suspect a racial element to the plan.*

*The plan foresaw the rejection of P.A. 4 coming in the November 2102 election, and so work began on P.A. 436 beforehand. As a result, it only took 14 days to enact it after it was introduced in the legislature's post-election, lame-duck session.*

*It was also enacted in derogation of the will of the people of Michigan as just expressed in their rejection of P.A. 4.*

*The plan also included inserting into P.A. 436 two very minor appropriations provisions so that the law would not be subject to the people's right of referendum and would not risk the same fate as P.A. 4 had just experienced.*

*The plan also called for P.A. 436 to be drafted so that the Detroit emergency manager would be in office under the revived P.A. 72 on the effective date of P.A. 436. This was done so that he would continue in office under P.A. 436, M.C.L. § 141.1572, and no consideration could be given to the other options that P.A. 436 appeared to offer for resolving municipal financial crises. See M.C.L. § 141.1549(10) ("An emergency financial manager appointed under former 1988 PA 101 or former 1990 PA 72, and serving immediately prior to the effective date of this act, shall be considered an emergency manager under this act and shall continue under this act to fulfill his or her powers and duties."); see also id. § 141.1547 (titled, "Local government options . . .").*

*The plan also saw the value in enticing a bankruptcy attorney to become the emergency manager, even though he did not have the qualifications required by P.A. 436. M.C.L. § 141.1549(3)(a).*

*Another important part of the plan was for the state government to starve the City of cash by reducing its revenue sharing, by refusing to pay the City millions of promised dollars, and by imposing on the City the heavy financial burden of expensive professionals.*

*The plan also included suppressing information about the value of the City's assets and refusing to investigate the value of its assets - the art at the Detroit Institute of the Arts; Belle Isle; City Airport; the Detroit Zoo; the Department of Water and Sewerage; the Detroit Windsor Tunnel; parking operations; Joe Louis Arena, and City-owned land.*

*The narrative continues that this plan also required active concealment and even deception, despite both the great public importance of resolving the City's problems and the democratic mandate of transparency and honesty in government. The purposes of this concealment and deception were to provide political cover for the governor and his administration when the City would ultimately file for bankruptcy and to advance their further political aspirations. Another purpose was to deny creditors, especially those whose retirement benefits would be at risk from such a filing, from effectively acting to protect those interests.*

*This concealment and deception were accomplished through a public relations campaign that deliberately misstated the ultimate objective of P.A. 436 – the filing of this case. It also downplayed the likelihood of bankruptcy, asserted an unfunded pension liability amount that was based on misleading and incomplete data and analysis, understated the City’s ability to meet that liability, and obscured the vulnerability of pensions in bankruptcy. It also included imposing an improper requirement to sign a confidentiality and release agreement as a condition of accessing the City’s financial information in the “data room.”*

*As the bankruptcy filing approached, a necessary part of the plan became to engage with the creditors only the minimum necessary so that the City could later assert in bankruptcy court that it attempted to negotiate in good faith. The plan, however, was not to engage in meaningful pre-petition negotiations with the creditors because successful negotiations might thwart the plan to file bankruptcy. “Check-a-box” was the phrase that some objecting parties used for this.*

*The penultimate moment that represented the successful culmination of the plan was the bankruptcy filing. It was accomplished in secrecy and a day before the planned date, in order to thwart the creditors who were, at that very moment, in a state court pursuing their available state law remedies to protect their constitutional pension rights. “In the dark of the night” was the phrase used to describe the actual timing of the filing. The phrase refers to the secrecy surrounding the filing and is also intended to capture in shorthand the assertion that the petition was filed to avoid an imminent adverse ruling in state court.*

*Another oft-repeated phrase that was important to the objectors’ theory of the City’s bad faith was “foregone conclusion.” This was used in the assertion that Detroit’s bankruptcy case was a “foregone conclusion,” as early as January 2013, perhaps even earlier.*

*Finally, post-petition, the plan also necessitated the assertion of the common interest privilege to protect it and its participants from disclosure.*

The Court will now turn to its evaluation of this narrative of bad faith on the City’s part in filing this case.

## **2. The Court’s Conclusions Regarding the Objectors’ Theory of Bad Faith**

The Court acknowledges that many people in Detroit hold to this narrative, or at least to substantial parts of it.

The Court further recognizes, on the other hand, that State and City officials vehemently deny any such improper motives or tactics as this theory attributed to them. They contend that the case was filed for the proper desired and necessary purpose of restructuring the City's debt, including its pension debt, through a plan of adjustment. Indeed, in Part XIV, above, the Court has already found that the City does desire to effect a plan of adjustment.

The Court finds, however, that in some particulars, the record does support the objectors' view of the reality that led to this bankruptcy filing. It is, however, not nearly supported in enough particulars for the Court to find that the filing was in bad faith.

The evidence in support of the objectors' theory is as follows:

- The testimony of Howard Ryan, the legislative assistant for the Michigan Department of Treasury who shepherded P.A. 436 through the legislative process. He testified that the appropriations provisions in P.A. 436 were inserted to eliminate the possibility of a referendum vote on the law, and everyone knew that. Ryan Dep. Tr. 46:1-23, Oct. 14, 2013. To the same effect is Exhibit 403, a January 31, 2013 email from Mr. Orr to fellow Jones Day attorneys, stating, "By contrast Michigan's new EM law is a clear end-around the prior initiative that was rejected by the voters in November. . . . The news reports state that opponents of the prior law are already lining up to challenge this law. Nonetheless, I'm going to speak with Baird in a few minutes to see what his thinking is. I'll let you know how it turns out. Thanks." Ex. 403.
- Email exchanges between other attorneys at the Jones Day law firm during the time period leading up Mr. Orr's appointment as Emergency Manager and the retention of the Jones Day law firm to represent the City. For example, Exhibit 402 contains an email dated January 31, 2013 from Corinne Ball of Jones Day to Mr. Orr, which states:

Food for thought for your conversation with Baird and us - I understand that the Bloomberg Foundation has a keen interest in this area. I was thinking about whether we should talk to Baird about financial support for this project and in particular the EM. Harry Wilson-from the auto task force-told me about the foundation and its interest. I can ask Harry for contact info-this kind of support in ways 'nationalizes' the issue and the project.

Ex. 402 at 2. Exhibit 402 also contains an email dated January 31, 2013, from Dan T. Moss at Jones Day to Mr. Orr, which states:

Making this a national issue is not a bad idea. It provides political cover for the state politicians. Indeed, this gives them an even greater incentive to do this right because, if it succeeds, there will be more than enough patronage to allow either Bing or Snyder to look for higher callings—whether Cabinet, Senate, or corporate. Further, this would give you cover and options on the back end.

Ex. 402 at 2.

- Exhibit 403, containing an email dated February 20, 2013, from Richard Baird, a consultant to the governor to Mr. Orr, stating: “Told [Mayor Bing] there were certain things I would not think we could agree to without your review, assessment and determination (such as keeping the executive team in its entirety). *Will broker a meeting via note between you and the Mayor’s personal assistant who is not FOIA ble.*” Ex. 403 (emphasis added). The Court finds that “FOIA” is a reference to the Freedom of Information Act. Generally, FOIA provides citizens with access to documents controlled by state or local governments. *See* M.C.L. § 15.231.
- The Jones Day Pitch Book. As part of its “Pitch Presentation,” the Jones Day law firm presented, in part, the following playbook for the City’s road to chapter 9:
  - (i) the difficulty of achieving an out of court settlement and steps to bolster the City’s ability to qualify for chapter 9 by establishing a good faith record of negotiations, Ex. 833 at 13; 16-18; 22-23; 28;
  - (ii) the EM could be used as “political cover” for difficult decisions such as an ultimate chapter 9 filing, Ex. 833 at 16;
  - (iii) warning that pre-chapter 9 asset monetization could implicate the chapter 9 eligibility requirement regarding insolvency, thus effectively advising the City against raising money in order to will itself into insolvency, Ex. 833 at 17; and
  - (iv) describing protections under state law for retiree benefits and accrued pension obligations and how chapter 9 could be used as means to further cut back or compromise accrued pension obligations otherwise protected by the Michigan Constitution, Ex. 833 at 39; 41.
- The State’s selection of a distinguished bankruptcy lawyer to be the emergency manager for Detroit. Orr Dep. Tr. 18:12-21:20, Sept. 16, 2013 (discussing how Mr. Orr came with the Law Firm in late January to pitch for the City’s restructuring work before a “restructuring team [of] advisors”); Baird Dep.Tr. 13:11-15:10, Oct. 10, 2013. During that pitch, Mr. Orr (among other lawyers that would be working on the proposed engagement) was presented primarily as a “bankruptcy and restructuring attorney.” Orr Dep. Tr. 21:3-6, Sept. 16, 2013; see also Bing Dep.Tr. 12:7-13:7, Oct. 14, 2013 (indicating that Baird explained to Mayor Bing that Baird was “impressed with him [Mr. Orr], that he had been part of the bankruptcy team representing

Chrysler” and that Mr. Orr primarily had restructuring experience in the context of bankruptcy).

- Jones Day provided 1,000 hours of service without charge to the City or the State to position itself for this retention. Ex. 860 at 1 (Email dated January 28, 2013, from Corinne Ball to Jeffrey Ellman, both of Jones Day, stating: “Just heard from Buckfire. . . . Strong advice not to mention 1000 hours except to say we don’t have major learning curve”). See also Eligibility Trial Tr. 103:23-109:17, November 5, 2013; (Dkt. #1584) Ex. 844.

Exhibit 844 provides a list of memos that attorneys at Jones Day prepared prior to June 2012, “in connection with the Detroit matter.” Heather Lennox of Jones Day requested copies of these memos for a June 6, 2012, meeting with Ken Buckfire, of Miller Buckfire, and Governor Snyder. Some of the memos include:

- (1) “Summary and Comparison of Public Act 4 and Chapter 9”
- (2) “Memoranda on Constitutional Protections for Pension and OPEB Liabilities”
- (3) “The ability of a city or state to force the decertification of a public union”
- (4) “The sources of, and the ability of the State to withdraw, the City’s municipal budgetary authority.”
- (5) “Analysis of filing requirements of section 109(c)(5) of the Bankruptcy Code (“Negotiation is Impracticable” and “Negotiated in Good Faith”)

- Exhibit 846, an email dated March 2, 2012, from Jeffrey Ellman to Corinne Ball, both of Jones Day, with two other Jones Day attorneys copied. The subject line is, “Consent Agreement,” and the body of the email states:

We spoke to a person from Andy’s office and a lawyer to get their thoughts on some of the issues. I thought MB was also going to try to follow up with Andy directly about the process for getting this to the Governor, but I am not sure if that happened.

. . . .

The cleanest way to do all of this probably is new legislation that establishes the board and its powers, AND includes an appropriation for a state institution. If an appropriation is attached to (included in) the statute to fund a state institution (which is broadly defined), then the statute is not subject to repeal by the referendum process.

Tom is revisiting the document and should have a new version shortly, with the idea of getting this to at least M[iller]B[uckfire]/Huron [Consulting] by lunchtime.

- Exhibits 201 & 202, showing that Jones Day and Miller Buckfire consulted with state officials on the drafting of the failed consent agreement with the City. They

continued to work on a “proposed new statute to replace Public Act 4” thereafter. Ex. 847, Ex. 851. *See also* Ex. 846.

- The testimony of Donald Taylor, President of the Retired Detroit Police and Fire Fighters Association. He testified about a meeting that he had with Mr. Orr on April 18, 2013: “I asked him if he was - - about the pensions of retirees. He said that he was fully aware that the pensions were protected by the state Constitution, and he had no intention of trying to modify or set aside . . . or change the state Constitution.” Eligibility Trial Tr. 140:9-13, November 4, 2013. (Dkt. #1605)
- At the June 10, 2013 community meeting, Mr. Orr was asked a direct question - what is going to happen to the City employee’s pensions? Mr. Orr responded that pension rights are “sacrosanct” under the state constitution and state case law, misleadingly not stating that upon the City’s bankruptcy filing, his position would be quite the opposite. In response to another question about whether Mr. Orr had a “ball park estimation” of the City’s chances of avoiding bankruptcy, Mr. Orr responded that, as of June 10, there was a “50/50” chance that the City could avoid bankruptcy, knowing that in fact there was no chance of that.
- State Treasurer Andy Dillon expressed concern that giving up too soon on negotiations made the filing “look[] premeditated” Ex. 626 at 2.
- The City allotted only thirty four days to negotiate with creditors after the June 14 Proposal to Creditors. Ex. 43 at 113.

The issue that this evidence presents is how to evaluate it in the context of the good faith requirement. For example, during the orchestrated lead-up to the filing, was the City of Detroit’s bankruptcy filing a “foregone conclusion” as the objecting parties assert? Of course it was, and for a long time.

Even if it was a foregone conclusion, however, experience with both individuals and businesses in financial distress establishes that they often wait longer to file bankruptcy than is in their interests. Detroit was no exception. Its financial crisis has been worsening for decades and it could have, and probably should have, filed for bankruptcy relief long before it did, perhaps even years before. At what point in Detroit’s financial slide did it lose the ability, without bankruptcy help, to restructure its debt in a way that would firmly ground its economic and

social revitalization? Was it after the disastrous COPs and swaps deal in 2005? Or even sometime before?

The record here does not permit an answer to that question. Whatever the answer, however, the Court must conclude that Detroit's bankruptcy filing was certainly a "foregone conclusion" during all of 2013.

For purposes of determining the City's good faith, however, it hardly matters. As noted, many in financial difficulty, Detroit included, wait too long to file bankruptcy.

Then the issue becomes what impact does it have on the good faith analysis that Detroit probably waited too long. Perhaps it would have been more consistent with our democratic ideals and with the economic and social needs of the City if its officials and State officials had openly and forthrightly recognized the need for filing bankruptcy when that need first arose. It is, after all, not bad faith to file bankruptcy when it is needed.

City officials also could have avoided the appearance of pretext negotiations, and the resulting mistrust, by simply announcing honestly that because negotiating with so many diverse creditors was impracticable, negotiations would not even be attempted. The law clearly permits that, and for good reason. It avoids the very delay, and, worse, the very suspicion that resulted here.

The Court must acknowledge some substantial truth in the factual basis for the objectors' claim that this case was not filed in good faith. Nevertheless, for the strong reasons stated in the next section, the Court finds that this case was filed in good faith and should not be dismissed.

### **3. The City Filed This Bankruptcy Case in Good Faith.**

Based on *Stockton* and *New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, reviewed above, the Court concludes that the following factors are most relevant in establishing the City's good faith:

- a. The City’s financial problems are of a type contemplated for chapter 9 relief.
- b. The reasons for filing are consistent with the remedial purpose of chapter 9,
- c. The City made efforts to improve the state of its finances prior to filing, to no avail.
- d. The City’s residents will be severely prejudiced if the case is dismissed.

**a. The City’s Financial Problems Are of a  
Type Contemplated for Chapter 9 Relief.**

The Court’s analysis of this factor is based on its findings that the City is “insolvent” in Part XIII, above, and that the City was “unable to negotiate with creditors because such negotiation [was] impracticable” in Part XVI, above. 11 U.S.C. §§ 109(c)(3) and 109(c)(5)(C).

The City has over \$18,000,000,000 in debt and it is increasing. In the months before the filing, it was consistently at risk of running out of cash. It has over 100,000 creditors.

“Profound” is the best way to describe the City’s insolvency, and it simply could not negotiate with its numerous and varied creditors. *See In re Town of Westlake, Tex.*, 211 B.R. 860, 868 (Bankr. N.D. Tex. 1997) (finding the debtor filed in good faith because it faced “frozen funds, multiple litigation, and the disannexation of a substantial portion of its tax base”).

It is true that the City does not have a clear picture of its assets, income, cash flow, and liabilities, likely because its bookkeeping and accounting systems are obsolete. But this only suggests the need for relief. It does not suggest bad faith. Moreover, as the City’s financial analysts’ subsequent months of work have sharpened the focus on the City’s finances, the resulting picture has only become worse. Eligibility Trial Tr. 118:4-119:5, Nov. 5, 2013. (Dkt. #1584)

The Court finds that this factor weighs in favor of finding good faith.

**b. The City's Reasons for Filing Are Consistent with the Remedial Purpose of Chapter 9.**

One of the purposes of chapter 9 is to give the debtor a "breathing spell" so that it may establish a plan of adjustment. *In re Cnty. of Orange*, 183 B.R. 594, 607 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1995).

The Court's analysis on this factor is based on its finding that the City "desires to effect a plan to adjust such debts." 11 U.S.C. § 109(c)(4). To show good faith on this factor, "the evidence must demonstrate that 'the purpose of the filing of the chapter 9 petition [was] not simply . . . to buy time or evade creditors.'" *In re New York City Off-Track Betting Corp.*, 427 B.R. at 272 (quoting *In re City of Vallejo*, 408 B.R. at 295). Notably, this argument was not raised by the objectors in any pleadings or at trial, nor was any evidence presented to support it.

The objectors do assert that the City filed the petition to avoid "a bad state court ruling" in the *Webster* litigation. They argue this is indicative of bad faith. *See, e.g.*, Second Amended Final Pre-Trial Order, ¶ 107 at 30. (Dkt. #1647) This argument is rejected. Creditor lawsuits commonly precipitate bankruptcy filings. That the suits were in vindication of an important right under the state constitution does not change this result. They were suits to enforce creditors' monetary claims against a debtor that could not pay those claims.

The objectors also argue that the City filed the petition so that its pension obligations could be impaired and that this is inconsistent with the remedial purpose of bankruptcy. *See, e.g.*, Second Amended Final Pre-Trial Order, ¶ 86 at 24. (Dkt. #1647) Again, discharging debt is the primary motive behind the filing of most bankruptcy petitions. That motivation does not suggest any bad faith. That the City "chose to avail itself of a legal remedy afforded it by federal law is not proof of bad faith." *In re Chilhowee R-IV School Dist.*, 145 B.R. 981, 983 (Bankr.

W.D. Mo. 1992). This is especially true here. The evidence demonstrated that attempting to negotiate a voluntary impairment of pensions would have been futile.

Accordingly, the Court finds that this factor also weighs in favor of finding good faith.

**c. The City Made Efforts to Improve the State of Its Finances Prior to Filing, to No Avail.**

Although the Court finds that the City did not engage in good faith negotiations with its creditors, Part XV, above, the Court does find the City did make some efforts to improve its financial condition before filing its chapter 9 petition. See Part III C, above.

The City's efforts are detailed in Mr. Orr's declaration filed in support of the petition. Ex. 414 at 36-49. (Dkt. #11) Those efforts include reducing the number of City employees, reducing labor costs through implementation of the City Employment Terms, increasing the City's corporate tax rate, working to improve the City's ability to collect taxes, increasing lighting rates, deferring capital expenditures, reducing vendor costs, and reducing subsidies to the Detroit Department of Transportation. Ex. 414 at 36-49. (Dkt. #11); Eligibility Trial Tr. 231:15-233:7, October 28, 2013. (Dkt. #1502) Despite those efforts, the City remains insolvent.

The fact that the City did not seriously consider any alternatives to chapter 9 in the period leading up to the filing of the petition does not indicate bad faith. By this time, all of the measures described in Mr. Orr's declaration had largely failed to resolve the problem of the City's cash flow insolvency. Ex. 414 at 36-49. (Dkt. #11); Eligibility Trial Tr. 231:15-233:7, October 28, 2013. (Dkt. #1502). In *In re City of San Bernadino, Cal.*, 499 B.R. 776, 791 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 2013), the Court observed:

Was there an alternative available to the City when it was faced with a \$45.9 million cash deficit in the upcoming fiscal year and inevitably was going to default on its obligations as they came due? The Court answers this question 'no.' To deny the opportunity to reorganize in chapter 9 based on lack of good faith

would be to ignore fiscal reality and the general purposes of the Bankruptcy Code.

The Court finds this factor also weighs in favor of finding good faith.

**d. The Residents of Detroit Will Be Severely Prejudiced If This Case Is Dismissed.**

The Court concludes that this factor is of paramount importance in this case. The City's debt and cash flow insolvency is causing its nearly 700,000 residents to suffer hardship. As already discussed at length in this opinion, the City is "service delivery insolvent." See Parts III B 6-11 and XIII B, above. Its services do not function properly due to inadequate funding. The City has an extraordinarily high crime rate; too many street lights do not function; EMS does not timely respond; the City's parks are neglected and disappearing; and the equipment for police, EMS and fire services are outdated and inadequate.

Over 38% of the City's revenues were consumed by servicing debt in 2012, and that figure is projected to increase to nearly 65% of the budget by 2017 if the debt is not restructured. Ex. 414 at 39 (Dkt. #11) Without revitalization, revenues will continue to plummet as residents leave Detroit for municipalities with lower tax rates and acceptable services.

Without the protection of chapter 9, the City will be forced to continue on the path that it was on until it filed this case. In order to free up cash for day-to-day operations, the City would continue to borrow money, defer capital investments, and shrink its workforce. This solution has proven unworkable. It is also dangerous for its residents.

If the City were to continue to default on its financial obligations, as it would outside of bankruptcy, creditor lawsuits would further deplete the City's resources. On the other hand, in seeking chapter 9 relief, the City not only reorganizes its debt and enhances City services, but it

also creates an opportunity for investments in its revitalization efforts for the good of the residents of Detroit. Ex. 43 at 61.

This factor weighs heavily in favor of finding good faith.

### **C. Conclusion Regarding the City's Good Faith**

While acknowledging some merit to the objectors' serious concerns about how City and State officials managed the lead-up to this filing, the Court finds that the factors relevant to the good faith issue weigh strongly in favor of finding good faith. Accordingly, the Court concludes the City's petition was filed in good faith and that the petition is not subject to dismissal under 11 U.S.C. § 921(c).

### **XVIII. Other Miscellaneous Arguments**

The objections addressed here were asserted in briefs after the deadline to object had passed. Accordingly, these objections are untimely and denied on that ground. In the interest of justice, however, the Court will briefly address their merits.

#### **A. *Midlantic* Does Not Apply in This Case**

In its supplemental brief filed October 30, 2013, AFSCME asserts, "The rights created by the Pensions Clause should survive bankruptcy because the Pensions Clause is an exercise of the right to enact 'state or local laws designed to protect public health or safety' which cannot be disregarded by the debtor." AFSCME's Supplemental Br. at 3-4. (Dkt. #1467) In support of this argument, AFSCME relies on the United States Supreme Court decision in *Midlantic Nat'l Bank v. New Jersey Dep't of Env. Protection*, 474 U.S. 494, 106 S. Ct. 755 (1986).

In *Midlantic*, the Supreme Court held that "a trustee in bankruptcy does not have the power to authorize an abandonment without formulating conditions that will adequately protect

the public’s health and safety.” 474 U.S. at 507, 106 S. Ct at 762. At issue in that case was whether a trustee in bankruptcy could abandon real property pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 544(a), when the property was contaminated with 400,000 gallons of oil containing PCB, “a highly toxic carcinogen.” *Id.* at 497, 106 S. Ct. at 757.

The case is simply not applicable on AFSCME’s point. The City has not “abandoned” its property. Moreover, AFSCME has failed to identify how the pensions clause is a “state or local law designed to protect public health or safety.” *Id.* at 502, 106 S. Ct. at 760.

Accordingly, this objection is overruled.

### **B. There Was No Gap in Mr. Orr’s Service as Emergency Manager**

In an objection filed on October 17, 2013 (Dkt. # 1222), Krystal Crittendon asserted that Mr. Orr was not validly appointed because the rejection of P.A. 4 did not revive P.A. 72. This argument is rejected for the reasons stated in Part III D, above.

In this objection, Crittendon also contended that Mr. Orr was not validly appointed because his initial emergency manager contract expired before P.A. 436 took effect.

P.A. 436 contains a grandfathering provision which states:

An emergency manager or emergency financial manager appointed and serving under state law immediately prior to the effective date of this act shall continue under this act as an emergency manager for the local government.

M.C.L. § 141.1571.

Mr. Orr’s initial emergency manager contract under P.A. 72 stated that it “shall terminate at midnight on Wednesday, March 27, 2013.” Crittendon contends that therefore the contract terminated the morning of Wednesday, March 27, and that therefore he was not in office on that day. She asserts that because Mr. Orr’s current emergency manager contract became effective

on Thursday, March 28, 2013, there was no emergency manager serving immediately prior to the March 28 effective date of P.A. 436, and the grandfathering clause does not apply.

The City contends that the parties intended for Mr. Orr's initial contract to expire at the end of the day on March 27th and that there was no gap in his service.

In *Hallock v. Income Guar. Co.*, 270 Mich. 448, 452, 259 N.W. 133, 134 (1935), the court assumed "midnight" meant the end of the day. Courts in other jurisdictions, however, have found that the term is ambiguous. See *Amer. Transit Ins. Co. v. Wilfred*, 745 N.Y.S.2d 171, 172, 296 A.D.2d 360, 361 (N.Y. 2002); *Mumuni v. Eagle Ins. Co.*, 668 N.Y.S.2d 464, 247 A.D.2d 315 (N.Y.A.D. 1998).

In *Klapp v. United Insurance Group Agency, Inc.*, 468 Mich. 459, 663 N.W.2d 447 (2003), the Michigan Supreme Court noted, "The law is clear that where the language of the contract is ambiguous, the court can look to such extrinsic evidence as the parties' conduct, the statements of its representatives, and past practice to aid in interpretation." *Id.* at 470, 663 N.W.2d at 454 (quoting *Penzien v. Dielectric Prod. Engineering Co., Inc.*, 374 Mich. 444, 449, 132 N.W.2d 130, 132 (1965)).

The Court finds that the parties to the contracts clearly intended that there would be no gap in Mr. Orr's contracts or in his appointment. Accordingly, Mr. Orr was validly appointed under M.C.L. § 141.1572. The objection is rejected.

**XIX. Conclusion:  
The City is Eligible and the Court  
Will Enter an Order for Relief.**

The Court concludes that under 11 U.S.C. § 109(c), the City of Detroit may be a debtor under chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code. The Court will enter an order for relief forthwith, as required by 11 U.S.C. § 921(d).

The Court reminds all interested parties that this eligibility determination is merely a preliminary matter in this bankruptcy case. The City's ultimate objective is confirmation of a plan of adjustment. It has stated on the record its intent to achieve that objective with all deliberate speed and to file its plan shortly. Accordingly, the Court strongly encourages the parties to begin to negotiate, or if they have already begun, to continue to negotiate, with a view toward a consensual plan.

For publication

**Signed on December 05, 2013**

**/s/ Steven Rhodes**  
**Steven Rhodes**  
**United States Bankruptcy Judge**

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
SOUTHERN DIVISION**

In re:  
City of Detroit, Michigan,  
Debtor.

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Chapter 9  
Case No. 13-53846  
Hon. Steven W. Rhodes

**Order for Relief Under Chapter 9 of the Bankruptcy Code**

The Court has determined that the City of Detroit, Michigan has met all of the applicable requirements and is eligible to be a debtor under chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code. The Court has further determined that the City of Detroit, Michigan filed its chapter 9 petition in good faith.

Accordingly, the Court hereby enters this Order for Relief and grants relief to the City of Detroit, Michigan under chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code.

**Signed on December 05, 2013**

/s/ Steven Rhodes  
**Steven Rhodes**  
**United States Bankruptcy Judge**