

Badger Institute: Praises legislature for increased prosecutor and public defender pay

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May 17, 2023 — The Badger Institute on Wednesday praised action by the Legislature's budget writing committee to raise pay for prosecutors and public defenders, a move the Institute has been advocating for nearly a year.

Badger Institute visiting fellow Jeremiah Mosteller demonstrated the link between Wisconsin's comparatively low pay for prosecutors and public defenders and the state's growing backlog of criminal prosecutions in a study released in September 2022, "[Toward Swifter Justice: Overburdened Prosecutors and Public Defenders Linked to Wisconsin Court Backlogs.](#)"

His research found that the compensation paid to prosecutors and public defenders in Wisconsin was the lowest among both the same roles in other states and comparable attorney roles within the state. These low salaries significantly contribute to high turnover among these public servants and the state's tens of thousands of backlogged criminal cases.

"It is encouraging to see Wisconsin's leaders step up to address the problem of delayed justice in the Badger State. It should not take longer than a year to resolve criminal cases involving grave violent crimes" said Mosteller. "The \$37 million dollars approved by the Joint Committee on Finance this week is a vital down payment toward more effective and swift justice."

State Public Defender Kelli Thompson concurs: "Today's vote by the Joint Committee on Finance is an historic investment in the criminal justice system. Without the people who work tirelessly every day in courthouses all over Wisconsin,

the Constitution is a hollow guarantee of fundamental rights and liberties. Providing adequate compensation and resources will ensure that we protect those rights.

“Our ability to successfully advocate for resources based on data and analytics was in large part thanks to the Badger Institute’s research.”

The Joint Finance Committee vote also drew praise from the president of the Wisconsin District Attorneys Association. “Today’s vote by the JFC represents a transformational investment in public safety and prosecutors,” said Eric Toney, who also serves as District Attorney in Fond du Lac County. “We expect this will stabilize the prosecutor ranks allowing us to recruit and retain excellent prosecutors to work together with law enforcement to keep dangerous criminals off our street and find justice for crime victims and our community.”

Mosteller’s study was published as part of the Badger Institute’s “[Mandate for Madison](#),” a compendium of ready-to-implement policies addressing some of Wisconsin’s most pressing issues. Wisconsin legislative leaders have cited the book as they have proposed action on several of the issues.

Other work the Badger Institute has published on the topic since has connected the prosecutor pay issue to [staffing problems in Dodge County](#) and, from Mosteller, [followed up](#) on his 2022 study.

The Badger Institute is Wisconsin’s most influential free-market public policy research organization.