

Sen. Marklein: Budget Bulletin: Public safety, the court system, agriculture and natural resources

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The Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) met on Tuesday, May 16 and Thursday, May 18, 2023. Between the two days, we took action on public safety, the court system, agriculture and natural resources. We completed our work on the following agencies: Circuit Courts, Supreme Court, District Attorneys, Public Defender, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), Environmental Improvement Fund (EIF) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Tuesday was a terrific day for public safety and law enforcement. In a fully bipartisan effort, we took meaningful steps to solve real problems and to provide the resources needed to provide justice throughout Wisconsin. Everyone in Wisconsin has the right to a speedy trial. Justice should be fair and timely. The investments we made will ensure that this happens.

District Attorneys and Public Defenders have faced difficulty with recruitment and retention of qualified attorneys to provide services for people who are engaged in the court system. Without action, we face a constitutional crisis. The system cannot function without being fixed.

In response, we increased pay for Assistant District Attorneys (ADAs) and Public Defenders by \$8.76 per hour. We also included a corresponding increase for elected District Attorneys (DAs). This creates parity for everyone. Tons of experience departs these offices frequently because of the pay situation. Elected DA's quit to become a Deputy DA because the pay progression is better to be second in command rather than the top attorney in command. We need high-quality attorneys in DA positions and improved pay rates will help.

We also created one ADA position in Sauk County to address their workload. Sauk County has a lot of cases for offenders who are not “local”. In fact, 45% of their cases are for people who are not from Sauk County due to Wisconsin Dells and the interstate.

On Thursday, the legislature created a \$125 Million PFAS Fund to address PFAS pollution. In creating a separate account for funds to address PFAS now and into the future, we are acknowledging the seriousness of this issue. We do not know exactly what we need to do to address the issue right now, but establishing the fund builds resources for taking action. Water quality is a top priority across the entire state.

In addition to the PFAS Fund and many other great initiatives, I am particularly proud of our work to reinvest state park revenues into our state parks. I have more state parks in my Senate District than any other Senate District.

I have been working on the state park issue for several years. We have made reforms that have put the parks into incredible financial position by allowing the parks to increase rates, manage occupancy and employ private sector principles.

As a result, the parks account is very, very strong. We are reinvesting the funds in this account right back into our state parks. We will be investing more than \$10 million in improvements, additional site electrification and the roads that run through our parks and state forests.

State park visitors, like me and my extended family, have greatly benefitted from past investments and I look forward to continued improvements with these new funds. I am hopeful that the Governor will sign our budget and continue improving this tremendous natural resource.

Finally, we made meaningful investments in several agriculture programs that have moved the needle for our ag community. We invested in Ag in the Classroom, Meat Processor Grants, Dairy Processor Grants, Producer-led Watershed Grants and Agricultural Export initiatives. All of these programs, among others, support agriculture throughout the state.

Please do not hesitate to connect with me to provide input, ideas or to seek assistance. Send an email to sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov or call



608-266-0703. I want to hear from you.