

State Bar of Wisconsin: Statement on prosecutor and public defender shortage

Posted on Monday, Jan 23, 2023

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON - The State Bar of Wisconsin issued a statement regarding the staffing and funding issues faced in Wisconsin District Attorney offices, in the State Public Defenders office, and private attorney pay for assigned cases. The joint statement comes from Margaret W. Hickey (Milwaukee), President; Dean R. Dietrich, (Wausau), President-Elect; and Cheryl Furstace Daniels (Madison), Past President.

Shortage in DA's, Public Defenders is a Crisis Situation

The State Bar of Wisconsin, the state's second largest professional association, is substantially concerned over staffing and funding issues in our state's criminal justice system. Specifically, the staffing crisis in our District Attorney offices, State Public Defender's office and with those private attorneys that take assigned counsel cases is beyond its breaking point. It is time for our elected state leaders to be criminal justice partners in fixing this funding emergency without delay.

Wisconsin Ranks in Bottom 10 for New Assistant Prosecutors Starting Pay

While the recent announcement of the resignation of Dodge County District Attorney Kurt Klomberg highlights our underfunded system, this issue has been percolating for years. District Attorneys across the state have either staff shortages or positions they are unable to fill as salaries have not kept pace with the employment market. Starting pay for new assistant prosecutors ranks Wisconsin among the bottom 10 nationally. State Public Defender Kelli Thompson has also highlighted these same issues with public defenders, indicating that her agency is almost down 20% of their typical attorney employees. The issue is even more eye

opening in rural counties with staff vacancies that are not able to be filled.

A Constitutional Crisis is Looming

Make no mistake, this is a defining moment for those that believe in our Constitution. This is about victims that are waiting too long for justice. This is about those accused of a crime that are incarcerated without the ability to defend their constitutional right to receive a fair and speedy trial. This is about our hard-working state employees who are reporting emotional exhaustion and work stressors that impact their personal lives. This is about the private attorney that takes an assigned case at \$70 an hour, traveling hours around the state for even less, and then just barely making enough to cover overhead office costs.

Wisconsin's New Budget Presents Opportunity to Right a Wrong

With the state being in a healthy fiscal position, there is ample opportunity to address this problem. We believe the state has an opportunity for transformative change and likely many worthy things need funding. But the consequences of not acting for our justice system are too great to ignore. This has become a crisis for our state and our communities. All we are asking for is a fair investment for those employees fighting for our public's safety and a court system that works and be fair for all.