



# Wisconsin State Public Defender

**Kelli Thompson**  
State Public Defender

17 S. Fairchild Street, 5th Floor  
Madison, WI 53703  
Phone: 608.266.0087/Fax: 608.267.0584  
[www.wisspd.org](http://www.wisspd.org)

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CONTACT: Randy Kraft 608-267-3587

## **Statement from State Public Defender Kelli Thompson on Private Attorney Rate Increase and Staff Attorney Pay in Governor's Budget**

I thank Governor Evers for including in his budget several items that are a priority for the State Public Defender's Office (SPD). Increasing the rate of reimbursement for private attorneys taking SPD cases, indexing the rate to allow for future increase, and providing merit pay for staff attorneys are vital for Wisconsin to meet its constitutional obligations regarding indigent defense. The inclusion of these items in the Governor's budget marks widespread support among Wisconsin policymakers following the recent announcement of support for these items by the Assembly.

The nation's lowest private bar hourly rate is having a severe impact on defendants, victims, and counties. With fewer and fewer attorneys willing to accept appointments in conflict of interest cases, defendants are being forced to wait weeks, often while in custody, to have an attorney appointed in their case. A higher rate of compensation will help to ensure that the constitutionally-guaranteed right to counsel is being fulfilled. Raising the rate to \$70 per hour, indexed for future increases, will have a significant impact.

Similarly, providing merit pay to retain SPD staff attorneys who have the knowledge and experience to provide effective representation while maintaining a significant and diverse caseload will help to ensure Wisconsin is meeting its Sixth Amendment obligation.

Our initial review of the Governor's budget is encouraging, and I am thankful for his support of the state's criminal justice system in general, and the SPD budget in particular. We look forward to working with the Governor and the legislature as the budget moves through the legislative process.

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