



Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Press Release
For Immediate Release**

March 1, 2021

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Public Defender Bill Signed Into Law

Madison- Today, Senate Bill 62, authored Representative Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton) and Senator Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon) was signed into law by Governor Tony Evers.

2021 Wisconsin Act 7 will allow the State Public Defender (SPD) to exceed the 10% cap for merit raises for the remainder of this fiscal year. This will allow for the SPD's office to help close the gap that was created between the SPDs and the Assistant District Attorneys (ADAs) when the long-standing practice of linking the pay progression funding for ADAs to the level of pay progression funding for SPDs did not continue in the 2019-2021 budget process. SPD vs. ADA pay disparity was already having a negative impact on retention, and the pandemic exacerbated that discrepancy.

"Significant progress and investments were made during the last legislative session to ensure Wisconsin's criminal justice system functions efficiently and effectively and that each of the three legs of the criminal justice stool (Courts, Prosecutors, and Public Defenders) are adequately resourced and balanced," said Loudenbeck.

"Since March 2020, 78 staff have left the Office of the State Public Defender. It has been even more difficult than normal to recruit and hire during the pandemic, and while positions are vacant, cases and clients continue to wait," said Loudenbeck. "This causes delays throughout the criminal justice system, particularly in more rural areas. Many counties are now experiencing significant delays that are creating a multitude of issues for judges, jails, prosecutors, clients, and victims."

"It's extremely important to have balance in funding our justice system," said Senator Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon). "In order to function properly you have to have adequate resources for judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys, otherwise you see bottlenecks that slow things down and that harms everyone."

"I am grateful to Representative Loudenbeck and Senator Petrowski for their ongoing support and the support of the entire Legislature. This is a key tool in retaining staff and ensuring that the criminal legal system isn't brought to a standstill due to lack of counsel", said State Public Defender Kelli Thompson.

"I am thrilled to have this bill pass with such strong bipartisan support and was signed by Governor Evers. It's critically important to help the SPD's office to retain their staff and to ensure we are able to protect Wisconsin's citizens' constitutional rights," said Loudenbeck.

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