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***2007-09 State Budget Should Include Adequate Funding for
Wisconsin's Justice System***

Tom Basting, State Bar of Wisconsin President
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Because we believe that every Wisconsin resident should have reliable access to justice through our courts, the State Bar of Wisconsin urges legislators to enact a State Budget that provides adequate state funds to assure that our justice system is both accessible and impartial to all. The state budget as proposed by the Governor, Joint Committee on Finance, and the State Senate would advance this goal by dedicating an additional \$19 million to support circuit court operations statewide. The budget as passed by the State Assembly eliminates this funding (while incongruously earmarking additional state funds for a new circuit court branch in a single county).

Wisconsin courts have responsibilities that they simply cannot ignore – and neither should the Legislature. For example, increasing numbers of hearings and other courtroom procedures require qualified interpreters to overcome language barriers. Yet, the Assembly budget eliminates a modest increase in state reimbursement proposed to help counties meet this growing need.

The pre-Assembly version of the budget also included initiatives to assist people who represent themselves in civil legal matters (such as landlord-tenant disputes) and \$1 million for other civil legal assistance. The urgent need for these services in Wisconsin was documented in a study released by the State Bar in March ([Bridging the Gap: Wisconsin's Unmet Legal Needs](#)), which shows that about one-half million residents face serious legal matters on their own that could impact their housing, health, or employment. These and other proposed justice initiatives intended to benefit families across Wisconsin were removed from the Assembly version of the bill.

(more)

Finally, the proposed Assembly budget would eliminate sick leave for newly-elected judges and, by cutting state compensation and other reserves by almost \$200 million, would effectively reduce the compensation of all judges by approximately \$7,000 annually. This makes no sense if we hope to attract the most talented and dedicated people to serve on the bench.

Most of us recognize the fundamental importance of justice as a cornerstone of our high quality of life in Wisconsin and all of us deserve a State Budget that embodies this priority.

The State Bar of Wisconsin is the mandatory professional association, created by the Wisconsin Supreme Court, for attorneys who hold a Wisconsin law license. With more than 20,000 members, the State Bar aids the courts in improving the administration of justice, provides continuing legal education for its members to help them maintain their expertise, and assists Wisconsin lawyers in carrying out community service initiatives to educate the public about the legal system and the value of lawyers. For more information, visit www.wisbar.org or www.legalexplorer.com

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