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**State Bar asks Governor to adequately
fund prosecutors and public defenders**

July 24, 2008 – State Bar of Wisconsin President Diane Diel today asked Governor Jim Doyle to continue his fight for equal justice in Wisconsin by taking measures to restore adequate numbers of qualified prosecutors and defense attorneys.

“Our criminal justice system is in a state of crisis,” Diel said. “Our state is losing qualified prosecutors and defense attorneys willing to take State Public Defender (SPD) cases at ridiculously low hourly rates.”

Diel urged the Governor to address the state’s rising prosecutorial caseload and the loss of experienced mid-level prosecutors, who are leaving the profession due to the lack of adequate pay progression. She also asked the Governor to significantly increase Wisconsin’s long-outdated hourly rates for private practice attorneys who take public defender cases.

A recent [state audit](#) revealed that Wisconsin has 117 fewer prosecutors than needed to adequately handle the increasing number of criminal cases referred to district attorneys by local police. The audit showed that between 2002 and 2006, the number of prosecutors in the state dropped 4.4% while the number of cases referred for prosecution increased 11.5%. It concluded that Wisconsin has 27% fewer assistant district attorneys than we need and that 63 of our 72 counties are understaffed. The recent loss of federal funding for prosecutors has placed an additional 20 assistant district attorney positions across the state at risk.

The hourly rate the state pays to private practice attorneys who take public defender cases has not been increased since 1992, and in fact was cut to its current level in 1995. The low rate makes it increasingly difficult to find qualified lawyers to take SPD appointments, resulting in delays and postponements of cases.

(more)

“These facts demonstrate that a chronically under-funded criminal justice system in Wisconsin is affecting not just prosecutors, but court operations and access to constitutionally-required public defenders as well,” Diel said. “This leads to longer delays for justice; serious crimes not getting the attention they deserve; and potential outcomes that fail to advance the goals of promoting justice and protecting public safety.”

Diel praised Governor Doyle for previous steps he has taken to strengthen Wisconsin’s criminal justice system – including the addition of more state DNA analysts and the creation of a commission on racial disparity in the justice system – but noted that much more needs to be done.

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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