



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN
Leaders in the Law. Advocates for Justice.®

January 18, 2023

Members of the Wisconsin Legislature
Wisconsin State Capitol
P.O. Box 7863
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Honorable Members of the Legislature:

As the 2023-24 legislative session begins, the State Bar of Wisconsin extends its sincerest congratulations on your election as a representative to the Wisconsin legislature. We, along with the members of the State Bar of Wisconsin, share your pride in and hope for the future of Wisconsin and your desire to ensure a bright future for all our fellow citizens. We look forward to working with you and those returning in the Senate.

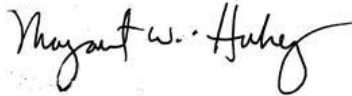
We write all of you today as the leadership of the over 25,000 attorney members of the State Bar of Wisconsin, the state's second largest professional association, to express our significant concerns over staffing and funding issues with our state's personnel, specifically in our criminal justice court system. The staffing crisis in our District Attorney offices, State Public Defenders 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 come together and fix this funding emergency without delay.

While the recent announcement of the resignation of Dodge County District Attorney Kurt Klomberg highlighted the system's vast underfunding, this issue has been long in the making. Vacancies in the ranks of elected District Attorneys are now occurring with alarming frequency. 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 that have had staff vacancies that they have been unable to fill.

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 of innocence or receiving 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 pay to cover overhead office costs.

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 community. 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 is fair for all.

Sincerely,



Margaret W. Hickey
President



Dean R. Dietrich
President-Elect



Cheryl Furstace Daniels
Past President