



Wisconsin State Public Defender

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ISSUED: July 3, 2019

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Statement from State Public Defender Kelli Thompson regarding enactment of the biennial budget:

With the Governor's signature today on the budget bill, Wisconsin has made an historic increase in the nation's lowest hourly private bar rate. I thank the Governor and our legislative leaders for their support of this much-needed boost. Increasing the rate to \$70 per hour will help address the constitutional crisis caused by the lack of attorneys willing to accept public defender appointments at the current rate. The new rate goes into effect with cases appointed on or after January 1, 2020.

While the investment in the private bar rate is a significant step forward, the final version of the budget includes a disparity in merit pay funding. The justice system requires balance, and I look forward to working with legislative leadership and our partners in the criminal justice budget coalition in the coming months to ensure equitable compensation for public defender staff attorneys.

The State Public Defender's Office is a vital and essential component of Wisconsin's justice system: we protect individual rights and ensure the state meets its constitutional mandate to provide legal representation to the indigent accused of crimes. Public defender staff provide professional and zealous legal representation in courthouses throughout Wisconsin on a daily basis.

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