



Wisconsin State Public Defender

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Statement from State Public Defender Kelli Thompson regarding today's actions in the Joint Committee on Finance:

I sincerely thank the Joint Committee on Finance for its actions today to raise the nation's lowest hourly private bar rate. I very much appreciate that Committee members as well as the Governor and our partners in the criminal justice budget coalition support the effort to address this issue, which is having severe repercussions on defendants, victims, counties, courts, and jails.

Today's vote is to increase the rate to \$70 per hour effective January 1, 2020. In addition, the committee voted to provide cost-to-continue funding for the private bar appropriation. This cost-to-continue item, while technical in nature, is a key component of our private bar funding. In addition, merit pay funding for Assistant State Public Defenders will help us retain our staff attorneys.

The current \$40 per hour reimbursement rate has had a crippling effect on our justice system. The State Public Defender's Office along with our justice system partners from all around Wisconsin have been very vocal about the impacts of the current rate and the need for a rate increase. I thank the Governor, legislators, and the many judges, prosecutors, private attorneys, citizens, and county boards who have taken the time to share their perspective as to the need for an increase.

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