



Dear Joint Committee on Finance Members:

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity (AFP), we urge you to include an increase in the private bar rate when the Joint Committee on Finance votes on the State Public Defenders budget on Tuesday, May 28.

AFP encourages an increase for private bar attorneys serving as public defenders to \$70/hour, which is more in line with the rate in other states. Wisconsin currently has one of the lowest private bar rates in the country, leading to defendants across Wisconsin to wait far too long for access to a qualified attorney to work on their behalf. For example, in Marathon County, the average wait time for appointment of an attorney is just over 78 days. These wait times are unacceptable. AFP strongly supports the increase to \$70/hour to ensure everyone's rights are protected.

Additionally, an increase in the hourly rate for private bar attorneys would create a more efficient and cost-effective criminal justice system. Defendants, who are presumed innocent, would spend less time pre-trial in jail, victims would not experience such lengthy delays in justice, and county and court budgets would be less strained.

All Wisconsin residents have the right to a criminal defense attorney if they are accused of a crime. Increasing the private bar rate to \$70/hour will help ensure that all defendants are receiving legal counsel within an appropriate and constitutional timeframe. An increase in the private bar rate is a commonsense, bipartisan step toward addressing many of the needs in the criminal justice system. AFP respectfully encourages all members of the Joint Committee on Finance to support this increase.

Sincerely,

Megan Novak
Legislative Director
Americans for Prosperity – Wisconsin