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Chairman Lang, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Nicole Stephan and I am the Deputy Director of the Tuscarawas County Public Defender's Office. Thank you for the opportunity to stand before you today and provide proponent testimony on House Bill 5.

I would like to share with you several areas that rural and underserved counties such as Tuscarawas County face when trying to operate an effective and efficient Public Defender's Office and how House Bill 5 will help solve some of the issues encountered while trying to do so.

The areas in which I believe House Bill 5 will play a large role in addressing are:

- Difficulty in recruiting for Assistant Public Defenders
- High turnover rate in the Public Defender's Office -the last four attorneys that were hired and have left my office worked an average of 2.5 years. The reason they left was for a higher paying position.
- The constant turnover impacts the clients which in turn creates a negative attitude toward public defenders -with a high turnover rate, clients are constantly being juggled between attorneys who are covering for a recently departed attorney. This means the covering attorney may not be familiar with the client and the client's case and will not have built a rapport with the client. Also, the level of confidence the client has will decrease, especially when the client does not know who the attorney is that is representing him/her. The new attorney that is hired may be far less experienced than the attorney that just left the position also creating a lower level of confidence the client has in the representation.
- Desire of individuals who want to work in the field of public defense, but educational costs prevent them from doing so after graduating from law school -in public defender offices, the salaries are lower than salaries of someone who would be employed in a large law firm. Public defenders only practice criminal law, becoming almost an expert in the field as opposed to other attorneys who may dabble in criminal law in addition to other areas. Also, some public defenders, who truly want to help, may have an outside practice to help compensate their income because of the amount of student loan debt.

Chairman Lang, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 5 and I will be glad to answer any questions that you may have.