



Testimony in support of House Bill 5

June 13, 2019

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Jeff Dillon, and I am the Legislative Liaison for Americans for Prosperity – Ohio. Americans for Prosperity is the state’s largest grassroots organization focused on long-term solutions to country’s biggest problems. **I urge you to support House Bill 5**, which will better protect due process rights across Ohio by establishing a loan repayment program for law school graduates who choose to serve as public defenders in understaffed areas for 3-5 years.

Many quality lawyers are passionate about helping their communities through public service but feel unable to work as public defenders because of the financial pressures of law school debt. House Bill 5 creates an Ohio public defender state loan repayment fund. This program will allow the state public defender to create contracts with qualified Ohio attorneys and law students in their final year of study to work as public defenders for 3-5 years in jurisdictions with the highest caseloads and greatest need for extra staff.

The right of the accused to legal representation is a bedrock of Americans’ liberties, enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Every Ohioan should enjoy legal representation, regardless of their resources, in order to protect against government overreach and abuse which, unfortunately, does occur too within our justice system. AFP – Ohio has already called attention to the extra funding that the Office of the Public Defender needs in this year’s budget cycle to address historic understaffing. In order to provide the highest quality public defense possible, the OPD should enjoy the recruiting benefit that loan repayment can provide, making public defense a more viable career choice than it currently is for too many otherwise-qualified attorneys.

The right to counsel is a cherished American principle, which is why **I urge you to support House Bill 5**. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to answer any questions the committee might have.

Jeff Dillon
Legislative Liaison
Americans for Prosperity—Ohio

