



ERIE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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May 23, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Gardner, Senate Williams, sub-committee members. My name is Matt Old, and I represent 77,000 citizens as an Erie County Commissioner. I personally want to thank each of you senators for giving me this opportunity to address State funding for the legal defense of persons who lack the money to hire their own attorney.

Since most or all of you visited Erie County last month for the Governor's annual address, you probably are aware of the amount of tourism that occurs in Erie County. Combining Lake Erie, Cedar Point, 4 indoor waterpark resorts, and other related businesses, tourism certainly brings economic benefits to our communities; and to the State of Ohio as well. While our 3 to 4 million guests a year are very welcome, some also get themselves into legal troubles that have to be dealt with here. That also applies to the influx of out-of-state and international seasonal employees that support this industry.

Erie County operates a Public Defender Commission that provides the constitutional right to defending one's self against criminal allegations. Along with the tourism that puts an added burden on that office, the Ohio Turnpike and State Route 2 are well known corridors used by illegal drug transporters passing through Erie County.

We also have 4 municipal court locations that our Public Defenders appear in. Compared to other northern Ohio counties with Public Defender offices, that's a significant difference. Huron, Hancock and Geauga are just slightly smaller or larger than us, and they have just 1 location. Wood, Wayne and Medina have populations almost double or more than us, and they all have 2 courts. Lake County has 3 times our population and has 3 entities. Although I was just recently elected, my staff has told me that our Public Defenders office has been asking for more staff every year over the last 10 years or so. While the tourism sector of our local economy does generate additional revenues, it affects every level of our County government spending.

In this budget, the administration chose to reduce from 88 percent to 83 percent the share of the Indigent Defense Support Fund (IDSF) that is allocated to county reimbursement. This 5% reduction accounts for the approximate \$6.5 million reduction in each year as these non-GRF revenues are diverted from county reimbursement to support the State Public Defender's Office operations. A slight increase in the GRF appropriation remediated this impact to some extent but, overall, HB 49, as introduced, provided funding that was \$8.1 million less than what was actually appropriated for the current biennium.

For well over 35 years, counties have been carrying a disproportionate share of the cost of providing this mandated service. If Erie County would have been reimbursed at 50% since the year 2012, we would have brought in just under \$470,000*.

It's time to show Ohio taxpayers that counties and the State are indeed partners. As counties are an arm of the State, it's imperative to our citizens that they see that reality to give them the confidence that their governments do, in fact, work for them. Given the relatively small amount of money it would take to remedy this imbalance, compared to the overall State budget, I ask you to do the right thing. Our constitution provides for fair and equal treatment of all people in the eyes of the law, so please make this vital funding fair and equal as well.

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Year	Reimb %	Actual \$	Reimb 50%	Difference
2012	35	\$258,198.12	\$368,854.46	\$110,656.34
2013	35/40	\$351,750.76	\$466,693.68	\$114,942.92
2014	40	\$471,219.10	\$589,023.88	\$117,804.78
2015	40	\$417,118.98	\$521,398.73	\$104,279.75
2016	48	\$528,709.53	\$550,739.09	\$22,029.56
Account 10100-1010-433500 Indigent Assistance				\$469,713.34