



**STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.**

209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309

Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986

Toll Free: 888-757-1904 • www.ccao.org

Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

Senate Finance Committee  
House Bill 150 – Proponent Testimony

Kyle Petty  
Managing Director of Policy

December 6, 2022

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony in support of House Bill 150, which would establish the Rural Practice Incentive Loan Repayment Program.

Modeled after existing loan repayment programs for physicians, dentists and dental hygienists, the Rural Practice Incentive Loan Repayment Program would allow the Chancellor of Higher Education to repay certain loans held by attorneys working as public defenders or in a county prosecutor's office in areas identified as underserved by attorneys across the state. Under the program, qualifying attorneys would commit to serving as a public defender or work in a county prosecutor's office in an underserved community for a period of at least three years, with the option of an additional one or two more years of service. Under the bill, an underserved community is a county that has a ratio of less than one attorney per seven hundred residents as determined by the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation.

As the provider of indigent defense services, counties understand the importance of ensuring quality legal representation for those who cannot afford their own legal counsel. The right to competent legal representation is a pillar of our justice system. Skilled public defenders also ensure a smoother operating criminal justice system which ultimately reduces taxpayer cost.

Additionally, elected prosecutors and their assistants serve as the legal advisor to the board of commissioners and provide instruction in matters connected with the board's official duties. County prosecutors also work hand in hand with local law enforcement to maintain public safety in the county and secure justice for victims of crime. Therefore, it is equally important to attract and retain qualified attorneys in the county prosecutor's office as it is to have qualified public defenders in the county.

The high cost of acquiring legal education today places a significant financial burden upon many young attorneys. This heavy burden precludes many young and talented attorneys from pursuing public service careers, such as working as a public defender or in a county prosecutor's office. The financial burden results in a shortage of talented public defenders and county prosecutors in certain areas of the state. This legislation will alleviate some of the financial burden borne by young public sector attorneys and will ultimately ensure that quality legal counsel is available in Ohio, regardless of geographic location.

CCAO thanks Representatives Hillyer and Leland for introducing this legislation to strengthen the legal system in Ohio's counties.

