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Ohio Indigent Defense Task Force

## Ismail Mohamed

State Representative, Ohio House District 3

Chair Edward's, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of Finance Committee.

Thank you for considering HB 584. This bill establishes the Minority Law Student Encouragement Scholarship Pilot Program. The bill appropriates \$350,000 to the Chancellor of Higher Education to be distributed to Ohio State Bar Association. The OSBA will establish procedures and criteria to award the scholarship. The program will start with an initial cohort of 10-20 students who are currently enrolled in a Bachelors Degree Program to receive \$4,000 dollars each calendar year.

The OSBA will organize events, programming, and one-on-one mentorship with the cohorts to familiarize them with law school and the legal profession. Furthermore, it will provide free materials to members of cohort, registration for the Law School Admission Test and academic support.

By January 30th, 2026, OSBA will submit a report to Chancellor of Higher Education, Chairpersons and Ranking Members of both House and Senate standing committee's that consider higher education legislation. The report will highlight the pilot program, expenses/reviews and its impact as well.

As of 2021, per the OSBA report, Ohio has a total of 38,354 registered attorneys. The attorney/person ratio in Ohio is low and the numbers are even more concerning for rural counties that don't attract attorneys. The percentage of attorneys who serve as public defenders is even lower and that brings about additional concerns when we talk about public defender access for indigent defendants.

I had the pleasure of serving on Governor DeWine's Indigent Defense Taskforce. The task force consisting of members of House and Senate, Judges, Council Commissioner Association, Ohio Public Defenders Office, and County Prosecutors were tasked with studying our state model that provides access to counsel for indigent defendants. We heard from practicing attorneys, Judges, and others and the overwhelming theme was the shortage of counsel for Indigent Defendants which underscores the underlying issue of attorney shortage.

In Ohio, only 4.2% of attorneys are African American, 1.7% Hispanic, 2.0% Asian, and 0.7% Native American. We need to change these numbers not only for the impact it would have on promoting young minority students to get into law, but it would have a positive impact economically for our state. Per OSBA's 2021 report, the legal profession employed 44,427 and paid more than 3.6 Billion in wages. Furthermore, it also indirectly created an additional 58,394 jobs and indirectly created 2.6 Billion in wages. Overall, the legal profession had an impact of 6.3 Billion in household wages.

I am a proud attorney, but also even more proud to be the only Somali-American practicing attorney in Ohio. This just underscores the need to have more minority attorney's serving as public defenders, providing Pro Bono representation to Ohioans from minority background and those who speak a different language.

Thank you Chair Edward's, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of Finance Committee for considering this legislation.

I am ready to answer any questions of the committee.

Thank you.



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Ismail Mohamed  
State Representative  
Ohio House District 3