



HOUSE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE – Proponent Testimony, HB 150, March
25th, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Jeff Dillon, and I am the Ohio Legislative Director for Americans for Prosperity (AFP). As one of the largest grassroots organizations in the country, AFP is driving long-term solutions to some of the country's biggest problems. Our organization, and its thousands of activists across Ohio, are dedicated to breaking barriers that stand in the way of people realizing their full potential. Removing or reducing these barriers, in whatever forms they take, helps move our society toward one of mutual benefit, where people succeed by helping others improve their lives and by transforming their communities. Accordingly, I am here to express support for House Bill 150.

HB 150 will better protect and provide due process rights across Ohio by establishing a loan repayment program for law school graduates or practicing attorneys who choose to serve as public defenders in underserved areas for 3-5 years. Many quality lawyers are passionate about helping their communities through public service, but they are often forced to choose work more lucrative than public defense because of the financial pressures of law school debt. The program created under HB 150 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 to legal representation for *anyone* standing accused of a crime is a cornerstone of Americans' liberties, enshrined in the Bill of Rights. *Every* Ohioan deserves legal representation, regardless of their personal financial resources, in order to protect against government overreach and mistreatment which, unfortunately, can still occur too frequently within our

criminal justice system. AFP has been honored to advocate alongside the Office of the Public Defender during this budget cycle and the last, wherein key funding issues related to indigent defense have been and are being addressed to ensure that OPD and Ohio counties are receiving appropriate levels of funding to offer the services that protect the rights of Ohioans. In order to provide the highest quality public defense possible, 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.

Another highly important aspect of HB 150 is the creation of the task force to study indigent defense in Ohio. AFP pushed strongly for its inclusion in the Budget during the 133rd General Assembly, and my organization still believes today that it is an important policy to pursue. As many of the members of this committee know, AFP is part of large national network of organizations, and as such, we get the opportunity to collaborate with leaders and stakeholders from many policy areas. I can tell you from conversations I've been a part of, there is a consensus that no state has an ideal system for delivering indigent defense services in place, and that indigent defense delivery across the states is very different, in many cases, and woefully lacking in some. At a cost of only \$10,000, the task force created under HB 150 will be able to thoughtfully examine Ohio's unique issues and challenges, and recommend legislative solutions, which hopefully can create value for other states as they examine how to best modify their own systems. Generally speaking, indigent defense is not a public policy area that receives as much attention as it deserves, given its importance. Ohio is moving in the right direction on many criminal justice reforms, and the creation of this task force will help keep another important component of the criminal justice reform conversation front and center.

Access to counsel is a cherished American right, meant to protect its people from the heavy hand of excessive governmental control over their lives. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to offer testimony today. AFP – Ohio strongly supports HB 150, and on behalf of my organization and our affiliated activists, I'm happy to do my best to answer any questions the committee might have.

Americans for Prosperity (AFP) exists to recruit, educate, and mobilize citizens in support of the policies and goals of a free society at the local, state, and federal level, helping every American live their dream – especially the least fortunate. AFP has more than 3.2 million activists across the nation, a local infrastructure that includes 36 state chapters, and has received financial support from more than 100,000 Americans in all 50 states. For more information, visit www.AmericansForProsperity.org.