

**STATEMENT OF JOHN T. MARTIN
ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER
CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO**

**TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 150

**March 25, 2021
11:00 a.m.**

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**Chairman LaRe
Vice-Chair Swearingen
Ranking Member Leland
Members of the Committee**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of H.B. 150. I would draw the Committee's attention to the statement that has been submitted in support of H.B. 150 by Cuyahoga County Chief Public Defender Cullen Sweeney. I concur in Mr. Sweeney's analysis of how H.B. 150 will help public defender offices throughout the State attract and retain high-quality attorneys who cannot currently afford to make long-term commitments to being public defenders.

During my 36 years of legal practice, I have had the pleasure of working with many law students, first at the University of Akron School of Law where I was a visiting professor from 1995 to 1997, and then at the Case Western Reserve University School of Law, where I have been an adjunct professor since 2002. In my professional lifetime, student loan debt has increased markedly as the cost of education has far outpaced just about any other cost in society, particularly salaries in the public sector. My current students are oftentimes swimming in debt.

One of HB 150's strengths is that it provides the State Public Defender with the discretion to target money to public defender's offices most in need of assistance, either because of a lack of attorneys in their county or because of excessive workloads. And the General Assembly has the ability through oversight and budgetary appropriations to ensure that the money is well spent.

As an added benefit, by helping young public defenders avoid having to seek re-financing or hardship deferrals during their loan payment period, money is returned to our financial institutions more quickly, thus enabling banks to circulate that money more effectively to the next wave of deserving students.

In the end, I support this legislation, fully aware that my younger colleagues in the Cuyahoga County Public Defender's Office may not be first in line to receive loan assistance. H.B. 150 is not about helping attorneys nearly as much as it is about securing the best available representation for indigent defendants, and doing so in a fiscally responsible manner. I urge this Committee to view this bill for what it really is -- an investment in our State's continuing commitment to ensure justice for all Ohioans.

Thank you.