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Cecil Thomas
State Senator
9th District

Committees:

Criminal Justice – Ranking Member
State and Local Government – Ranking Member
Civil Justice
Education
Financial Institutions
Insurance
Finance Subcommittee on Education
Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 22, 2017

To: Members of Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

From: Cecil Thomas, Senator, 9th District

Subject: Sponsor Testimony on SB 19

Good morning Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Uecker, Ranking Member Yuko, and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on Senate Bill 19.

This legislation would prohibit elected prosecutors who represent counties with 400,000 or more residents from engaging in private law practices while they serve as the county prosecutor. The legislation will not prohibit county prosecutors from lecturing or teaching at academic institutions or any local or state bar association forums.

A county prosecutor interacts with judges and attorneys on a daily basis in his or her official capacity as prosecutor. Engaging in a separate law practice invites conflicts of interest. Further, prosecutors in large counties take on very demanding caseloads. If the prosecutor has a private practice, there will always be concern that the taxpayers' interests are not a priority. Ohioans expect and deserve their county prosecutor to be engaged and in the office on a daily basis.

There are currently six Ohio counties with populations large enough to fall under the requirements in this bill. These counties are Cuyahoga, Franklin, Summit, Montgomery, Lucas, and Hamilton. Of those six counties, only Hamilton has a part-time prosecutor who retains a private legal practice.

The situation in my district needs to be addressed as it has gotten a lot of attention from the media as well as our citizens. The appearance of overlapping loyalties or conflicts of interest undermines the integrity of the office. I ask for your support of this measure and am happy to answer questions.