



# Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association

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House Bill 5  
Interested Party Testimony  
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Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer written interested party testimony on House Bill 5 to create a loan forgiveness program for young attorneys who agree to serve as public defenders and an indigent defense task force for the purpose of studying Ohio's indigent defense system and to provide recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the delivery, structure, and funding of indigent defense. We do not object to the concept of a loan forgiveness program for public defenders or to efforts to improve indigent defense in Ohio. Quality public defenders make the system function more efficiently and make the jobs of prosecutors easier. Our interest in House Bill 5 is twofold.

First, if the General Assembly is to create a loan forgiveness program for public defenders, it our feeling that the same should be done for assistant prosecuting attorneys. Young lawyers who wish to be prosecutors come out of law school with no less debt than those who wish to do defense work and can also be woefully underpaid. Additionally, prosecutors' offices are subject to high assistant turnover rates just like the public defender with assistants moving either to areas with better pay for assistant prosecutors or to private practice. If the General Assembly is to create incentives for lawyers to enter the criminal justice world, it should do so evenhandedly, recognizing that the same challenges exist for young prosecutors and prosecutors' offices as exist for young defense attorneys and public defender offices.

Second, if the General Assembly is to create a task force to study Ohio's indigent defense system, we respectfully request that our Association be given an appointment to that Task Force. A county prosecutor can provide a unique perspective on issues surrounding indigent defense and how the delivery, structure, and funding of indigent defense impacts county government and the criminal justice system in Ohio. The OPAA is deserving of a seat at the table with the rest of legal community in Ohio so that we can have input along with the Governor, the Attorney General, judges, defense lawyers, the Ohio State Bar Association, County Commissioners, and legislators on an issue that will impact the day-to-day work of prosecutors across Ohio. We are supportive of efforts to improve the quality of indigent defense and would like to have a voice in efforts to do so.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.