



STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

BRAD D. SCHIMEL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

Andrew C. Cook
Deputy Attorney General

114 East, State Capitol
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-7857
608/266-1221
TTY 1-800-947-3529

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL BRAD D. SCHIMEL
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Joint Finance Committee
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Good afternoon and thank you Co-Chair Darling and Co-Chair Nygren, and Committee members, for this opportunity to appear before you to offer an overview of the Executive Budget (2015 Assembly Bill 21, hereinafter "Budget") as it concerns the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ). I will also be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Having been recently sworn into office as Attorney General, many of the requests contained in the Governor's proposed Budget are those that were submitted by my predecessor. I believe that many of the requests made by the prior administration and the Governor's Budget are well-reasoned, fiscally prudent, and will help the DOJ carry out its mission.

I learned while running for office how little the public knows about the Department of Justice and the ways in which we accomplish our important role in ensuring public safety. Therefore, one of things I plan to accomplish during my tenure as Attorney General is to raise the Department of Justice's profile and educate the public about many of the important functions carried out by the 600-plus employees. I would like to begin my testimony by giving this committee a summary of the work performed by the various divisions within the Department of Justice.

The Department of Justice is most commonly recognized as a public safety and law enforcement agency that enforces state law and helps frontline police officers and prosecutors. The DOJ works closely with local law enforcement, district attorneys, as well as victim and witness professionals throughout the state.

Part of this work is accomplished by the Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), which provides elite investigative services to assist local law enforcement with some of the most serious and complex crimes. The DCI leads much of the state's efforts in protecting children from Internet predators.

Funding for District Attorneys

As a front-line prosecutor for 25 years in Waukesha County prior to being elected as Attorney General, I can attest that district attorneys and their assistants play a pivotal role in protecting public safety. Virtually every county District Attorney's Office is severely understaffed and is struggling to retain experienced prosecutors. If Wisconsin does not take prompt steps to address the resource challenges faced by the DA's Offices, it will be more difficult to keep Wisconsin residents safe.

I continue to work closely with district attorney offices throughout the state as Attorney General. I therefore strongly advocate for more funding to provide new positions and/or to continue the pay progression enacted last session.

Over the past decade, I've witnessed firsthand the devastation caused by the growing abuse of heroin and prescription opiates. I have met with countless parents who have watched helplessly as drugs destroyed their children's lives. And, tragically, many have experienced the heartbreaking death of a child to drugs. The heroin and prescription drug crisis is placing huge demands on many district attorney offices.

Without additional funding for district attorneys fighting on the frontline, I'm convinced that in many parts of the state we will not win the battle against this growing problem. I therefore urge this committee to add funding to provide new assistant district attorney positions, and to fund pay progression enacted by the Legislature last session.

State Justice Assistance Grants

The previous administration at the DOJ included a request to convert certain pre-existing earmarked grants currently administered by DOJ to competitive grants. These include grants dedicated to Youth Diversion (Wis. Stat. § 165.987(1) and (3)), Beat Patrol (Wis. Stat. § 165.986), Child Advocacy Centers (Wis. Stat. § 165.96), and the Shot Spotter grant to the City of Milwaukee created through 2013 Wisconsin Act 263. The Governor's Budget includes this request, with the exception of the Shot Spotter grant to the City of Milwaukee.

My predecessor's budget proposal also included a provision to create a grant administrator to oversee the competitive grant programs; however, that aspect was not included in the Governor's Budget. Without the grant administrator position, the DOJ will not be able to effectively oversee the competitive grants. Therefore, I am asking that the provisions modifying these grants be removed from the Budget.

Law Enforcement Officer-Involved Death Investigations

In 2014, Wisconsin became the first state in the nation to require independent

constitutional framework. It is therefore critically important for the State to have the very best advocacy from its own lawyers.

As the Governor noted in his State of the State Address earlier this year, it is likely that the DOJ will be involved in litigation against the Environmental Protection Agency, among participation in other legal actions necessary to protect the sovereignty of our state, as well as our ability of our State's employers to compete nationally and internationally. The Department of Justice already employs some of the best attorneys in the State. The addition of a solicitor general's office will provide a structure to allow my office to best develop and maintain expertise while handling these high-profile and important cases affecting the State's interests.

Conclusion

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to working with you over the next four years as we continue to work our hardest to provide for the public safety of Wisconsin citizens.