



**DANE COUNTY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ISMAEL R. OZANNE**



August 28, 2018

Joe Parisi
County Executive
City County Building Room 421
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
Madison, WI 53703

Dear County Executive Parisi:

I am writing to request your consideration of increases in the budget for the Office of the District Attorney.

Longevity Bonuses for Prosecutors \$47,000

This request is based on the loss of experienced prosecutors due to their retiring or obtaining positions with higher salaries and more opportunity for wage growth. Our prosecutors have left to work at the Wisconsin Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, UW Law School, private practice or other opportunities. Since March 2014 through December 2018, we have lost 35 prosecutors with 501 years of cumulative experience, replaced with attorneys of 91 years of cumulative experience. At the same time, the level of serious crimes, including homicides and attempted homicides, requiring the skills of seasoned prosecutors, continues to rise.

Our Dane County employees -- from victim witness and crime response specialists, paralegals, investigators, deferred prosecution counselors, -- to secretaries and other support staff all benefit from the recognition and benefits of working in a county system which offers pay increases as an important factor in recognizing the value of their work. The work is difficult and frequently trauma-inducing, but also rewarding, knowing they are part of an organization dedicated to helping keep the community safe. Turnover of county employees in our office is rare. In contrast, our State of Wisconsin employees--the prosecutors--work in an environment where they feel dismissed and undervalued by the State and turnover has been high. There has never been a time in our history when the longevity, salaries and benefits between the two have differed so dramatically. Unless a prosecutor has other sources of income, their stay here, in a community with an increasing cost of living, becomes a challenge for them and their families. As they receive trial-by-fire training in Dane County, they become more attractive potential employees to other agencies and law firms.

Although the large turnover in prosecutors has presented challenges in terms of stability and experience, it has also presented the opportunity to diversify our prosecution teams and recruit individuals who share the desire to reform and rebuild a criminal justice system that is more equitable and compassionate.

In our attempts to diversify our staff and address issues of racial disparity, the District Attorney's Office Management Team has adopted new procedures to ensure that applicants share our organizational core values of dignity, respect, integrity, fairness and transparency. (A copy of our mission statement and resolutions in pursuit of the mission are enclosed with this letter.) All applicants are informed of our commitment to this mission in job postings, answer questions about this commitment in their job applications and answer related questions, if invited for an interview.

All employees participate in Implicit Bias training. Additionally, we have created action teams within the office to address organizational change in a collaborative manner. One of our DA action teams has addressed equity and inclusion. This group provided leadership in reviewing and revising our mission statement and defining our goals. These processes have added dynamic, diverse personnel to our prosecutor and other DA staff and reinforced our commitment to these values.

As our current staff gains experience, we want to retain them as they develop their skills. Having experienced prosecutors represent our community in cases of interpersonal violence, robbery, drunk driving and homicide keeps all our citizens safe in holding perpetrators accountable and allows for a culture where those who gain experience can mentor and train others. This was the culture in the District Attorney's Office when the State recognized the value of experienced prosecutors who stayed in their jobs for twenty plus years. While we understand the County's position on not providing funding for additional prosecutors, we are requesting County funding of an annual bonus to prosecutors to promote stability and longevity in the Office of the District Attorney. A bonus, providing a financial incentive, along with County recognition of the value of the work and the importance of their retention as prosecutors, would contribute to a more stable, experienced prosecution team impacting both criminal justice reform and the safety of all in Dane County.

Employee Assistance POS \$15,000

Secondary trauma is now recognized as an issue for first responders. The County has acknowledged this reality in funding Employee Assistance POS providers for those Dane County Sheriff Officers responding to homicides, traffic fatalities, serious child maltreatment and other horrific cases. Our prosecutors also experience this secondary trauma, when called to a crime scene or in viewing gruesome photographs and other evidence. In preparing for trial they are immersed in the details of these cases. They are experiencing the same cases as those DCSO deputies are exposed to as well as all the other law enforcement agencies in the County. We know in our working with crime victims, in providing them with POS trauma therapists, funded by VOCA through our Crime Response Program, that trauma intervention can reduce long-term negative effects.

Conference and Training Increase \$40,000

As mentioned above, we have lost 35 prosecutors with 501 years to cumulative experience, replaced with attorneys of 91 years of cumulative experience. While I have instituted an in-house training program with frequent lunch and learn opportunities for staff, these cannot replace in-depth training one can get from specialized conferences and trainings.

2.0 FTE Paralegals \$165,000

Paralegals are the best resource we have in addressing our prosecutor shortage. Paralegals draft criminal complaints as well as other pleadings and correspondence related to criminal cases; confer with attorneys, police departments, and defendants regarding all aspects of civil and criminal cases; perform legal research and analyze criminal history backgrounds; subpoena witnesses for hearings; obtain necessary court documents; organize hard copy and electronic files in criminal cases for contested hearings and trial; actively participate in weekly status conferences and/or weekly pretrial conference court proceedings. They order 911 calls and other related data on criminal cases. Our level 1 paralegals are each assigned to 6 prosecutors. Obviously, two more paralegals would offer more services and relief to our attorneys.

Deferred Prosecution 1.0 FTE Bilingual Social Worker \$81,500 and Bilingual Clerk II \$79,600

As we increased our commitment to diversion programs, we need to be able to be able to better communicate with those who speak Spanish as their first language. As fears surrounding immigration increase in Dane County, a bilingual social worker connects the person being diverted from criminal prosecution with the social worker without the necessity of an interpreter, allowing them to forge a professional relationship which can result in successful diversion. The social worker can also effectively communicate with victims and community providers who are Spanish speaking. A bilingual clerk in the office also takes away the necessity of interpreters when those diverted come to appointments.

All of these requests are being made so that we can provide the level of service and competency that the citizens of Dane County deserve in addressing their safety.