

Submitter: Yonathan Yohannes DPSST# 84075

On Behalf Of: Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5031

Honorable Members of the Public Defense Commission,

My name is Yonathan Yohannes and I've been a criminal defense investigator for over 8 years. Public defense rests on a simple promise: every person deserves a fair and thorough defense. Yet, that promise is at risk due to a severe shortage of criminal defense investigators. These professionals uncover critical evidence, but their wages—lower today than in 1985 when adjusted for inflation—have driven many away. As a result, attorneys are stretched thin, cases are delayed, and justice is denied. While the Governor's budget offers some relief, delaying implementation until 2026 will only worsen the crisis.

Investing in investigators not only ensures fairness but also saves taxpayers money. Skilled investigators help resolve cases efficiently, preventing unnecessary trials and costly incarcerations. Without them, attorneys are forced to take on investigative work, risking legal complications and further straining resources. A competitive wage would attract more investigators, strengthening the public defense system and ensuring justice moves swiftly.

Raising the investigator rate to \$75 per hour is a necessary step to rebuild a struggling system. Without action, the backlog of cases will grow, costing both time and taxpayer dollars. Strengthening public defense benefits not only defendants but the integrity and efficiency of our entire justice system.