

Submitter: David Hession
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and other distinguished Committee Members,

I write today in support of HB 5006 and encourage all members of the Committee to vote in favor. Being a public defender has been among the most meaningful things I have done in my life. I knew entering law school that I would work in public service but did not plan on being a public defender. I could not be more grateful that I ended up here. I consider it an honor to represent my clients at a time when they often have few other resources and no other options. My clients have ranged scared kids as young as 18 to people in their 80s who have never before been in trouble with the law. Many have themselves been victims of crime. They struggle mightily with addiction, poverty and their mental and physical health. They are often scared and, whether they are guilty of the crimes for which they are charged, need skilled and dedicated advocates to represent them.

I of course take immense pride in helping innocent clients escape conviction. Hearing "not guilty" at the end of a trial is hugely gratifying. But many of my best moments in this job are working with clients who just need someone to care. I connect clients to mental health courts, domestic violence treatment courts, and other resources that address underlying causes and needs. This improves their lives and makes our communities better and safer. I work every day with mental health providers, social workers and law enforcement to connect my clients to the help they need. It's my job to take someone accused of a crime and understand them as a full person and not just someone who may have done a bad thing. I rely on the expertise of investigators, legal assistants, and other support staff who often know how to navigate these systems better than I do. They are vital to my work as a public defender.

Many days my work is hard and doesn't come with immediate rewards. But it's become abundantly clear over my five-plus years in public defense that I have chosen a good and worthwhile profession filled with dedicated professionals who fill an essential role in our justice system and our society. I believe wholeheartedly that we need to do more to encourage new graduates and seasoned lawyers to take on this calling. Fulling funding our work will do just that. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,
David Hession