

TO: Cook County Board of Commissioners

FROM:

DATE: January 2, 2007

RE: County Budget Process

While there may be waste in the County budget, assistant public defenders are not part of the problem.

We handle 400,000 cases each year- an incredible average of 800 cases for each attorney in the Office.

In felony cases alone, our attorneys typically handle far more than the 150 case standard set by the American Bar Association.

Because of our modest salaries that continue to fall behind lawyers in other sectors, the cost to the County per case is an astoundingly low \$100.

As these numbers show, public defenders work hard, and provide cost-effective service to this County. There may not be a better bargain in the County. As the Chicago Suntimes recently acknowledged, "Because the county is required to provide a defense lawyer to poor people, it would have to hire more expensive outside lawyers if it doesn't have enough public defenders available."

The hidden costs in weakening our Office with layoffs, mandatory furloughs, and 4-day work weeks far surpass the savings proposed cuts to our Office budget. Such staffing changes would inevitably lead longer resolution times for criminal cases. Prolonging the jail stay of inmates in County Jail by only a single additional court appearance prior to resolution of criminal cases would cost the County approximately \$20,000,000 per month in the cost of detaining inmates in Cook County Jail. Seeking to solve the County shortfall through cuts to our Office is bad policy.

We are not patronage hires in do-nothing jobs. We are attorneys who leave law school with over \$66,000 in debt on average to take a job helping the poor and working poor in Cook County for a starting salary of \$43,000, while our peers who begin jobs at big law firms in Chicago start at \$130,000. To seek more sacrifice from us during the budget process is simply unfair. Please stand up for the poor and working poor in Cook County, stand up for hard-working assistant public defenders, and demand alternatives to random 17% cuts.