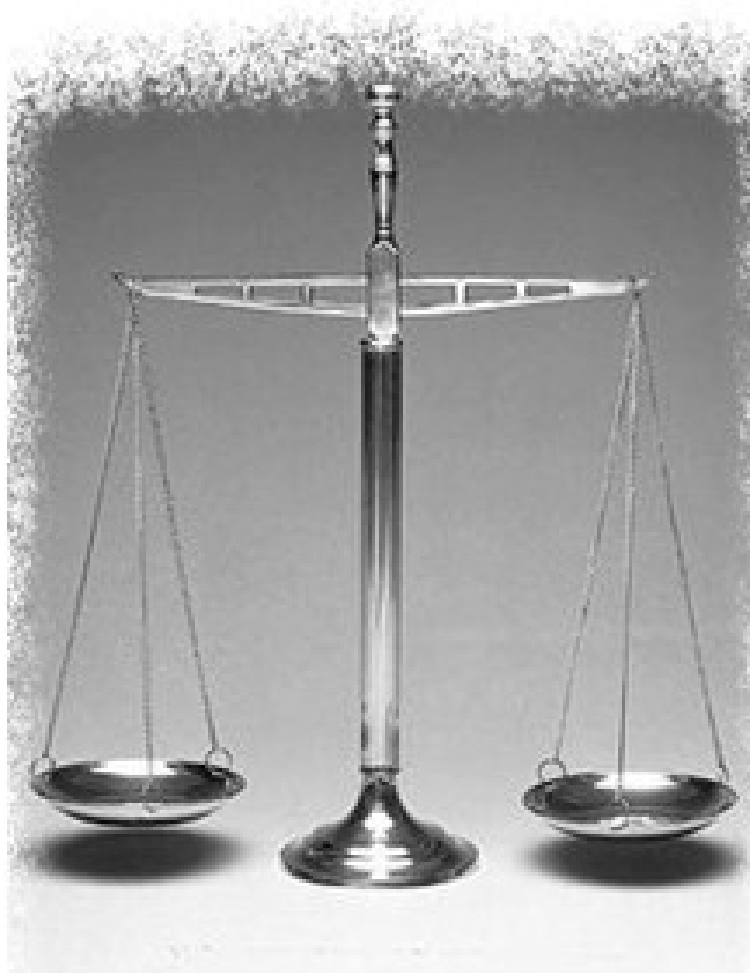


*IMPROVING STATE ATTORNEY &
PUBLIC DEFENDER BUDGET PROCESS
& TARGETED SALARY INCREASES
WILL HELP ACHIEVE REVISION 7 GOALS,
REDUCE TRIAL LAWYER TURNOVER*



A FLORIDA TAXWATCH SPECIAL REPORT
MARCH 2004

**IMPROVING STATE ATTORNEY AND PUBLIC DEFENDER
BUDGET PROCESS AND TARGETING SALARY INCREASES WILL HELP
ACHIEVE REVISION 7 GOALS, REDUCE TRIAL LAWYER TURNOVER**

In the November 1998 general election, nearly 57% of voting Floridians approved constitutional Revision 7 amending Judicial Article V to shift funding of most state judicial functions from counties to the state on July 1, 2004.

While the state already pays many costs of operating State Attorney and Public Defender offices and the Justice Administrative Commission, an additional \$145 million of state funding has been requested for Revision 7 implementation in FY 2004-05.

The new money would be spent on fees for private attorneys representing the state in selected criminal and child dependency cases; due process costs of court reporting, interpreting and expert witnesses; and State Attorney/Public Defender operations, including communications and transportation/travel expenses that the state assumes on July 1, 2004.

This report examines major Revision 7 issues in the Judicial Administration budget request and the Governor's recommended budget for 2004-05. It also spotlights counterproductive impacts on Florida's justice system resulting from turnover of experienced state trial lawyers for both State Attorneys and Public Defenders.

Implementation of Revision 7 Key Funding Issues

The Judicial Administration legislative budget request for key Revision 7 functions shaded in the following table is \$145.4 million, \$120.4 million of which is recommended by the Governor.

The lion's share of the difference between the Judicial Administration legislative budget request and the Governor's recommendation is in due process funding. While Public Defenders have requested \$26 million, the Governor has recommended \$7 million.

Implementation of Revision 7 Judicial Administration Budget

Consisting of State Attorneys, Public Defenders, the Justice Administrative Commission, et al.
FY 2004-05

	Requested Funds	Governor's Recommendation
Criminal Conflict Cases - Private Attorney Fees (1)	\$41,596,519	\$41,596,519
Child Dependency Cases - Pri Atty Fees (1)	\$23,271,856	\$19,771,856
Article V Operations - SA/PD	\$20,008,978	\$20,008,978
PD Workload Conflict Costs	\$7,781,644	\$7,781,644
Due Process - SA/PD	\$38,301,587	\$19,612,660
Witness Coordination - SA/PD	\$8,213,616	\$8,213,616
Contingency Fund	\$5,000,000	\$2,500,000
Law Library Equipment - JAC	\$24,300	\$0
Vehicles SA/PD/JAC	\$981,328	\$742,768
Additional Rental Space/Office Equipment - JAC	\$187,400	\$187,400
Article V Operations - JAC	\$24,230	\$24,230
Indigent Services Advis. Board Exp.	\$10,000	\$10,000
Total	\$145,401,458	\$120,449,671

(1) A Legislative consultant study recommends savings opportunities of 5% to 15% or \$3.2 million to \$9.7 million.

It should be noted that Revision 7 funding needs for all judicial entities—State Trial Courts, State Attorneys, Public Defenders, Appellate and Capital Collateral Representative (death penalty case) Offices, the State Courts Administrator's Office and the Justice Administrative Commission—are based on imprecise cost estimates for many of the state's new fiscal responsibilities.

This is because Parallel cost determination efforts by the state's Chief Financial Office (Department of Financial Services), the Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations and a legislative consultant similarly have failed to yield precise cost estimates. This is because county-by-county data—referred to by some detractors as a “fruit salad”—employ different organizational schemes and are accounted for and reported to Tallahassee in a variety of different ways. Thus, legislative fine-tuning—likely to result in both increases and decreases in funding for Revision 7—will occur after paying the bills in FY 2004-05.

Summary of Key Revision 7 Issues



Private Attorney Fees for Criminal Conflict and Child Dependency Cases

Nearly 45% (\$64.9 million) of Justice Administrative Commission's \$145.4 million request to implement Revision 7 is for private attorney fees in criminal and child dependency cases; \$41.6 million of this \$64.9 million is for criminal conflict fees.

The Tallahassee-based management consulting firm MGT of America, under a contract with the Legislature, issued a series of reports in 2003 that make numerous policy, process and cost saving recommendations. MGT of America estimates that recommended improvements could reduce private attorney fees by 5% to 15%, equal to \$3.2 million to \$9.7 million of the FY 2004-05 request.

MGT of America's estimate of likely savings among 47 Judicial Administration budget entities—consisting of 20 State Attorney and 20 Public Defender offices, five appellate case offices and two capital collateral Representative offices—is based on the consultant group's previous studies involving independent entities that perform the same basic function and which lack a centralized management and administrative system to apply standardized policies and procedures.



Operations

A \$20 million line item for Revision 7 operations is the sum total of requests by the above-mentioned 47 budget entities comprising Judicial Administration. These requests are based on three-year-old county expenditure data that have been adjusted for growth.

Most of these line items are to pay for responsibilities assigned to the state in Sections 41 and 42 of House Bill 113-A enacted by the 2003 Legislature (such as travel, transportation/maintenance/repair of county-funded motor vehicles and library and electronic research services) or those not required of the Clerks of Court in the same bill.



Public Defender Workload Conflict Costs

Counties in nine circuits currently fund 132 Public Defender positions. The Governor agreed that these positions become state-funded for FY 2004-05 and included the requested \$7.8 million in his budget recommendations. These positions will help to ensure that the Public Defender offices in these circuits do not receive less support than in previous years, and that the intent of Revision 7 is honored.



Witness Coordination

This is an area in which funding levels vary dramatically from county to county, and that will become a responsibility of State Attorneys and Public Defenders according to Section 5 of House Bill 113-A. The Chief Financial Officer survey cited above found that 12 circuits have witness coordination offices charged with coordinating court appearances (including pre-trial conferences and depositions) for all witnesses. The remaining circuits give these additional duties to other employees.

The Justice Administration budget request for this issue is based on the assumption that all circuits should be funded at least one position solely for witness coordination in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and thereby to provide cost savings. The request of \$8.2 million and 166 Full Time Equivalent Positions (FTE's) is in the Governor's budget recommendation.



Due Process

Due process costs include those associated with providing constitutionally mandated access to the services of court reporters, translators/interpreters, expert witnesses and mental health professionals. The initial Justice Administration legislative budget request submitted in September 2003 contained a \$1 placeholder for due process costs of Public Defenders and a \$12.6 million request for State Attorneys. The Governor's recommendation, based on a Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations survey of three-year-old county-by-county data adjusted for growth, and included \$7 million for Public Defenders and the full \$12.6 million for State Attorneys.

An amended Judicial Administration budget request on March 1, 2004 is \$26 million for Public Defender due process costs and a slightly reduced \$12.3 million for the State Attorneys' request to \$12.3 million. The \$19 million difference in Public Defender due process costs accounts for most of the divergence between the Justice Administration request and the Governor's recommendation.

Other Revision 7 Issues

Several additional issues relating to implementation of Revision 7 should be considered before the constitutional amendment takes effect on July 1, 2004.



Equity

Florida TaxWatch contends that the fundamental purpose of Article V originally approved by the voters in 1972 was to create an organizationally uniform State Courts System. A little over a quarter century later, voters approved Revision 7 to complete the job of achieving a minimum uniform funding threshold throughout the judicial system. The purpose of uniformity is to ensure citizens' equitable access to essential judicial functions, including State Attorney and Public Defender services, in furtherance of the Rule of Law.

The 1998 Constitution Revision Commission’s design of Revision 7 is seen in the following excerpt from a transcript of the Commission’s February 12, 1998 meeting; in a statement of Commission intent; and in Revision 7 ballot language. These documents show that the intent of the voter-approved amendment is for the state to assume county funded state judicial functions and to create statewide equity of justice system services – including those of State Attorney and Public Defender offices.

“The promise of Article V is a fair and balanced (equitable) approach to statewide funding at every locality. Small counties (pre-Revision 7) have had major problems in, for example, being able to afford conflict counsel in capital cases and that this is a very, very serious matter. These counties with fewer resources have been asking us to help get them some relief.”

Former Supreme Court Chief Justice and Constitution Revision Commissioner Gerald Kogan’s comments, February 12, 1998 CRC meeting

“The Constitution Revision Commission intends for the state to fund all salaries, costs and expenses necessary to ensure the rights of the people to have access to a functioning and efficient judicial system. Core functions and requirements statewide are the obligation of the state and not of individual localities.”

Constitutional Revision Commission Statement of Intent

“The amendment expressly promotes uniformity of justice irrespective of geography. Its intent is to make justice less dependent on a county’s size or wealth and, therefore, more equitably funded and consistent with local needs.”

Revision 7 Ballot Language Adopted by Florida Voters in November 1998



Cost Allocation

Clarification is needed in regard to how judicial administration costs associated with state trial court cases that commenced prior to July 1, 2004 will be allocated. It is important that these ongoing costs are budgeted for and a plan for their prompt payment is established. One suggestion is for counties to pay for costs incurred before July 1 and the state to pay for all reasonable and necessary costs after that date.



Bill Paying

Clerks of Court in each county currently pay for costs incurred by State Attorney and Public Defender offices for expert witnesses, court reporters, etc. House Bill 113-A requires the Clerks’ offices to requisition funding from the Justice Administrative Commission (JAC). An amendment to House Bill 113-A providing for the JAC to directly pay bills should be approved by the 2004 Legislature in order to help achieve timeliness and efficiency of administrative services.



Technology

House Bill 113-A requires counties to provide an “integrated computer system” for use by the State Courts System, Public Defender and State Attorney offices, and Clerks of Circuit and County Courts. This system, required to be in place by January 1, 2006, is intended to connect these groups and their related data and remit their revenue, performance and case management data to the state.

Florida’s Clerks of Court have developed a Comprehensive Case Information System (CCIS) which allows authorized users to search court case information by name or case number, to access judges’ court calendars, and to generate reports to help manage caseloads and measure efficiency. By June 2004, stakeholders in 31 counties are scheduled to have access to CCIS.

The CCIS provides an excellent framework for the integrated computer system required by House Bill 113-A. It is important that this initiative receive the proper financial support so that the system can be quickly expanded throughout the remaining counties. And while the needs of all potential users—including State Attorneys and Public Defenders—have not yet been satisfied, it is crucial to provide funding to increase the system’s capabilities to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Turnover of Experienced State Trial Lawyers Is Counterproductive To Florida’s Justice System and the Residents, Businesses, and Visiting Taxpayers of Florida

State Attorney Offices, which are the largest trial law firms in a number of the state’s 20 circuits, as well as Public Defender offices, compete with other government agencies and private firms to hire and retain lawyers. Generally, people recruited right out of law school as Assistant State Attorneys and Assistant Public Defenders are those who are willing to accept less compensation and handle high caseloads in exchange for rigorous training and trial work. After spending two to three years in Florida courtrooms they have very marketable skills and are often recruited to leave for better compensation. When they leave they create a day-to-day performance void that usually cannot be filled very effectively by rookie attorneys.

The average tenure of Assistant State Attorneys and Assistant Public Defenders who left their jobs between July 1, 2003 and February 18, 2004 was 3.7 years. During this seven-month period, Assistant State Attorney and Assistant Public Defender turnover was 10.2% and 11.7%, respectively. A report by the consulting firm MGT of America under a contract with the Legislature states that more than \$6 million is spent annually to recruit and train lawyers to replace those leaving the system.

Experienced prosecutors can save their judicial circuits thousands of dollars a month by routinely making expeditious decisions regarding which cases to prosecute, which to plea out, and which to dismiss.

Two Tallahassee-based criminal defense lawyers with 33 years of experience recently wrote the following to the President of the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association:

At a single case management conference, dozens of inmates are brought from the county detention facility where they are being housed pending trial. Files are pulled by clerks and brought into the courtroom where bailiffs, court reporters, judges, public defenders, assistant state attorneys or private counsel are assembled at public expense.

Each minute in the courtroom costs hundreds of dollars. Those minutes which a case unnecessarily survives on the docket can only be minimized by an experienced prosecutor who has the ability to quickly decide that a case has merit and cause it to be properly tried or, just as quickly, decide that a case lacks merit and cause it to be disposed of promptly.

For thirty-three years it has been our realization that the most important cog in the wheel of the criminal justice system is the prosecuting attorney. The most important single decision made in the criminal justice system -- which cases to prosecute, which to plea out and which to dismiss -- is made by the prosecutor.



Ex-Prosecutors, Public Defenders Speak

Florida TaxWatch conducted telephone interviews with two-dozen former Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders now in private practice of criminal defense law. Their comments corroborate the above statements:

- There's no doubt that Assistant State Attorneys are the most important cog in the criminal justice wheel. I decided who got prosecuted and who didn't.
- Assistant State Attorneys have more power than judges because only prosecutors can decide to drop cases.
- Assistant State Attorneys drive the train. They're the ministers of justice. They grade the job that law enforcement does by deciding which cases have strong enough evidence to go to trial.
- Assistant Public Defenders' performance is critical to avoid appeals based on incompetent counsel that can clog the justice system and keep innocent people behind bars.
- Most cases are worked out by plea arrangements. Plea offers require experienced Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders.
- As a criminal defense attorney in private practice I have to educate rookie prosecutors on a daily basis.
- There's such a huge turnover among Assistant State Attorneys that—as a criminal defense lawyer—you don't know from one minute to the next who's handling your case. It's a constant churn.

- In my last four years in the State Attorney's office I won more than 80% of my cases—much better than my first four years.



Comments About Being An Assistant State Attorney

Many of the criminal defense attorneys interviewed by Florida TaxWatch offered unsolicited comments concerning their experiences as Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders. Some examples:

- I was an Assistant State Attorney for eight years because I loved it. It's the best job in the legal field; the best job I ever had and ever will have.
- I loved the job of Assistant State Attorney. If I won the Lottery, I'd return to it.
- Being an Assistant State Attorney was rewarding work because I felt I was protecting society and the people I grew up with.
- Very few people leave the State Attorney's office because they're disgusted.
- The job of Assistant State Attorney is fantastic, phenomenal, a very big calling. It was very heartbreaking to leave.

Reasons for Turnover

Following are reasons for Assistant State Attorney and Assistant Public Defender turnover offered by criminal defense lawyers interviewed by Florida TaxWatch:



Compensation

By far the main reason Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders leave their jobs is compensation. Data provided by the Justice Administrative Commission shows that nearly 70% move to private law firms, generally for salary increases in the neighborhood of \$15,000. Another 20% or more go to Executive Branch attorney positions for pay increases of approximately \$5,000.

Comments made to Florida TaxWatch during the above-mentioned telephone interviews (during February and March 2004) suggest that a majority of experienced Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders would have remained in their jobs for a \$15,000 or less pay hike.

- Money is the biggest issue for most Assistant State Attorneys who leave.
- A lack of money drives attorneys out of the system.
- Turnover is basically a money issue.
- The difference between the public and private sectors is so substantial that most Assistant State Attorneys constantly grapple with the notion of leaving for private practice.

- I left the State Attorney's office after successfully prosecuting a high profile murder case and receiving the same 5% salary increase as everyone else.
- Assistant State Attorneys tend to leave for a 20% raise.
- I was making \$42,000 after two years (plus my previous experience in private practice) and would have stayed for \$55,000.
- After four to five years you're either pretty good as a prosecutor or not able to make the grade. Five of the 46 attorneys in my office have that level of experience and are making \$45,000 to \$50,000. Those who could get a \$15,000 bump are much more likely to stay.
- I left the State Attorney's office in 1996 after two years making \$30,000. I would have stayed for \$8,000 more, which is what I was offered by a state agency.
- I left the State Attorney's office after eight years. I was making \$59,000 and would have stayed for a \$15,000 raise.
- There were 15 new attorneys in my class in Orange County. When I left two years later, more than half were already gone. 90% of them left because of insufficient pay.



Repayment of Student Loans

- When I left the State Attorney's office last year, fellow attorneys had law school debts of \$20,000 (public law schools) to upwards of \$100,000 (private law schools).
- State assistance in paying off my student loan debt of about \$60,000 would have to have been substantial to keep me from leaving.
- Student debt had a strong influence on my leaving. State assistance with repaying loans would help but it's not a cure all.

Pending Legislation

CS/CS for SB 250 by the Committee on Governmental Oversight and Productivity and Judiciary and Senators Campbell and Fasano authorizes a student loan program to be administered by the Justice Administrative Commission.

It would allow assistant state attorneys and public defenders with three continuous years of services to have annual student loan payments of \$3,000 on their behalf. After six years of continuous service, payments would increase to \$5,000 annually, and would continue until completion of 13 years of service or full satisfaction of the student loan. Individual loan repayment could not exceed \$44,000.

Repayment of Federal Employees' Student Loans

Some federal agencies use student loan repayment as a tool for recruitment and retention of highly qualified employees.

Individuals receiving up to \$10,000/year are required to sign commitment of service agreements of at least three years. The lifetime maximum is \$60,000.

In FY 2002, 690 employees in 16 government agencies received benefits from student loan repayment programs. The amount of the benefits paid by the federal government totaled over \$3 million. (Average of \$4,348 each.)

Despite the popularity of the student loan repayment programs, only 2% of the 690 employees that received benefits in FY 2002 were classified as attorneys, and 2.5% classified as attorney advisors.

Furthermore, none of the attorneys or attorney advisors receiving student loan reimbursement were employed by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

However, the increasing support of the student loan repayment programs could lead to future student loan repayment benefits for federal defenders and prosecutors.



Work Environment

Another reason for leaving State Attorney and Public Defender offices is work environment.



Training

- More entry-level training—followed by giving attorneys the freedom to make decisions—would help the system.
- Being in court every day is the best training.
- I started work in the State Attorney's office on a Tuesday, received a day of training, then was handed a juvenile rape case.
- There are three types of attorneys: those who command the courtroom and need little training; those with basic talent who can improve with training; and those who should never set foot in the courtroom. Members of the second group are most likely to remain Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders.



Workload

- Felony prosecutors' workload today is similar to my misdemeanor workload 25 years ago.
- The workload was high but did not cause me to leave the State Attorney's office.

- My workload as an Assistant State Attorney was extremely high with not much time for preparation. Later, as an Assistant Public Defender the workload was less but I did mostly first-degree murder cases.



Employee-Management Relations

- Assistant State Attorneys often have an inability to control what they do on cases. Their hands are tied due to lack of experience and bureaucratic control.
- Some upper level managers don't respect and show consideration for Assistant State Attorneys.
- Supervisors rub young attorneys' noses in their cases before letting them make decisions. Delays make Assistant Public Defenders and private defense attorneys look like they don't know what's going on, and they waste judges' time.
- If Assistant State Attorneys can't make decisions it may be because of micromanaging by supervisors.



Career Path

- Every prosecutor asks himself: Is being an Assistant State Attorney a career or a stepping-stone?
- The main reason I left the State Attorney's office after eight years was pay. The second reason was pressure I felt to advance. Advancement in the State Attorney's office was limited.
- At the three-to-five-year level of experience, an Assistant State Attorney is happy to see someone with more seniority leave because it opens up a job for advancement and more money.

Recommendations to Improve State Attorney/Public Defender Budget Process, Help Achieve Revision 7 Goals, Reduce Trial Lawyer Turnover



Budget Development Process

Constitutional locally elected State Attorneys and Public Defenders develop their budgets based on local circumstances and challenges. To supplement their efforts, Florida TaxWatch suggests a representative body patterned after the State Courts' Trial Court Budget Commission should be established to promulgate uniform budgeting policies and procedures

The 2004-05 Judicial Administration budget request includes \$331,912 for the Justice Administrative Commission (JAC) to provide planning and budgeting assistance to the 47 budgeting entities that comprise Judicial Administration. An additional \$615,377 is requested to ensure leadership, policy and support services to all agency personnel.

Florida TaxWatch suggests that this funding should be used to expand the JAC beyond its current ministerial role in order to provide more extensive substantive staff support; to gather, analyze and communicate consistent and accurate information for policy options and procedures to the 47 budgeting entities; to assist these entities in requesting resources that reflect the goal of statewide equity of service provision envisioned by Revision 7; and to communicate “best practices” improvements to State Attorney and Public Defender offices for their consideration.



Use of Outside Attorneys

Nearly 45% (\$64.9 million) of the Judicial Administration’s \$145.4 million request to implement Revision 7 is for private attorney fees in criminal and child dependency cases; \$41.6 million of this \$64.9 million is for criminal conflict fees.

The Tallahassee-based management consulting firm MGT of America, under a contract with the Legislature, issued a series of reports in 2003 that make numerous policy, process and cost saving recommendations concerning the use of outside attorneys. MGT estimates that recommended improvements could reduce private attorney fees by 5% to 15%, which would equal \$3.2 million to \$9.7 million of the 2004-05 request.

MGT’s estimate of likely savings among 47 Judicial Administration budget entities—consisting of 20 State Attorney and 20 Public Defender offices, five appellate case offices and two capital collateral offices—is based on the consultant group’s previous studies involving independent entities that perform the same basic function and which lack a centralized management and administrative system to apply standardized policies and procedures.



Reduction of Trial Lawyer Turnover

After spending two to three years in Florida courtrooms, many Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders possess skills that command substantially higher salaries. When these skilled attorneys leave for higher compensation or other reasons, they create a day-to-day performance void that usually cannot be filled by rookie attorneys.

Experienced prosecutors can save their judicial circuits thousands of dollars a month by routinely making expeditious decisions regarding which cases to prosecute, which to plea out, and which to dismiss.

Comments made during the Florida TaxWatch interviews with former Assistant State Attorneys and Assistant Public Defenders now practicing criminal defense law suggest that approximately \$15,000 or 20% salary increases would have kept a majority from leaving government.

Turnover will always challenge State Attorneys and Public Defenders because the state cannot match private sector compensation. For this reason, and because of the critical need to reduce turnover for the collective good of Florida’s justice system, Florida TaxWatch recommends substantial and targeted pay increases to a limited number of state trial court lawyers with three years or more experience.

Florida TaxWatch recommends two options for reducing outside attorneys: Legislative redirection of at least 10% of this \$64.9 million line item for the purpose of offering competitive and targeted salaries for selected Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders whose retention is a high priority and who would otherwise have a high probability of successful retention. Alternatively, legislative authorization of salary increases for the state's trial lawyers from each circuit's savings of its share of the \$64.9 million line item for outside attorneys that result from improved use of these funds without compromising the purposes for which the funds are appropriated.



Proviso Language Recommended

Florida TaxWatch recommends legislative proviso language such as the following for inclusion in the FY 2004-05 state budget:

1. Recognizing the pivotal role that experienced Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders play in the judicial process, and recognizing that the state must compete with other state agencies and private law firms to retain legal talent, there is a critical need to reduce the rate of turnover of trial court lawyers.

A. A total of \$6.5 million (the midpoint of the range of savings from reduced use of private attorneys estimated in the MGT study) is provided to State Attorney and Public Defender offices in the 20 judicial circuits as an incentive for Assistant State Attorneys and Assistant Public Defenders to remain in their jobs.

OR

B. Funding for this initiative shall be from monies saved by each circuit's reduced use of private attorneys as recommended in a 2003 study conducted for the Legislature by MGT of America. This study estimates 5% to 15% savings, equivalent to between \$3.2 and \$9.7 million of the Judicial Administration's 2004-05 legislative budget request for private attorneys.

Funds from options A or B must be used solely to provide salary increases of not less than \$7,500 and not more than \$15,000 per position to attorneys with three years or more trial experience who, in the judgment of their supervisors—based on written performance evaluations focusing on the lawyers' career goals and employment intentions—are most likely to remain in their positions for at least three years following their salary increases.

2. Florida TaxWatch recommends a task force consisting of legislators, State Attorneys and Public Defenders and other interested parties should oversee a comprehensive study of ways to reduce counter productive state trial lawyer turnover -- particularly by offering competitive salaries for selected lawyers whose retention is a high priority and would otherwise have a high probability of successful retention -- in order to provide the 2005 Legislature with recommendations for further structural corrective action.

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Staff of the Justice Administration Commission

Former Assistant State Attorneys and Public Defenders interviewed by Florida TaxWatch

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About Florida TaxWatch

Florida TaxWatch is the only statewide organization entirely devoted to protecting and promoting the political and economic freedoms of Floridians as well as the economic prosperity of our state. Since its inception in 1979, Florida TaxWatch has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. The nationally distributed *City and State* magazine (now *Governing* magazine) published a poll of the nation's statewide taxpayer research centers. Based on this poll, the publication cited Florida TaxWatch as one of the six most influential and respected government watchdogs and taxpayer research institutes in the nation.

In recent years, news stories about Florida TaxWatch have run in all Florida newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and *Fortune* magazine. In addition, Florida TaxWatch has been featured on the prestigious *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour*.

Florida TaxWatch is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institute supported by voluntary, tax-deductible membership contributions and philanthropic foundation grants. Membership is open to any organization or individual interested in helping to make Florida competitive, healthy and economically prosperous by supporting a credible research effort that promotes constructive taxpayer improvements. Members, through their loyal support, help Florida TaxWatch to bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the citizens it serves.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by all types of taxpayers -- homeowners, small businesses, corporations, professional firms, labor unions, associations, individuals and philanthropic foundations -- representing a wide spectrum of Florida's citizens.

Florida TaxWatch's empirically sound research products recommend productivity enhancements and explain statewide impact of economic and tax and spend policies and practices. Without lobbying, Florida TaxWatch has worked diligently and effectively to build government efficiency and promote responsible, cost-effective improvements that add value and benefit taxpayers. This diligence has yielded impressive results: through the years, three-fourths of TaxWatch's cost-saving recommendations have been implemented, saving taxpayers over \$6.2 billion (according to an independent assessment by Florida State University). That translates to approximately \$1,067 in added value for every Florida family.

With your help, we will continue our diligence to make certain your tax investments are fair and beneficial to you, the taxpaying customer who supports Florida's government. Florida TaxWatch is ever present to ensure that taxes are equitable, not excessive, that their public benefits and costs are weighed, and that government agencies are more responsive and productive in the use of your hard-earned tax dollars.

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