

COOK COUNTY



MINNESOTA

COUNTY ATTORNEY

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January 12, 2023

Re: Attorney General's Budget and Support for Rural County Attorneys

Dear Committee Members,

I write in my capacity as the County Attorney for Cook County, Minnesota, to support the Minnesota Attorney General's budget proposal. Funding the Attorney General's full request means increased support for county attorneys in small or part-time offices, which equates to more equal justice for our rural constituents harmed by serious crime.

Twenty-four county attorney offices in Minnesota have two or fewer attorneys and there are fourteen counties with just three attorneys. These small offices must both represent county officials in all civil matters and must prosecute the crimes referred to us by local law enforcement. We often take on prosecution responsibilities for municipalities which don't have a city attorney employed, handling every level of crime in the county from traffic tickets to felony crimes. While acting as line prosecutors for criminal sexual conduct cases, serious domestic violence crimes, and the same variety of crimes larger offices handle, we also must represent the County Boards, draft and amend ordinances, negotiate contracts, advise in numerous areas of law, and assist in resolving our counties' most difficult conflicts.

Each attorney in these small offices must be both a line prosecutor and "general counsel" for the county. Crimes such as murder, sex and human trafficking, and large-scale drug manufacture and sales do occur, but with less frequency than in more densely populated areas. Because of their rarity, small-office County Attorneys find themselves wanting for greater expertise and support to access that expertise for these specialized prosecutions. Meanwhile, the State Public Defender's office can pull its most experienced defense attorneys from central offices to represent defendants in these cases.

The nature of our varied and full law practices means that we could find ourselves without the capacity for the most complex and difficult prosecutions, but rural Minnesotans who have suffered as victims of serious crimes in small communities deserve the same level of

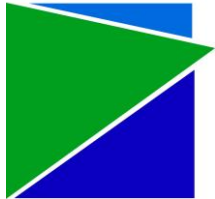
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justice as Minnesotans living in larger communities with larger prosecutor offices and greater specialization. The solution is for the Attorney General's office to provide assistance when requested, and not just for murder cases. The AG needs greater capacity in its criminal division to provide the assistance upon request by rural county attorneys. Currently, only a few attorneys in the AG's criminal division handle every murder case referred by county attorneys in small offices. With additional funding, the office could expand its caseload in number and variety of crimes, increasing the aid provided to small counties.

Please support the Attorney General's request for additional funding for criminal prosecutors. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Hicken".

Molly Hicken
Cook County Attorney

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