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Chairman Wanggaard and Judiciary and Public Safety Committee Members,

Thank you for holding a Public Hearing on AB 117 related to allowing district attorneys, deputy district attorneys, and assistant district attorneys to engage in the private practice of law for certain civil purposes.

AB 117 is one of three bills that were put forward by the Legislative Council Study Committee on Access to Civil Legal Services. This bill passed unanimously through both the Access to Civil Legal Services Study Committee as well as the Joint Legislative Council Committee.

This bill simply allows district attorneys, deputy district attorneys, and assistant district attorneys to provide legal services to a person of limited means or to a charitable, religious, civic, community, governmental, or educational organization if the attorney provides the services without a fee and the services are not in conflict with the interests of the district attorney's county.

AB 117 supports the effort to offer legal services to vulnerable populations in Wisconsin. Currently district attorneys, deputy district attorneys, and assistant district attorneys are prohibited from providing pro-bono legal services. This bill does not mandate that these attorneys engage in this type of work, it simply allows them to do so.

During our discussion as a study committee we identified various ways to address the need for civil legal services and we need to utilize every available resource to do so. It is clear that there is a need for civil legal services for indigent populations and we need a multi-faceted approach to tackle this issue statewide. We should allow those who are closest to the people work to address the needs of their communities.

I appreciate your consideration of this bill and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.