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## Chief Justice Ziegler Establishes Attorney Retention and Recruitment Committee to Address Attorney Shortage in Wisconsin

**Madison, Wisconsin** (June 6, 2024) — Chief Justice Annette Kingsland Ziegler today announces the creation of the **Attorney Retention & Recruitment Committee** to address Wisconsin’s attorney shortage, which is particularly acute in rural counties. The committee is comprised of the deans of Wisconsin’s two law schools, representatives of the State Bar of Wisconsin, and attorneys and judges from around the state. Chief judges from the state’s nine judicial administrative districts will help lead the effort.

“The Chief Judges in each district recognize the importance of collaborating with the law schools, the State Bar, and attorneys to address this shortage our state is facing,” said Kenosha County Circuit Court Judge Jason Rossell, chief judge of the state’s Second Judicial Administrative District and chair of the Committee of Chief Judges. “Each day in court, trial judges face the challenges of finding attorneys for unrepresented individuals in criminal cases. The delays caused by the shortage cause problems throughout the system, including delays in trials, lengthy pretrial incarceration, losing treatment options, and delayed closure for victims and witnesses.”

In the last four years, the number of active attorneys in Wisconsin has decreased by over 4 percent, and the number of students enrolling in Wisconsin’s two law schools has declined over the last five years. This trend significantly impacts the more rural parts of Wisconsin, where the number of available attorneys has decreased by over 7 percent. Lawyers provide important representation to individuals and serve their communities in a variety of ways. The absence of attorneys is being realized statewide.

Some counties—seven of them in the northern part of the state—have no certified attorneys to take cases when the State Public Defender attorneys cannot represent an individual. This lawyer shortage not only impacts the constitutional rights of defendants – it also affects victims and our communities.

“In the Northwestern quadrant of the state, the attorney shortage has reached crisis levels,” said Barron County Circuit Court Judge Maureen Boyle, chief judge of the state’s Tenth Judicial Administrative District. “In Barron County, there are no local lawyers who regularly accept public defender appointments, and we must rely on remote technology to ensure

representation for those facing criminal charges.” Even with remote technology, Chief Judge Boyle said the pool of lawyers available is small.

“A lasting solution will require all justice partners to collaborate and coordinate efforts,” Chief Judge Boyle noted. “The Chief Justice’s committee on attorney retention and recruitment is a necessary step forward.”

The Attorney Retention & Recruitment Committee will involve various stakeholders in the legal community to study the attorney shortage issue and make recommendations on how Wisconsin can address the problem moving forward.

“The Chief Judges are thankful for the leadership of Chief Justice Ziegler and the Wisconsin Supreme Court in addressing this problem,” Chief Judge Rossell said.