

PUBLIC DEFENDER
COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT
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March 17, 2022

Dear Members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Measure Z Expenditures,

A top priority of Measure Z was to maintain and improve crime investigation and prosecution. Those goals cannot be achieved without a properly functioning and funded program to appoint private defense attorneys in court cases.

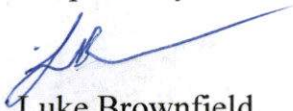
I write to your committee to support the County Administrative Office's application for a position to administer the Humboldt County Court-Appointed Attorney Program (HCAAP), which ensures this critical component of our public safety and indigent defense service operates year-round.

In order for a court case to move to conclusion, all defendants must have adequate defense. Often, the Public Defender's Office and Conflict Counsel declare conflicts in cases and cannot legally defend a client. In these cases, our only resort is to rely on private attorneys in our community to provide this service. The clients they represent are often the poorest and most vulnerable in our community, and the most in need of competent defense.

The HCAAP program seeks attorneys almost daily to represent these clients, often on short notice with a judge, court staff and the prosecution all scheduled to appear. In some cases, including the most violent cases such as homicide, domestic violence or sexual assault, only a few private defense attorneys are qualified and experienced enough to provide defense, which requires that staff spend additional time and effort to find appropriate attorneys. There is a dire need to recruit additional attorneys to this program, and to ensure that attorneys, investigators and other service providers receive a fair wage and charge the county appropriately.

By having staff dedicated to the program I believe it would provide the CAO's Office the resources required to ensure these goals are achieved and that each case receives the defense services needed to investigate cases and move them to conclusion in a timely manner. The HCAAP program is an essential piece of our entire public safety system and provides services to residents and agencies in every part of the county. I am proud to support this application and respectfully request that your committee prioritize it in your recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Respectfully,



Luke Brownfield
Humboldt County Public Defender