

February 27, 2007

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: John R. Justice Prosecutors and Defenders Incentive Act (S. 442)**

Dear Senators Leahy and Specter:

The undersigned voluntary bar and allied associations from thirty-three states and Puerto Rico write to express our strong support for the John R. Justice Prosecutors and Defenders Incentive Act (S. 442). Our members are private and public lawyers who represent persons accused of criminal offenses and juvenile delinquency.

Many of our members are struggling to repay mortgage-size education loans from their low public defender salaries. As a result of their decision to devote their careers to public service and their enormous debt, they are forced to sacrifice home ownership and other basic opportunities. Many are eventually compelled by financial circumstances to leave public defenders' offices, depriving their clients of years of training and experience.

It is not just the attorneys and their clients who suffer – high turnover among experienced public defenders wastes taxpayer money and jeopardizes public safety. As public defenders' offices lose their most experienced attorneys to more lucrative jobs, they must continually expend resources on recruitment and training. Cases are delayed due to attorney turnover, inexperienced attorneys are forced to handle complex cases, and public defenders' offices are less equipped to provide effective representation in a high caseload environment. Some of our members are the chief defenders and supervisors within public defenders' offices, who know well the difficulties of recruiting qualified attorneys and the inefficiencies that result from high turnover.

The John R. Justice Prosecutors and Defenders Incentive Act would strengthen the criminal justice system and enhance public safety by encouraging qualified attorneys to choose careers as prosecutors and public defenders and to continue in that service. We are confident that S. 442's program of student loan repayment assistance will greatly improve the reliability, fairness, and efficiency of the criminal justice systems in our states. We urge you to support quick passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Melinda Morgan Austin  
President  
**Alabama Criminal Defense Lawyers Association**

Christopher B. Dupont  
President  
**Arizona Attorneys for Criminal Justice**

Dana P. Hlavac  
Mohave County Public Defender  
**Law Offices of the Mohave County Public Defender**

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**South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense**

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**Wisconsin Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers**

cc: Senate Judiciary Committee