



VALERIE L. SMITH
JUDGE

DIVISION THREE
THIRTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
STATE OF TENNESSEE

SHELBY COUNTY COURTHOUSE
140 ADAMS AVENUE, ROOM 212
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38103

February 1, 2024

Governor Bill Lee
State Capital, 1st Floor
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

Additional funding is needed for attorneys appointed to represent indigent litigants. I write on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Tennessee Judicial Conference in support of the Supreme Court's request to increase the hourly rate of compensation for appointed counsel to \$80 per hour.

The federal and state Constitutions mandate that criminal defendants be provided representation at all stages of criminal proceedings, as well as in some civil proceedings. While Public Defenders shoulder much of that work, conflicts arise that necessitate the appointment of private counsel. The current hourly rate is so low that it does not provide private counsel adequate financial incentive to help the State meet its mandate. Consequently, judges find themselves visiting the same wells only to find them drier each time.

When discussing concerns about crime, we must also consider impediments to efficiently moving cases, and the lack of available, competent legal representation is necessarily a part of that discussion. Better compensation paid to appointed attorneys would help counsel take on more appointed cases. We ask you to support increased funding for indigent representation, not only to comply with the Constitutional and statutory rights of those entitled to appointed counsel, but to help protect Tennesseans.

Thank you for your service to our great State.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Valerie L. Smith".

Valerie L. Smith
President, Tennessee Judicial Conference