



MIKE DEWINE

★ OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL ★

Testimony
Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine
Senate Finance Committee
House Bill 153: Biennial Budget for Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013
May 16, 2011

Chairman Widener, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Skindell, and Members of the Committee -- thank you for the opportunity to discuss the biennial budget request for the Attorney General's Office.

When I took office in January, I swore in my oath that I would do all I can in my power as Attorney General to seek truth and to seek justice and to protect Ohio families. That is the core mission of this Office. I took a vow to uphold the rule of law, to protect the most vulnerable among us, and to support our local prosecutors, sheriffs, and police throughout the state. The budget before you today is grounded in this commitment.

Budget Overview

The overall funding request for the Attorney General's Office is \$222.6 million for fiscal year 2012 and \$217.1 million for fiscal year 2013. My office's requested budget is funded approximately 20 percent from the state's General Revenue Fund, 65 percent from General Services and State Special Revenue funds, 10 percent from federal funds, and five percent from other funding sources. The 20 percent of the Office budget supported by the state's General Revenue Fund totals \$44.2 million in each fiscal year of the upcoming biennium -- and that represents a 6.3 percent cut from fiscal year 2011.

This budget request is focused on my top priorities: Protecting Ohio families, dramatically improving our capabilities to support local law enforcement, and providing quality legal services to clients. Let me take a moment to talk specifically about families, legal services, and law enforcement.

Protecting Ohio Families

Our Consumer Protection Section protects Ohio families from scam artists who engage in predatory and illegal business practices. This budget will strengthen our efforts to protect families by creating a special prosecutions unit within the Consumer Protection section to support local efforts to investigate and criminally prosecute swindlers and scam artists. In 2010, the Attorney General's office received at least 32,000 consumer complaints that range from elderly Ohioans getting misled by con-artists posing as their grandchildren to contractors ripping off families rebuilding their homes after natural disasters. Many of these complaints were misunderstandings that were resolved. But, I was shocked to find out that only two of these complaints resulted in criminal prosecution.



MIKE DEWINE

— ★ OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL ★ —

And so to change things, I hired former Jackson County Prosecutor Jonathan Blanton to head up special prosecutions in our Consumer Protection section. Jonathan is heading up a group of trained prosecutors in our office to look at the thousands of complaints we receive, assess when it is appropriate for criminal charges, and then refer these cases to local prosecutors. Sometimes consumers view fines as just the cost of doing business. And so, some people are going to have to go to jail. Our job is to find cases to make an example of the perpetrators and use the law as a deterrent.

This budget also supports the most vulnerable of our citizens. As a former county prosecutor, I learned first-hand about the need to provide compassionate support to victims of crime, and this budget request continues the important services that the Crime Victims section offers both to victims and to the local organizations that support their needs.

I am pleased to report that we have dramatically reduced the time that crime victims have to wait to receive payments from the Crime Victims Fund. And, just today, we welcomed over a thousand participants to the 20th annual Two Days in May Conference, which has become the nation's largest victim advocate conference. I am honored to host this incredible two day event and to work with so many dedicated and passionate advocates.

Law Enforcement

One of the most important core functions of my office is the critical support we provide to local law enforcement. Funding our budget will allow BCI to significantly reduce the turnaround time on evidence testing -- from the time evidence is received to when results are provided to local law enforcement and prosecutors.

When I took office, I named Tom Stickrath as Superintendent of BCI. He found that the combined turnaround time for completing Biology and DNA assignments sent to us by local law enforcement agencies was more than 125 days! That is simply unacceptable. We have already completed a comprehensive system analysis of the lab. And, we have identified and are implementing improvements to dramatically reduce our turnaround times. We cannot continue to do things as we have always done them, and we intend to make significant improvements.

To attack this problem, we are doing more than just streamlining procedures. We are focused on the addition of sophisticated forensic testing technology and IT resources. This budget directs more resources to BCI and will allow us to respond to the ever-increasing demand for its services. Change will take time, but it is coming, and it will make a real difference in protecting lives.

This budget request also will support a targeted approach to fighting prescription drug abuse. During my campaign, as my wife Fran and I traveled the state, the issue of prescription drug abuse came up whether we were in a small village, suburb, or large city. To help fight this growing problem, I am dedicating staff and financial resources of the Attorney General's Office to help local prosecutors and law enforcement deal with the devastating consequences of prescription drug abuse.



MIKE DEWINE

— ★ OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL ★ —

There is something wrong in this state when four Ohioans are dying every single day from accidental drug poisonings. This problem is bigger and more pervasive than any one agency can handle.

And so, I am very pleased to be partnering with Governor Kasich and former Attorney General Betty Montgomery, with several other state agencies, and with local law enforcement to fight this growing scourge. We are serious about this fight -- and we will be relentless.

Legal Services

With regard to the legal end, my office provides legal services to state agencies, boards, commissions, and public colleges and universities. The specific functions of our legal sections are many and varied, from issuing opinions to providing legal advice, litigating cases on behalf of our statutory clients, and collecting delinquent debt owed to Ohio.

As I conclude my testimony today, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I want to reiterate my support for the men and women of our local law enforcement agencies who put their lives on the line each and every day to protect us and our families. Already this year, we have lost six brave Ohio men and women as a result of their work in law enforcement, including a young officer who was killed in the early morning hours on May 10th.

Sergeant Brian Dulle of the Warren County Sheriff's Department was killed by a speeding vehicle driven by a fleeing suspect. I ask that you keep the family and friends of Sergeant Dulle and all of our brave public servants in your thoughts and in your prayers.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.