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Tuesday, July 29, 2008

## Letter

# State public legal services study is credible

Grand Haven attorney Joseph Legatz's letter compelled me to respond with a different perspective ("State public defender report is 'over the top,' " July 15).

I also participated in the study conducted by the National Legal Aid Defender Association and was very impressed and completely satisfied by the credible manner in which the data was collected. The result is a comprehensive and honest look at how public defense services are delivered in our state.

The work undertaken by the research teams was significant and time-consuming, but most of all, they did all of the heavy lifting this important project required.

I agree with Legatz that there is an opportunity to improve public defense services. It is imperative we have a system of justice that our citizens trust. Every person in the legal system must be treated equally.

When each defendant is adequately represented, our criminal justice system is stronger and better.

The Detroit News accurately wrote on June 19 ("Poor deserve better treatment in criminal court"), "providing an adequate defense for the poor is a basic function of government and should not be an afterthought in state and county budgets."

Prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges and the state all have a clear responsibility and a duty to ensure our system works right. The NLADA report undeniably demonstrates that we are failing this responsibility. We must come together and find a remedy that adequately funds both prosecutors and defenders. This is one opportunity Michigan can't afford to let pass by.

*Nancy J. Diehl*

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*Former President*

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