Public defenders play a vital role in ensuring we have an efficient and just system that provides zealous representation no matter a person's financial status.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers signed Senate Bill (SB) 62 on Monday, a bipartisan bill that will allow the Wisconsin State Public Defender's Office to utilize savings over the past year due to staff turnover to provide a much overdue pay progression increase to staff to help retain and recruit talented staff, while ensuring competitive salaries compared to their prosecutor counterparts. According to the State Public Defender, since March 2020, the Wisconsin State Public Defender's Office lost 78 staff members, many who left seeking better pay.

"Our public defenders play a vital role in ensuring we have an efficient and just system that provides zealous representation no matter a person's financial status," said Gov. Evers. "But for too long they have been doing more with less and it shows, especially this past year as they have continued to serve the people of our state throughout the pandemic, while struggling to retain talented, experienced staff. We can't make the robust, critical changes needed to reform our criminal justice system in Wisconsin if our public defenders are overworked, understaffed, and undervalued. That's why I am glad to be signing this bipartisan bill today."

The governor's 2021-23 budget builds on SB 62 by ensuring the pay progression will continue in each year of the biennium.

SB 62, now 2021 Wisconsin Act 7, is available here . A video of the bill signing today is available here .