

Senate Bill 2002
Senate Appropriations
Education and Environment Division

Testimony Presented by Kara J. Erickson
Disciplinary Counsel
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Good morning, Chairman Sorvaag and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Kara Erickson. I serve as Disciplinary Counsel for the Judicial Conduct Commission and the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court. As Disciplinary Counsel, my office handles the administrative, investigative, and prosecutorial roles for matters that are before the Judicial Conduct Commission and the Disciplinary Board. More simply stated, my office handles allegations of ethical violations for both lawyers and judges within the judicial branch. Both the Judicial Conduct Commission and Disciplinary Board fall under the authority of the Supreme Court; however, because one of the functions of our office is to discipline members of the judiciary, including the Justices of the Supreme Court, our office is held at arms' length from the Supreme Court. Sally Holewa and Don Wolf have done a wonderful job going over the appropriations requests from the Court, but they asked me to specifically touch on my office's portion of that request.

As a bit of background about our functioning, the Court's rules established an Operations Committee to handle oversight of my office. The Committee has four members, with two additional ex-officio members. The members of the Operations Committee are appointed to oversee the budget requests and the operational aspects of the office. The four members of the Operations Committee consist of a lay member, a member appointed by the Court from nominations from the Disciplinary Board, a member appointed by the Court from a nomination from the State Bar Association's

Board of Governors, and one member appointed by the Court from a list of nominations from the Judicial Conduct Commission. The ex-officio members who attend the Operations Committee meetings are the State Court Administrator, Sally Holewa, and the State Bar Association's Executive Director, Tony Weiler.

As with the Court System as a whole, the majority of our budget is in salaries. There is a small increase in salaries due to reclassification of some of our employees and to bring salaries back to a competitive level.

In looking at our budget for the upcoming biennium, we have essentially presented a hold even operating budget for our office. The most significant operating increases were related to IT costs. Those were based on recommendations by the Court's IT Director. We also requested some increased travel costs because more meetings, hearings, and trainings, are being held in person.

I would be happy to try to answer any questions the Committee may have at this time that are specifically related to the Judicial Conduct Commission and the Disciplinary Board's portion of the budget included within Senate Bill 2002. I would urge the Committee to recommend a "do pass" of Senate Bill 2002. Thank you for your consideration.