



Goodhue County Justice
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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Goodhue County Commissioners
Scott Arneson, Goodhue County Administrator
Brian Anderson, Goodhue County Finance Director

FROM: Stephen F. O'Keefe, Goodhue County Attorney
Erin L. Kuester, Assistant County Attorney III 

RE: County Attorney Office Request To Hire Full Time Legal Secretary

DATE: February 2, 2023

Funding Request

The County Attorney's Office is requesting to hire a full time secretarial support professional beginning at Grade 81, Step 1, to assist with the high volume of work. This position would continue to be ARP funded through 2023 and a new position in the 2024 budget. The estimated cost with salary and benefits for this position, if approved, would be \$78,055.67.

Background

The Goodhue County Attorney's Office has a total of ten (10) attorneys, with nine (9) full time attorneys and one (1) attorney position allocated for six hours a week. There is a total of eight (8) support staff, with only three (3) Legal Secretaries. Prior to the disruption in the courts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we thought seriously about making a request for an additional full time legal secretary due to the continued increasing caseloads and support staff workloads. In August 2021, it became possible to use American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to hire a temporary full time secretarial support for the purpose of addressing the backlog of criminal cases directly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This position is funded through 2023. We are grateful to the Board for approving our request for a temporary full time legal secretary on August 17, 2021, as it gave use the ability to determine the level of need.

Fortunately, we were able to find a qualified and hardworking employee willing to take a temporary position approved only for a 23 month duration. After working for a one year time period (January 2022 to January 2023), this employee recently accepted a full time permanent

position in our office that was created by the retirement of long term employee Deb O'Connor. As a result, we are returned to existing staff levels.

During the past year we learned that the current workload required a full time Legal Secretary not only to diligently address the backlog caused by COVID 19, but to address the increased volume of cases created by the re-opening of society. If approved, the new position would be a permanent position assigned to assist attorneys with work related to Gross Misdemeanor, Misdemeanor, Traffic, and Petty Misdemeanor cases. A review of the 2022 statistics shows a return to pre-pandemic numbers and a large increase of case volume. For example, there is a 127% increase in misdemeanor cases from 2019, a 109% increase in DWI cases as well as an over 22% increase in Traffic/Alcohol/Drug Related Offenses from 2019, in addition to the continuing trend of increased law enforcement case referrals for review for criminal charges each year. In 2022, we received 2,446 cases to review, representing an almost 26% increase over 2021.

In comparing staffing levels to surrounding counties that are similar in size, the Goodhue County Attorney's Office is understaffed. Rice County has ten (10) attorneys and nine (9) support staff, with six (6) of them being Legal Secretaries. Winona County also has ten (10) attorneys and nine (9) support staff, with seven (7) of them being Legal Secretaries. In contrast, Goodhue County has a total of ten (10) attorneys with only three (3) Legal Secretaries. This direct county to county comparison using population does not consider factors such as geographical location, amenities found within the county, city prosecution contracts, as well as other factors that impact the volume and the complexity of the work done in the Goodhue County Attorney's Office.

Our office is dedicated to meeting our obligations to crime victims, to the public, and to the citizens of Goodhue County. We continue to keep our focus on public safety and realize that it takes a team to keep our citizens safe. The workload continues to increase each year and we believe that the addition of a full time secretarial support professional is needed for this office to meet our legal obligations to victims of crime, to meet our legal obligations to the citizens of Goodhue County, and to continue making progress on addressing the existing criminal case backlog. Thank you for considering our request to hire for the new position of one full time secretarial support professional beginning at Grade 81, Step 1, as outlined above.

Thank you for your consideration.

SFO/jk



REQUEST TO HIRE FORM

DEPARTMENT & POSITION INFORMATION

Department: Goodhue County Attorney's Office

Date: February 1, 2023

Submitter Name: Stephen F. O'Keefe, Goodhue County Attorney

Position Title: Legal Secretary

Position Reports To: Goodhue County Attorney

Has the job description been reviewed by the department head? Yes No

Type of Hire: Replacement (backfill) Replacing Who? _____ New Position

Classification: Full Time Part Time

Status: Permanent Temporary (67 day) Seasonal Intern - paid

How does Goodhue County staff in this position compare to similar sized counties?

Two counties similar in size to Goodhue County are Rice and Winona counties. Rice has 10 attorneys and 9 support staff, 6 of whom are legal secretaries; Winona has 10 attorneys and 9 support staff, 7 of whom are legal secretaries; Goodhue County has 10 attorneys, 1 of whom is approx. 8 hours per week, and 8 support staff, 3 of whom are legal secretaries and one is provisional ARPA funded through 2023. An accurate comparison is difficult as population alone does not take into account geographical location, amenities found within the county, city prosecution contracts and other factors that impact the volume and complexity of work.

BUDGET & SALARY INFORMATION

Budget Impact

For new positions, please indicate whether or not the position has been budgeted for the current year.

- Replacement position in budget
- New position in budget
- New position not in budget

Has this job classification been evaluated by the Hay Group?

Yes No

FLSA Status: Exempt (salaried) Non-Exempt (hourly)

Starting Pay Grade / Step: Grade 81 / Step 1

Anticipated Benefit Cost: \$ 9,038.96

Use this link for help calculating salary & benefits:
[Total Comp & Benefits Calculator](#)

Total Cost: \$ 78,055.67

*Salary & Benefits

Total Budgeted: \$ 78,055.67

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please explain all options and alternatives considered including mergers, transfers of duties, position elimination, impacts on county services and overtime, etc.

Job Posting Type: Internal only Internal & External

Advertising Requested:

- ADP Career Center (includes indeed.com)
- Lake City Shopper/ Graphic
- Cannon Falls Beacon
- Assoc. MN Counties (AMC) website
- County website (includes Facebook & Twitter)
- Republican Eagle (includes JobsHQ online)
- Zumbrota Shopper
- League of MN Cities (LMC) website

Other Advertising Requested: _____

Send completed form & job description to Human Resources Director.

REQUEST TO HIRE FORM
APPROVALS PAGE

Department: Goodhue County Attorney

Date: January 11, 2023

Submitter Name: Stephen O'Keefe, Goodhue County Attorney

Position Title: Legal Secretary

Position Reports To: Goodhue County Attorney

HUMAN RESOURCES USE ONLY

Did HR review job description? Yes No

Recommendation: Approve Hire Deny Hire

Comments: _____

HR Director Signature: _____

Date: _____

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR USE ONLY

Disposition: Approve Hire Deny Hire Require to go to Board

Comments: _____

County Administrator Signature: _____

Date: _____

After final determination is made, this form should be sent to:

Person/ Department	Date & Initial	Method
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources Director	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Interoffice
<input type="checkbox"/> Department Head	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Interoffice