



Wexford County

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Gary Taylor, Chair

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Executive Committee of the Wexford County Board of Commissioners will hold a regular meeting on Tuesday, September 8, 2026, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Room, third floor of the Historic Courthouse, 437 E. Division St., Cadillac, Michigan.

TENTATIVE AGENDA

- A. CALL TO ORDER
- B. ROLL CALL
- C. ADDITIONS / DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA
- D. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA
- E. APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 11, 2026, REGUALR MEETING MINUTES 1
- F. PUBLIC COMMENTS
Designated for topics on the agenda only.
- G. AGENDA ITEMS
 - 1. Discussion on Current Litigation Matters
 - 2. Infrastructure Alternatives Monthly Report *(Tom Lutke, Infrastructure Alternatives Inc.)* 4
 - 3. Public Defender FY27 Compensation Proposal 5
- H. CORRESPONDENCE
- I. ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS
- J. PUBLIC COMMENTS
- K. COMMITTEE COMMENTS
- L. CHAIR COMMENTS
- M. ADJOURN

WEXFORD COUNTY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

August 11, 2026
Gary Taylor, Chair

The regular meeting was called to order by Chairman Taylor at 4:00 p.m., in the Commissioner's room, Third Floor, Courthouse, 437 E. Division St. Cadillac, Michigan.

Members Present: Gary Taylor, Michael Bush, Brian Potter, Julie Theobald
Members Absent: None.
Also Present: Jami Bigger, Deputy Administrator/Human Resources Director; Johanna Carey, Prosecuting Attorney; Tom Lutke, Infrastructure Alternatives Inc.; Megan Swanberg, Executive Assistant; Judge Corey Wiggins, District Court

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

None.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

A motion was made by Comm. Theobald and supported by Comm. Bush to approve the agenda. A vote was called. All in favor.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A motion was made by Comm. Theobald and supported by Comm. Bush to approve the July 14, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes. A vote was called. All in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

AGENDA ITEMS

G.1. Discussion on Current Litigation Matters

Deputy County Administrator, Jami Bigger, informed the committee that there are no new updates.

G.2. Infrastructure Alternatives Monthly Report

Mr. Tom Lutke, IAI, informed the committee that it had been a relatively slow period, with no callouts or significant concerns. He reported that the block heater had failed and was replaced by Cummins. He also noted that the annual water maintenance testing was completed successfully, with no issues identified.

G.3. Discussion on Wages/Opening in the Prosecutor's Office

Ms. Carey expressed concern regarding the Assistant Prosecuting Attorney vacancy, noting that the position has been posted for a few weeks without receiving any applications. She explained that the current caseload is already extremely heavy and is expected to increase further when Mr. Karnes leaves. She also noted that the caseload fluctuates daily, making it difficult to predict the workload and further increasing the need for additional staffing.

The Commissioners asked what could be done to attract qualified applicants. Ms. Carey stated that increasing the wage rate would likely make the position more attractive and suggested that a hiring bonus could also help attract applicants.

Judge Wiggins noted that when he served as a prosecutor, the office was short of approximately four and one-half prosecutors, highlighting the ongoing difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels.

Ms. Bigger handed out a wage study of comparable counties that showed Wexford County Prosecutor pay rates higher than the average of the 14 counties that participated in the study. She also noted the shortage of attorneys across the state.

Commissioner Potter requested that the current wages be reviewed. The Commissioners reviewed the wages and expressed support for increasing the hourly rates for each prosecutor position. The proposed rates are as follows:

- Prosecutor: \$75.00 per hour
- Chief Prosecutor: \$55.00 per hour
- Assistant Prosecutor: \$46.00 per hour

The proposed wage increases are intended to improve the County's ability to attract and retain qualified prosecuting staff in light of the current and anticipated caseload.

A motion was made by Comm. Potter and supported by Comm. Bush to forward a recommendation to the full board to increase the Prosecutor to \$75.00 per hour, Chief Prosecutor to \$55.00 per hour and Assistant Prosecutor to \$46.00 per hour. A vote was called. All in favor.

CORRESPONDENCE

None.

ADMINISTRATOR'S COMMENTS

Ms. Bigger, informed the committee of the following:

- She has been working on the implementation of the new Telnet phone system, which is scheduled to go live on August 24, 2026.
- She and Joe attended a renewal meeting for risk management insurance with MMRMA. The renewal rate is estimated to increase by about 10% next year.
- The CDBG Closeout Hearing will be added to the next Finance committee meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

None.

CHAIR COMMENTS

None.

ADJOURN

A motion was made by Comm. Theobald and supported by Comm. Bush to adjourn the

meeting at 4:22 p.m. A vote was called, all in favor.

Gary Taylor, Chair

Megan Swanberg, Recording Secretary

DRAFT



INFRASTRUCTURE
ALTERNATIVES, INC.

Monthly Operations & Maintenance Report

September 8, 2026

Report for Month: August 2026
Location: Wexford County (Cedar Creek Township)
Facilities: Cedar Creek Water Plant & Distribution System
Operator in Charge: Tom Lutke, Water Operator

Emergency Callouts/Customer Concerns

- ❑ No callouts or customer concerns this month.

Significant Events:

- ❑ 8/5 – Reduced Chlorine pump speed at wellhouse. Chlorine residuals were above the goal, so we reduced the pump speed to conserve chlorine.
- ❑ 8/14 – Water main tap and customer connection at 9550 E 22 Rd.

Preventive Maintenance:

- ❑ IAI staff continues to regularly monitor chlorine residuals throughout the water system.
- ❑ Monthly Wellhead inspections completed.

Facilities Data for the Month

Production at Well House	525,070 gallons
Metered Usage	408,960 gallons
Metered Flushing	165,064 gallons
Difference *(% Gain)	48,954 gallons (9.32%)



WEXFORD COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

Proposal to Align Attorney Compensation with FY2026 Michigan Market Standards

FY27 Recruitment, Retention, and MIDC Compliance Request

SUBMITTED TO THE WEXFORD COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Prepared by	Robert Champion, Chief Public Defender
Office	Wexford/Missaukee Regional Public Defender Office
Date	August 7, 2026
Action requested	Approve the FY27 attorney compensation scale and funded salary placements

DECISION REQUESTED Approve FY27 salaries of \$145,000 for Robert Champion, \$110,000 for Geoff Harrison, \$100,000 for Rob Haertel, and \$90,000 for Connor Shantz. The \$67,436.67 base-salary adjustment, together with associated employer costs, is covered in the FY27 MIDC budget.

A targeted, grant-funded correction to protect constitutional representation, stabilize staffing, and compete for attorneys in Northern Michigan.

Executive Summary

Wexford County's public defender attorney compensation no longer reflects the FY2026 Michigan public-sector legal market. Wexford Public Defender salaries are based on a 40-hour workweek - 2,080 work hours per year - and every hourly equivalent for Wexford personnel in this proposal uses that basis. The Office's three assistant public defenders earn between \$75,420.00 and \$93,796.79. Their average salary is \$83,696.44, or \$40.24 per hour. Robert Champion, Chief Public Defender, earns \$126,474.00, or \$60.80 per hour. These figures fall materially below the statewide public defender benchmarks reported by the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC), below several prosecutor and public defender offices competing for the same limited attorney pool, and below the experienced ranges available in state employment.[1][2]

This is not simply an employee compensation issue. Competitive attorney pay is an operational requirement for a constitutionally adequate indigent defense system. Persistent vacancies or turnover increase workloads, delay client contact, reduce continuity of representation, weaken mentoring and supervision, and force greater reliance on contract counsel. Each of those consequences threatens the Office's ability to satisfy MIDC Standards 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8.

The staffing need is becoming more urgent. The shortage of qualified attorneys willing to accept indigent-defense appointments is already requiring Wexford to seek representation outside the county. Beginning October 1, 2027, the Office will also assume juvenile matters, adding a known category of appointments, hearings, client and family contact, investigation, and court coverage. Wexford must recruit, retain, and prepare sufficient attorneys before that expansion takes effect.[19]

RECOMMENDATION Adopt a market-based FY27 salary ladder and approve the four funded placements requested in this proposal. The recommended salaries are anchored to the FY26 MIDC statewide staff-attorney minimum, midpoint, maximum, and chief-defender median - not to arbitrary percentage increases.

Requested Board Action

1. Approve the FY27 Public Defender attorney salary bands shown in this proposal.
2. Approve the named FY27 salary placements effective October 1, 2026, or the first payroll period of the FY27 MIDC grant, as administratively appropriate.
3. Authorize the County Administrator and Human Resources Department to complete the related payroll and budget actions, with the adjustments charged to the FY27 MIDC-funded indigent defense budget.

4. Recognize attorney compensation as a compliance and service-continuity measure necessary to recruit and retain qualified counsel in Cadillac and the surrounding rural service area.
5. Recognize that current attorney shortages, out-of-county appointments, and the addition of juvenile matters beginning October 1, 2027 make workforce stabilization an immediate operational priority.

Current Wexford Compensation

Employee	Current salary	40-hour hourly equivalent	Market position
Robert Champion, Chief Public Defender	\$126,474.00	\$60.80	Below chief benchmark
Geoff Harrison	\$93,796.79	\$45.09	Below statewide midpoint
Rob Haertel	\$81,872.54	\$39.36	Below statewide minimum
Connor Shantz	\$75,420.00	\$36.26	Below statewide minimum

Source: Current Wexford County salaries supplied for this proposal. Hourly equivalents use 2,080 hours per year. [1]

The three assistant public defenders have a combined salary of \$251,089.33 and an average of \$83,696.44. The current four-attorney payroll is \$377,563.33. Two of the three assistants are below the statewide median minimum salary for staff public defenders, and even the highest-paid assistant remains below the statewide median midpoint and maximum.[1][2]

WORKWEEK CALCULATION Wexford Public Defender attorneys are paid on a 40-hour workweek. Their annual salaries are divided by 2,080 hours for every hourly comparison.

Why the Existing Scale Is Out of Alignment with Standard 8

MIDC Standard 8 is the approved statewide compensation standard addressing economic disincentives and incentives in indigent defense. It provides that reasonable salaries, benefits, and resources should be provided to salaried indigent defense counsel. It further identifies the rates paid by the Michigan Attorney General for Assistant Attorneys General, and the rates of other state offices, as guidance for reasonable compensation.[3]

Measured against the very benchmarks identified by Standard 8, Wexford's current compensation is not reasonable at the experienced levels needed to operate the office. The assistant average is below the median minimum of Michigan employee public defender systems, the top assistant salary is materially below the statewide median maximum, and the Chief salary is below the statewide chief-defender median. The result is substantive noncompliance with Standard 8's compensation recommendation and a continuing inability to demonstrate that Wexford's scale is reasonably aligned with the state legal market.[2][3]

COMPLIANCE FINDING For purposes of Wexford County's FY27 compliance plan, the present attorney scale should be treated as out of compliance with the compensation recommendation in Standard 8 and corrected with the funded FY27 adjustment.

This proposal uses the term 'out of compliance' to describe the objective failure to align with Standard 8's compensation recommendation and designated state benchmarks. It does not represent that MIDC has issued a separate adjudicative finding or sanction based solely on salary.

FY2026 MIDC Statewide Compensation Evidence

MIDC's FY2026 compensation workbook reports the pay structures used by every local indigent defense funding unit. Analysis of the 35 systems employing full-time staff attorneys produces the following statewide medians.[2]

FY26 benchmark	Hourly equivalent	Annual at 2,080 hours	Wexford comparison
Staff attorney median minimum	\$42.80	\$89,024	Wexford average is 6.0% lower
Staff attorney median midpoint	\$48.40	\$100,672	Wexford average is 16.9% lower
Staff attorney median maximum	\$52.51	\$109,221	Wexford highest APD is 14.1% lower
Northern Michigan median midpoint	\$45.62	\$94,890	Wexford average is 11.8% lower
Chief defender median	\$69.16	\$143,853	Wexford Chief is 12.1% lower

Source: Calculated from MIDC's FY2026 Attorney Compensation Structure - All Funding Units. Annual equivalents use 2,080 hours. [2]

The statewide picture is not driven only by large metropolitan offices. The Northern Michigan staff-attorney midpoint is approximately \$94,890. Wexford's average assistant salary is roughly \$11,194 below that regional midpoint. In addition, 31 of the 35 employee systems in the FY26 workbook have salary maximums above Wexford's highest current assistant salary.[2]

Competitive Market: Prosecutor Offices

Prosecutor offices recruit from the same pool of licensed Michigan attorneys, including new lawyers and experienced criminal litigators. Current 2026 postings show that Wexford's assistant public defender minimum is below every external prosecutor starting salary in the comparison group, while most prosecutor offices offer a materially higher experienced ceiling.[4]-[10]

Prosecutor office	2026 posted range	Context	Source
Wexford County Prosecutor	\$62,400-\$93,840	Local criminal-law recruiting market	[4]
Cheboygan County	\$86,000-\$91,700	Northern Michigan	[6]
Grand Traverse County	\$85,951-\$107,464	Mid-level attorney posting	[5]
Ionia County	\$76,674-\$93,912	Smaller office; entry through experienced	[7]
Barry County	\$71,219-\$96,845	County prosecutor office	[8]
Saginaw County	\$82,712-\$119,978	Entry, mid-level, and senior	[9]
Ingham County	\$79,318-\$125,868	Entry-level applicants accepted	[10]

Sources are current 2026 postings published by the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan. Annual ranges are shown as posted. [4]-[10]

The local comparison is especially important. The Wexford County Prosecutor's posted range reaches \$93,840, essentially the same as Wexford's highest current assistant public defender salary of \$93,796.79. That leaves no meaningful salary progression above the local prosecutor ceiling for an experienced public defender, while competing prosecutor offices elsewhere in Michigan advertise experienced salaries above \$100,000 and as high as \$125,868.[4][5][9][10]

Competitive Market: Public Defender Offices

Other Michigan public defender employers are advertising higher entry points and substantially higher ceilings. These are the offices most likely to attract experienced candidates who might otherwise consider relocating to Cadillac.[11]-[15]

Public defender office	2026 posted range	Difference from Wexford
Wexford advertised APD scale	\$65,796-\$93,787	Current reference point
Marquette County senior APD	\$82,597-\$100,755	Northern Michigan; higher experienced ceiling
Eaton County	\$70,886-\$92,144	Higher advertised entry
Muskegon County	\$77,188-\$116,958	Ceiling about \$23,161 higher
Calhoun County	\$80,508-\$113,428	Ceiling about \$19,631 higher
Van Buren County	\$96,674-\$117,845	Entry exceeds Wexford's current highest APD

Sources: Current public defender postings. Marquette's hourly range of \$39.71-\$48.44 was annualized at 2,080 hours. [11]-[15]

Competitive Market: State Police and Assistant Attorneys General

State employment provides another relevant public-sector benchmark. The comparison is not intended to diminish the hazards or responsibilities of law enforcement. It demonstrates the compensation choices available to public-service professionals in Michigan and the difficulty of recruiting licensed attorneys into a rural office at Wexford's current rates.[16]-[18]

State position	Hourly range	40-hour annual equivalent	Key comparison
MSP recruit/probationary trooper	\$26.98-\$39.26	\$56,118-\$81,661	High school diploma/GED; academy required
MSP Trooper E11 / FTO	\$39.26-\$49.77	\$81,661-\$103,522	Top exceeds every current Wexford APD salary
Assistant Attorney General, Staff Attorney 15/16	\$33.53-\$71.64	\$69,742-\$149,011	JD and bar required; Senior 16 at four years

Sources: State of Michigan 2026 job postings. MSP FTO employees may receive an additional 5% premium while training; overtime and other premiums are excluded. [16]-[18]

Connor Shantz's current salary is below the experienced MSP FTO minimum. Rob Haertel's salary is essentially equal to that minimum. Geoff Harrison's salary is below the MSP FTO maximum. Meanwhile, the Staff Attorney 15/16 scale used by the Attorney General reaches \$149,011 - approximately \$55,214 above Wexford's highest assistant salary. Standard 8 expressly directs local systems to use this state attorney compensation as guidance.[1][3][17][18]

Recruitment and Retention Are Compliance Requirements

Northern Michigan has a smaller attorney labor pool, greater travel distances, fewer lateral candidates, and less spousal-employment flexibility than the state's major population centers. A rural office therefore cannot assume that a lower cost of living will offset a materially lower salary. A candidate can remain in public service and earn more in Traverse City, Cheboygan, Marquette, Lansing, Saginaw, Battle Creek, Muskegon, Paw Paw, or state employment. The office must offer a credible career path at the moment the candidate decides whether to apply.

How the Attorney Shortage Is Affecting Wexford Now

The shortage is no longer a prospective concern. When the Office lacks sufficient available staff counsel - whether because of vacancies, conflicts, workload limits, scheduling demands, or the need for counsel with particular qualifications - Wexford must search beyond the local attorney pool. The County is increasingly dependent on attorneys from outside the county to provide representation that cannot be placed locally.[19]

Out-of-county appointments preserve access to counsel, but they are an expensive and fragile safety valve. They can require additional travel time and mileage, complicate confidential client meetings, create scheduling difficulties, reduce availability for emergency or short-notice hearings, and weaken the continuity that comes from counsel who regularly practices in the local courts. The need to look outside Wexford is itself evidence that the local compensation structure is not producing a sufficiently deep and reliable attorney pool.[2][3][19]

How Vacancies Threaten Multiple MIDC Standards

6. **Standard 1 - Education and training.** Turnover removes experienced mentors and requires remaining attorneys to train new lawyers while carrying active caseloads.
7. **Standard 2 - Initial client interview.** Vacancies make it harder to complete prompt confidential interviews, particularly for in-custody clients and clients held outside the county.
8. **Standard 4 - Counsel at first appearance and critical stages.** A thin roster reduces the Office's ability to provide dependable arraignment, hearing, trial, and emergency coverage.
9. **Standard 6 - Workload control.** Every vacancy reallocates cases to the remaining attorneys, increasing the risk that workloads interfere with effective representation.
10. **Standard 7 - Qualifications.** Low experienced-attorney pay limits the Office's ability to assign high-severity and life-offense cases to counsel whose training and trial experience match the case.
11. **Standard 8 - Compensation.** Below-market salaries are an economic disincentive to accepting or continuing indigent defense employment.

Standard 8 Contract-Counsel Rates and the Cost of Instability

Standard 8 requires assigned and contract counsel to receive reasonable compensation for all work necessary to provide quality representation, including work performed outside court, and requires reimbursement of reasonable case-related expenses. MIDC's cost-of-living-adjusted FY26 minimum hourly rates establish three compensation levels.[2][3]

Contract-counsel case level	FY26 minimum hourly rate	Illustrative cost for 10 hours	Multiple of Wexford's highest current APD hourly rate
Misdemeanor	\$127.24	\$1,272.40	2.8 times
Non-life felony	\$140.63	\$1,406.30	3.1 times
Life-offense felony	\$153.38	\$1,533.80	3.4 times

Source: MIDC FY2026 minimum rates under Standard 8. The 10-hour examples exclude mileage, other reimbursable expenses, and any additional case time. Multiples compare each rate with Wexford's highest current assistant public defender hourly equivalent of \$45.09. [1]-[3]

These rates show why out-of-county contracting cannot be treated as a low-cost substitute for a stable local staff office. Ten compensable hours cost at least \$1,272.40 for a misdemeanor, \$1,406.30 for a non-life felony, and \$1,533.80 for a life-offense felony, before mileage and other reimbursable expenses. By comparison, Wexford's current salaried assistants have hourly equivalents of \$36.26 to \$45.09, and the requested FY27 assistant placements have hourly equivalents of approximately \$43.27 to \$52.88.[1][2]

The comparison is not a claim that every salaried hour and every contract billable hour are interchangeable. Salaried staff also provide daily court coverage, supervision, institutional knowledge, client communication, administrative work, and availability that cannot be captured in a single invoice. The point is that recruiting and retaining a stable staff office remains the more dependable and cost-effective delivery model, while repeated out-of-county appointments expose the County to higher hourly rates, travel costs, and less predictable availability.

OPERATIONAL CONCLUSION Competitive compensation is not an optional benefit. It is the staffing infrastructure required to control workloads under Standard 6, assign qualified counsel, meet clients promptly, cover every critical stage, reduce dependence on out-of-county attorneys, and avoid more expensive vacancy-driven contracting.

Standard 6: Why the Shortage Cannot Be Absorbed by Existing Staff

Standard 6 requires each indigent-defense attorney's caseload to allow the time and effort necessary for effective representation. It applies to defender offices, contract attorneys, and assigned counsel, and it requires mixed caseloads - including noncriminal matters - to be evaluated proportionally. Wexford therefore cannot cure a recruiting shortage simply by distributing every unfilled, conflict, overflow, or new juvenile assignment among the attorneys who remain.[3]

Every unfilled position or unavailable local assignment increases pressure on the remaining roster. If cases are absorbed internally without adequate staffing, the Office risks excessive workloads, delayed client contact, reduced preparation time, fewer meaningful client meetings, and less capacity for investigation, motion practice, negotiation, and trial. If cases are sent outside the county, the County incurs the higher Standard 8 contract rates and the operational disadvantages described above. Competitive compensation is the practical intervention that addresses both sides of the problem: it enlarges the qualified local pool and protects the remaining attorneys from workloads that jeopardize effective representation.[2][3][19]

Juvenile Matters Beginning October 1, 2027

Beginning October 1, 2027, the Wexford Public Defender Office will add juvenile matters to its responsibilities. This is a foreseeable increase in the Office's scope of representation and will require additional attorney time for appointments, court appearances, detention-related matters, confidential client contact, communication with parents or guardians where appropriate, discovery review, investigation, case preparation, and coordination with other professionals and agencies.[19]

The Office should not wait until the effective date to begin building capacity. Recruiting an attorney to Cadillac, completing hiring and onboarding, providing training and supervision, and developing the experience needed for effective juvenile representation take time. Stabilizing the salary structure in FY27 gives Wexford a realistic opportunity to retain its current lawyers and recruit additional qualified counsel before the juvenile caseload arrives.

The FY27 compensation request addresses the immediate recruitment and retention foundation. Any additional positions, operating costs, or case-specific resources required for the juvenile expansion can be identified through the applicable future compliance-plan and County budget process. Delaying the compensation correction, however, would leave the Office entering that process with the same depleted local attorney pool it is already experiencing.

CAPACITY TIMELINE The October 1, 2027 juvenile expansion converts today's recruitment problem into a fixed implementation deadline. A competitive FY27 salary structure is the first step toward having trained, experienced, and locally available attorneys in place when that responsibility begins.

Proposed FY27 Compensation Structure

The proposed bands create a transparent career ladder and enough room for recruitment, progression, and retention. They are calibrated to the FY26 MIDC statewide data and Northern Michigan competition, while remaining below many upper-end prosecutor, public defender, and state attorney opportunities. The accompanying FY27 APD I-III wage-scale workbook uses six steps - Start through Year 5 - and converts every salary to an hourly equivalent using Wexford's 40-hour, 2,080-hour work year.

Classification	Proposed FY27 band	Market rationale
Assistant Public Defender I	\$85,000-\$97,500	Recruitment range centered near statewide median minimum
Assistant Public Defender II	\$95,000-\$108,000	Progression through statewide median midpoint
Assistant Public Defender III / Senior	\$108,000-\$120,000	Experienced range at and above statewide median maximum
Chief Public Defender	\$145,000-\$155,000	Anchored to statewide chief-defender median

Market targets are based primarily on FY26 MIDC employee-system compensation, with corroboration from current county prosecutor, public defender, MSP, and Attorney General postings. [2]-[18]

Requested FY27 Individual Placements

Employee	Current salary	Requested FY27	Increase	Increase %	Benchmark placement
Robert Champion	\$126,474.00	\$145,000.00	\$18,526.00	14.6%	Chief median
Geoff Harrison	\$93,796.79	\$110,000.00	\$16,203.21	17.3%	Experienced maximum
Rob Haertel	\$81,872.54	\$100,000.00	\$18,127.46	22.1%	Staff midpoint
Connor Shantz	\$75,420.00	\$90,000.00	\$14,580.00	19.3%	Staff minimum
TOTAL	\$377,563.33	\$445,000.00	\$67,436.67	17.9%	FY27 funded

The total above reflects base salary only. Associated employer costs are included in the FY27 MIDC budget. Final payroll coding and classification placement may be confirmed administratively by Human Resources without reducing the approved salaries.

The requested placements are deliberately tied to the state benchmarks. Connor Shantz's proposed \$90,000 salary is approximately the statewide median minimum. Rob Haertel's proposed \$100,000 salary is approximately the statewide median midpoint. Geoff Harrison's proposed \$110,000 salary is approximately the statewide median maximum. Robert Champion's proposed \$145,000 salary is approximately the statewide chief-defender median. This alignment is simple to explain, easy to administer, and supported by the official FY26 statewide evidence.[2]

FY27 Funding and County Fiscal Impact

FUNDED REQUEST All requested salary increases and associated employer costs are included in and covered by the FY27 MIDC compliance-plan budget. Approval implements funded indigent-defense compensation and does not require the Office to reduce services or exceed its FY27 MIDC budget.

The Board is therefore not being asked to choose between compensation and representation services. It is being asked to authorize the County to use FY27 indigent-defense funding for the purpose directly connected to Standard 8: maintaining reasonable attorney compensation. Continued funding in future fiscal years will remain subject to the County's annual MIDC compliance plan, grant award, and budget process.

Recommended Board Findings

- 12.The Wexford/Missaukee Regional Public Defender Office performs a constitutionally required county function and must maintain a sufficient number of qualified attorneys.
- 13.The Office's present assistant-attorney average of \$83,696.44 is below the FY26 statewide median minimum of approximately \$89,024 and below the Northern Michigan midpoint of approximately \$94,890.
- 14.The Chief Public Defender's present salary of \$126,474 is below the FY26 statewide chief-defender median of approximately \$143,853.
- 15.Current prosecutor, public defender, MSP, and Attorney General compensation demonstrates an active public-sector market in which experienced candidates can earn materially more than Wexford presently offers.
- 16.The current shortage of qualified local attorneys is requiring Wexford to seek representation outside the county, increasing cost, travel, scheduling complexity, and operational risk.
- 17.The current scale is out of alignment with the reasonable-compensation recommendation and state-office guidance contained in MIDC Standard 8.
- 18.Competitive compensation is necessary to recruit and retain attorneys and thereby support compliance with MIDC training, timely-client-contact, first-appearance, workload, qualification, and compensation standards.
- 19.The addition of juvenile matters beginning October 1, 2027 creates a fixed deadline for recruiting, retaining, training, and preparing sufficient attorney capacity.
- 20.The requested adjustment is included in and covered by the FY27 MIDC compliance-plan budget.

Proposed Motion

MOTION I move that the Wexford County Board of Commissioners approve the FY27 Public Defender attorney compensation bands and the following annual salary placements: Robert Champion at \$145,000; Geoff Harrison at \$110,000; Rob Haertel at \$100,000; and Connor Shantz at \$90,000, effective October 1, 2026, or the first payroll period of the FY27 MIDC grant, as administratively appropriate; and further authorize the County Administrator and Human Resources Department to complete the necessary payroll and budget actions, with the salary adjustments and associated employer costs charged to the FY27 MIDC-funded indigent defense budget.

Conclusion

The requested action is measured, evidence-based, and funded. It does not place Wexford at the top of the market. It places the Office near the statewide benchmarks that MIDC itself publishes and near the public-sector employers competing for the same attorneys. The correction will give Wexford a credible opportunity to recruit in Cadillac, retain trained trial lawyers, preserve institutional knowledge, control workloads, reduce dependence on out-of-county representation, prepare for juvenile matters beginning October 1, 2027, and meet its constitutional and MIDC obligations.

Without the adjustment, the County accepts an avoidable risk: continued below-market recruiting, loss of experienced counsel, increased workloads, reduced continuity, greater reliance on higher-cost out-of-county contract representation, and inadequate lead time for the juvenile expansion. With the adjustment, the Board can use already-budgeted FY27 funds to stabilize an essential public safety and constitutional service. Approval is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Champion

Chief Public Defender

Wexford/Missaukee Regional Public Defender Office

Sources and Methodology

Salary comparisons were compiled from official FY2026 MIDC materials and public 2026 employer postings available through August 7, 2026. Wexford Public Defender salaries and all hourly-to-annual equivalents use a 40-hour workweek and 2,080 hours per year. Posted ranges may not reflect an incumbent's actual step, overtime, premium pay, benefit value, or negotiated placement.

- [1] Wexford County Public Defender payroll figures supplied for this proposal
- [2] [Michigan Indigent Defense Commission, FY2026 Attorney Compensation Structure - All Funding Units](#)
- [3] [Michigan Indigent Defense Commission, Minimum Standards for Indigent Criminal Defense Services, Standard 8](#)
- [4] [Wexford County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, July 2026](#)
- [5] [Grand Traverse County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, May 2026](#)
- [6] [Cheboygan County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, July 2026](#)
- [7] [Ionia County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, August 2026](#)
- [8] [Barry County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, June 2026](#)
- [9] [Saginaw County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, April 2026](#)
- [10] [Ingham County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney posting, July 2026](#)
- [11] [Marquette County Senior Assistant Public Defender posting, March 2026](#)
- [12] [Eaton County Assistant Public Defender posting, July 2026](#)
- [13] [Muskegon County Assistant Public Defender posting, April 2026](#)
- [14] [Calhoun County Assistant Public Defender posting, FY2025-26](#)
- [15] [Van Buren County Assistant Public Defender posting, 2026](#)
- [16] [Michigan State Police Trooper / Police Officer statewide posting, March 2026](#)
- [17] [Michigan State Police Trooper E11 / Field Training Officer posting, March 2026](#)
- [18] [Michigan Department of Attorney General, Staff Attorney 15/16 posting, June 2026](#)
- [19] Wexford Public Defender Office operational information regarding attorney shortages, out-of-county appointments, and the addition of juvenile matters beginning October 1, 2027

Calculation Notes

- 21. Current assistant average: $(\$93,796.79 + \$81,872.54 + \$75,420.00) / 3 = \$83,696.44$.
- 22. Current total base payroll: $\$126,474.00 + \$93,796.79 + \$81,872.54 + \$75,420.00 = \$377,563.33$.
- 23. Proposed total base payroll: $\$145,000 + \$110,000 + \$100,000 + \$90,000 = \$445,000$.
- 24. Requested base-salary adjustment: $\$445,000 - \$377,563.33 = \$67,436.67$.
- 25. Illustrative 10-hour contract costs: $\$127.24 \times 10 = \$1,272.40$; $\$140.63 \times 10 = \$1,406.30$; and $\$153.38 \times 10 = \$1,533.80$.
- 26. Contract-rate multiples use Wexford's highest current assistant hourly equivalent of \$45.09: 2.8 times, 3.1 times, and 3.4 times, rounded to one decimal place.
- 27. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place; annual equivalents are rounded to the nearest dollar unless cents are shown.

Wexford County FY27 Public Defender Attorney Wage Scale

Four-level salary ladder • APD I–III and Chief Public Defender • 40 hours/week, 52 weeks/year, 2,080 hours/year

Workweek assumptions	Value
Hours per week	40
Weeks per year	52
Annual work hours	2,080

Required calculation basis

All Wexford Public Defender attorney hourly equivalents equal annual salary ÷ 2,080, based on a 40-hour workweek and 52 weeks per year.

Step	APD I Annual	APD I Hourly	APD II Annual	APD II Hourly	APD III Annual	APD III Hourly	Chief Annual	Chief Hourly
Start	\$85,000	\$40.87	\$95,000	\$45.67	\$108,000	\$51.92	\$145,000	\$69.71
Year 1	\$87,500	\$42.07	\$97,500	\$46.88	\$110,000	\$52.88	\$147,000	\$70.67
Year 2	\$90,000	\$43.27	\$100,000	\$48.08	\$112,500	\$54.09	\$149,000	\$71.63
Year 3	\$92,500	\$44.47	\$102,500	\$49.28	\$115,000	\$55.29	\$151,000	\$72.60
Year 4	\$95,000	\$45.67	\$105,000	\$50.48	\$117,500	\$56.49	\$153,000	\$73.56
Year 5	\$97,500	\$46.88	\$108,000	\$51.92	\$120,000	\$57.69	\$155,000	\$74.52

Administration note

The salary schedule establishes four classifications and progression steps, including the Chief Public Defender. Initial placement and advancement remain subject to Board approval, applicable County personnel policies,

FY27 Proposed Attorney Placements

Requested salaries tied to the APD I-III and Chief Public Defender ladder and statewide FY26 compensation benchmarks

Current total payroll	Proposed total payroll	Annual base-pay adjustment	Adjustment percentage
\$377,563.33	\$445,000.00	\$67,436.67	17.9%

Employee	Current Salary	Current Hourly	FY27 Classification / Step	Requested FY27	FY27 Hourly	Increase	Increase %
Robert Champion	\$126,474.00	\$60.80	Chief Public Defender / Start	\$145,000.00	\$69.71	\$18,526.00	14.6%
Geoff Harrison	\$93,796.79	\$45.09	APD III / Year 1	\$110,000.00	\$52.88	\$16,203.21	17.3%
Rob Haertel	\$81,872.54	\$39.36	APD II / Year 2	\$100,000.00	\$48.08	\$18,127.46	22.1%
Connor Shantz	\$75,420.00	\$36.26	APD I / Year 2	\$90,000.00	\$43.27	\$14,580.00	19.3%

Funding and implementation

The requested base-salary adjustment is \$67,436.67. All requested increases and associated employer costs are included in and covered by the FY27 MIDC compliance-plan budget. Every proposed placement links directly to the FY27 Wage Scale sheet; the Chief Public Defender scale is anchored to the FY26 statewide chief-defender median.

FY26 MIDC Compensation Benchmarks

Reference points supporting the proposed Wexford APD I-III and Chief Public Defender salary ladder

Benchmark	Hourly	Annual at 2,080	Wexford / proposal use	Source	URL
Staff attorney median minimum	\$42.80	\$89,024	APD I recruitment anchor	MIDC FY2026 compensation workbook	https://michiganidc.gov/overview-of-compensation-for-trial-court-level-assigned-counsel-in-fy2026/
Staff attorney median midpoint	\$48.40	\$100,672	APD II progression anchor	MIDC FY2026 compensation workbook	https://michiganidc.gov/overview-of-compensation-for-trial-court-level-assigned-counsel-in-fy2026/
Staff attorney median maximum	\$52.51	\$109,221	APD III experienced anchor	MIDC FY2026 compensation workbook	https://michiganidc.gov/overview-of-compensation-for-trial-court-level-assigned-counsel-in-fy2026/
Northern Michigan median midpoint	\$45.62	\$94,890	Northern Michigan recruitment context	MIDC FY2026 compensation workbook	https://michiganidc.gov/overview-of-compensation-for-trial-court-level-assigned-counsel-in-fy2026/
Chief defender median	\$69.16	\$143,853	Chief Public Defender anchor	MIDC FY2026 compensation workbook	https://michiganidc.gov/overview-of-compensation-for-trial-court-level-assigned-counsel-in-fy2026/

Standard 8 reference

MIDC Standard 8 recommends reasonable salaries, benefits, and resources for salaried indigent-defense counsel and identifies Michigan Assistant Attorney General and other state-office rates as compensation guidance. Standard source: <https://michiganidc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MIDC-Standards-Complete-October-2023.pdf>