

January 5, 2021

Chairman Michael Murphy  
200 E. Wells Rm 205  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Chairman Murphy:

I have had the opportunity to work with Attorney Fessahaye in her role as Administrator of Adult Institutions with the Department of Corrections (DOC) for almost two years. I have always found Attorney Fessahaye to be professional, responsive and most importantly, respectful of the sensitive and difficult issues we have to work through.

As the State Public Defender, our staff have a number of clients that are residing in prisons throughout Wisconsin. On a regular basis, we have issues that arise from technical difficulties such as access to clients as well as issues that our clients may be personally experiencing. Nothing could have prepared us for the changes we would have to make because of the pandemic. Our clients rights, due process, and liberty interests do not take a break during a global health crisis. Courts continue to meet, clients have hearing dates and more than ever, clients are desperate for communications with their attorneys. Attorney Fessahaye worked tirelessly and expeditiously to respond to our concerns and provide assistance whenever possible for us to continue to do our critically important work.

Attorney Fessahaye never shied away from or postponed a difficult conversation and was willing to problem solve and work through the constant and every changing issues that arose. She did this with patience and professionalism and a sense of cooperation and communication.

Prior to Attorney Fessahaye's role as Administrator, she worked in the Office of Legal Counsel for DOC. Again, our agency had numerous opportunities to work with this division within DOC. While I did not work directly with Attorney Fessahaye, public defender staff always reported a cooperative and professional relationship with her. While we did not always agree with DOC's position, we always felt Attorney Fessahaye listened and looked to problem solve with us in a collaborative manner.

While her expertise is certainly a loss for us, her talent, professionalism and experience is a gain for the people of Milwaukee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelli Thompson", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kelli Thompson  
Wisconsin State Public Defender

CC: Ald. Spiker, Vice-Chair  
Ald. Coggs  
Ald. Kovac  
Ald. Zamarripa