



MILWAUKEE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Supervisor Joseph J. Czarnezki - District II

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Czarnezki Proposal for Civil Forfeiture Right to Counsel Adopted by Finance Committee

MILWAUKEE – On Tuesday the County Board’s Finance Committee recommended a [budget amendment](#) by County Supervisor Joseph J. Czarnezki directing the Office of Corporation Counsel to issue an RFP to help develop, implement, and administer a pilot civil forfeiture Right to Counsel program for cases involving Milwaukee County General Ordinance violations.

“Providing legal counsel in civil forfeiture cases is one thing Milwaukee County can do to advance equity and justice,” said Supervisor Czarnezki. “I want to thank my colleagues on the Finance Committee for their support. I urge all members of the County Board and all citizens of Milwaukee County to look for ways to make our county a better, more just, and equitable place to live.”

The amendment appropriates \$50,000 to retain outside counsel to represent indigent clients and help collect data to determine if the pilot should be continued in future years.

In 2020, there were 24,768 contested and uncontested forfeiture cases filed in Milwaukee County, not including juvenile violations. Because county ordinance cases are civil cases and not criminal cases, people are not entitled to appointed lawyers if they are indigent.

“People arrested on ordinance violations are expected to represent themselves, even if they have absolutely no idea how the legal process works,” added Supervisor Czarnezki. “Meanwhile, Milwaukee County is paying Sheriff’s Deputies to write tickets, trained lawyers to prosecute cases, and agencies to pursue late payments. Most people would not call that justice.”

A conviction for an ordinance violation, although not criminal, may still pose a barrier to employment, housing, or educational opportunities.

Legal Action of Wisconsin has operated a similar program for Milwaukee Municipal Court.

The County Board will hold its [annual public hearing](#) on the budget on Monday, November 1. Members of the public who wish to speak can register at the [Board of Supervisors homepage](#).

The County Board will meet to adopt the annual budget on [Monday, November 8](#).

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