



Missouri House of Representatives

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 17, 2025

CONTACT: Majority Communications
Director Stephanie Whitaker
(573) 751-0907
Stephanie.Whitaker@House.Mo.Gov

Speaker Jon Patterson and House Republican Leadership Stand with House Budget Committee in Public Defender Controversy

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Republican leaders in the Missouri House today voiced their support for the House Budget Committee's stance against the Office of Public Defenders' decision to employ an individual convicted in connection to a violent crime.

House Speaker Jon Patterson, Speaker Pro Tem Chad Perkins, Majority Floor Leader Alex Riley, Assistant Majority Floor Leader Lane Roberts, Majority Whip Hardy Billington, Majority Caucus Chair Bennie Cook, and Majority Caucus Secretary Ann Kelley issued the following joint statement regarding **a recent House Budget Committee hearing and testimony from the Office of Public Defenders**—particularly concerning the employment of an individual convicted in connection with the 2007 murder of 9-year-old Rowan Ford:

"The continued employment of David Spears within the Missouri State Public Defender's Office is a serious lapse in judgment that undermines public trust in our institutions. While we believe in second chances, there are clear and reasonable limits—especially when it comes to those who have pled guilty to hindering the prosecution of a heinous crime like the murder of Rowan Ford.

We fully support Representative Dirk Deaton and the members of the House Budget Committee in their efforts to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used responsibly and in a way that reflects the values and expectations of Missourians.

We stand with our colleagues in calling for the Public Defender's Office to rectify this situation immediately. If they fail to do so, we support any and all measures, including the rejection of their budget request, to hold them accountable. Justice for Rowan Ford and her family must come first."

-###-