

**AB 171 (BEALL)**  
**PUBLIC INTEREST ATTORNEY**  
**LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM**  
**As Introduced- Thursday, January 23, 2007**  
**Fact Sheet**

**PROBLEM**

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The high tuition at law school can leave a graduate with over \$100,000 in debt. Since public interest attorneys make significantly less money than attorneys in the private sector recent graduates may be forced to take private sector jobs in order to pay off their school debt.

**THIS BILL**

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Assembly Bill (AB) 171 would include in the Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Program those who serve in the 58 offices of the County Counsel. These attorneys protect abused and neglected children, assist indigent and impaired adults, and represent and advise the counties in legal matters. They are public interest lawyers in every sense of the term.

AB 171 will also update the California Legal Codes to bring the Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Program into line with other existing loan assumption programs like the Assumption Program of Loans for Education (APLE). This will make the program manageable by the Student Aid Commission if it is funded.

**SUMMARY**

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A recent study by the American Bar Association found that law school debt prevented 66% of law school graduates from even considering a career as a public interest attorney. This includes district attorneys, public defenders, legal aid, and civil attorneys that make significantly less than their private law counterparts. These attorneys prosecute criminals, defend the innocent, assist the poor, and advise the government. Without these attorneys, our society could not function.

In 2001, AB 935 (Hertzberg) established the Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Program to encourage new law school graduates to take jobs in the public sector. The bill allowed for up to \$11,000 in loan assistance spread over four years.

Since 1988 nine states, including California, have enacted versions of a Loan Repayment Program for public interest attorneys. Many of these programs include deputy district attorneys, public defenders, and civil government attorneys in their definition of public interest lawyer.

**COMMENTS**

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"Public interests attorneys are essential to ensuring justice for all because public interest attorneys help the most vulnerable in our society navigate our legal system."

**STATUS/VOTES**

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- Amended March 22, 2007
- Introduced January 23, 2007

**SUPPORT**

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- California State Association of Counties (sponsor)
- County Counsel Association of California
- Legal Aid Association of California
- Legal Aid Society
- Child Care Law Center
- Homeless Action Center
- Western Center on Law and Poverty
- Child Support Directors Association of California
- Public Law Center
- Uncommon Good
- Impact Fund
- Regional Council of Rural Counties

**OPPOSITION**

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- None on file

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**Version:** April 4, 2007