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The Honorable Justice Charles W. Johnson  
Washington Supreme Court  
Temple of Justice  
PO Box 40929  
Olympia, WA 98504-0929

**Re: Comments on Proposed Amendments to CrRLJ 4.1**

Dear Justice Johnson,


I am writing on behalf of the Washington Defender Association (WDA) to express our support for the Washington State Bar Association's comments on the District and Municipal Court Judge's Association's proposed revision to CrRLJ 4.1. WDA participated in developing the unanimous recommendations by the WSBA's Council for Public Defense to support the rule change with the additional revisions that would clarify and strengthen the proposed change.

The right to counsel is a cornerstone of our judicial system and should not be waived without a thorough inquiry and finding that the person has made a knowing, voluntary, and intelligent waiver of counsel. Convictions for misdemeanor offenses often carry severe consequences, many of which are not apparent to unrepresented defendants. Sentences that do not initially include incarceration can lead to extensive incarceration if probation is violated. Guilty pleas can lead to deportation, a loss of student loans, inability to join the military or obtain employment, or restrictions on public housing or other benefits. Counsel is indispensable in helping defendants understand their rights, the sufficiency of the charges, and the potential consequences of a guilty plea. Neither the prosecutor nor the court can provide that counsel.

We urge the court to adopt the proposed rule with WSBA's proposed amendments.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Christie Hedman  
Executive Director