

Washington State Supreme Court
Temple of Justice
Email: supreme@courts.wa.gov

Subject: Comment in Strong Support for National Public Defender Workload Standards

Dear Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed changes to Washington's public defense standards, which seek to address critical issues facing the public defense system.

The current standards place an enormous burden on public defenders, significantly limiting the quality and amount of attention they can provide to any single case. Overwhelming caseloads prevent dedicated attorneys from engaging deeply with each client's circumstances, collecting comprehensive evidence, and developing individualized defense strategies. This situation compromises the standard of representation that is supposed to be afforded to every person under our constitution. By reducing the number of cases public defenders are required to handle, this proposal will allow attorneys the bandwidth to give each client the quality of representation they deserve.

Moreover, current workloads have a detrimental impact on public defenders' longevity in the field. Public defense is challenging and often emotionally taxing work, and the pressure of unsustainable caseloads leads to burnout and high turnover. When experienced attorneys leave, they take with them institutional knowledge and expertise, which are essential for providing effective representation. Lowering caseloads and bolstering support with administrative and investigative personnel will not only enhance the quality of representation but will also lead to the state retaining experienced defenders who contribute invaluable insights and skills to the public defense system.

It is crucial to remember that public defense disproportionately serves individuals from underserved backgrounds. Many of these clients already face systemic biases in the justice system, and the added burden of representation by an overworked attorney only exacerbates these inequities. Ensuring that public defenders have adequate time and resources to dedicate to each case is an essential step in leveling the playing field and upholding the principles of fairness and equality that our legal system strives for.

I urge the Washington State Supreme Court to adopt these proposals to promote a fairer, more sustainable public defense system that serves everyone in the state.

Thank you for considering this public comment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amelia Meier".

Amelia Meier
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