



KENNEWICK POLICE DEPARTMENT

"Committed To Your Safety"

CHIEF OF POLICE
Chris Guerrero

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October 31, 2024

Washington State Supreme Court
P.O. Box 40929 Olympia, WA 98504

Subject: Proposed Revised Standards for Indigent Defense and Caseload Limits

Chief Justice Gonzalez and Associate Justices:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the recently proposed rule change concerning reductions in indigent defense caseload standards. Consequently, I request the Court reject the proposal.

First, I would like to note that I understand and appreciate the need for a healthy public defense system, both here in the City of Kennewick and across Washington State. Public defense is a critical mechanism in protecting citizens' constitutional rights within a criminal justice setting. If there is a problem within the public defense system, then it is the responsibility of both the State and the Court to consider viable options on how to address the issues. However, a blanket reduction in caseload standards simply cannot be the solution Washington State considers.

The proposal to reduce caseloads by approximately 70% causes serious public safety concerns to come to mind because (1) there is not a sufficient workforce to support such a reduction, (2) there is not money to supply the workforce needed, (3) the proposal eliminates other, more reasonable, approaches to addressing the problem, and (4) it ignores the needs and rights of victims of crime. **I am very confident the only guaranteed result (should the rule change be adopted by the Court) is a drastic increase in case dismissals and, therefore, criminals returning to our communities without any accountability.** This is not only profoundly unjust but may very well increase the workload for the officers/deputies in my department/Office needlessly.

As a public servant and a long-time protector of victims, I fear this rule will cause more harm than good. Criminal accountability is a necessary function which local governments are tasked to provide. Accountability for those who commit crimes provides justice to the victims of those crimes and protects the remainder of society from the offender. Accountability also enables opportunities for treatment, recovery, reentry, and redemption, which are services and goals everyone—including proponents and opponents of this rule change—seems to agree are worthwhile. Allowing a rule to take effect when it would knowingly jeopardize victims of crime is unacceptable. There must be another solution. I ask this Court to be a part of finding that better, more workable solution – the one that doesn't sacrifice public safety along the way.

I respectfully ask this Court to reject the proposed rule change and work with stakeholders in finding a productive way to address the concerns underlying the proposal.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Chris Guerrero". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Guerrero" clearly legible.

Chris Guerrero
Chief of Police
Kennewick Police Department