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Subject: FW: CrR 3.1 Indigent Defense Standards
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From: Christine Olson <colson@snocopda.org>
Sent: Thursday, October 31, 2024 5:10 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: CrR 3.1 Indigent Defense Standards

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

Subject: Support for the 2023 National Public Defender Workload Standards

Dear Honorable Justices:

When I was growing up, my dream was to be a lawyer. I didn't know what kind of lawyer, but I did know I was a compassionate, fierce fighter, and that I was going to use these skills to help people who really needed it.

In 2005, while I was still in college, I started working as a receptionist for the Snohomish County Public Defenders Association. Little did I know then, that almost 20 years later, I would still be here today.

As soon as I started working in public defense, I fell in love with it. I knew I had found my home, my dream job, and where I was supposed to be. I knew that my dream was no longer to be just a lawyer, but to be a public defender.

I got my first full caseload as an attorney in 2015 after going to law school at night while still working full-time at the Public Defenders. It was a misdemeanor caseload mostly consisting of fourth degree assaults and DUI's.

Today, I work in our felony unit. I am class A qualified and my caseload, like most

experienced public defenders, consist of murders, sex cases, and violent cases. When my clients are convicted, they do not get a day in jail. They get years.

As I reflect on the past ten years, I can say I have always done my best to be the best lawyer I could be. I have worked 80 + hour weeks on numerous occasions. Before my last trial was over, a felony assault, I had already logged over 200 hours of work. I have missed out on time with my family and friends so I could instead devote my time to my clients, and I do not regret this. My family and friends understand how important my work and my clients are to me.

However, as I reflect on the future, I wonder can I keep this dream alive until I am 65? If I keep working like this, will I even live until I am 65? I look back at the last ten years and how exhausting they have been for me, both physically and mentally, and wonder can I really do this for job for another 25 years? At what point do I draw boundaries? At what point must I put my family first? At what point does my mental and physical health outweigh my love for this job?

The truth is I don't know. Over the years, I have watched too many good lawyers leave public defense. Out of the dozen attorneys I worked with when I started in our misdemeanor unit, one remains at my office. Retirement parties are rare. Goodbyes are not. With the current caseload standards, this job is simply not sustainable and those of us that are successfully sticking it out, are doing so by running ourselves into the ground.

I know there is a public defender shortage and there is concern this problem will get worse if we change the caseload standards. I can however tell you, that I am in the trenches, and from down here, the shortage, especially of class A qualified attorneys, clearly seems to be caused by the ever so many attorneys who are leaving this unsustainable career. Please make it sustainable.

Sincerely,

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