

Dear Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court,

My name is Daisy and I am a Paralegal for the Snohomish County Public Defender Association. I have been working for the Public Defenders for a little over three years now and I have seen and helped so many people from our community that desperately needed our help. Throughout these three years, I have worked in multiple positions (Law Office Assistant, Legal Secretary, Legal Assistant and Paralegal) and have gotten to support many great attorneys.

In my experience, the best public defenders are those who get to know their clients and do everything in their power to help them understand their situation and options. However, when you have a large caseload, it is difficult to give the level of support that our clients deserve. Our defenders truly try their best to give the highest level of representation that they can.

One day, I was attending the 1 PM In-Custody Felony Jail Calendar along with the calendar attorney and she was explaining that she was experiencing severe back pain. Throughout the hour-long calendar, she was on the verge of tears but fighting the pain so that she could be present with her clients. After the calendar was over, she explained that she had developed a painful cyst that had made it difficult to sit and stand. When I asked why she hadn't gone to the doctor to get it checked out, she explained that she was too busy to go to the doctor and that her clients were more important to her. Months later, this attorney left our association to work for a private firm with a smaller workload and higher pay. Although she cared deeply for our clients and loved the work, it was unsustainable for her.

Although this may be shocking to some, it was not shocking to me because so many attorneys I have assisted over the years have put their own needs on the back burner to focus on the needs of their clients. Many of our attorneys love the work that they do and love to help people in our community. However, their large caseloads often make them ignore their own health or home/family life to be able to advocate for our clients. These new workload standards could help so many attorneys have the capacity to both take care of their clients and themselves.

Many of my roles have also been client focused and I have spoken to countless clients on the phone. Many clients I have spoken to have often voiced their frustration that they have been unable to reach their attorney either that day or that they haven't heard back from them. When you are constantly meeting with different clients, running to and from court, staffing cases, preparing for trial, going through discovery and more, it can be difficult to answer every call or text that comes through. Many just do not have the capacity to call back right away, which can cause our clients to become anxious and frustrated.

Our clients deserve the highest quality of legal representation, and I truly believe that these new workload standards will help our defenders have more capacity to advocate for each of their clients.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for considering this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Daisy Santana
Paralegal
Snohomish County Public Defender Association.