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From: Dustin Drenguis <ddrenguis@snocopda.org>
Sent: Friday, October 18, 2024 1:17 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Indigent Defense Standards

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Dear Justices,

I am writing to implore this Court to adopt the proposed changes to the indigent defense standards. I am a public defender for the Snohomish County Public Defender Association and have been practicing public defense for nine years, my entire legal career. When I first started as a public defender, I was one of nine new attorneys to start in my office around the same time. For the most part, they, like me, became lawyers in order to practice indigent defense. It is the career path we choose. However, in my nine years, I have watched colleague after colleague leave public defense because the job requires more than they were able to give. These were talented, passionate Defenders that left for private practice because they knew the time and work it took to competently represent their indigent clients, and knew they were always falling short. Given the sheer volume of cases, public defenders are constantly triaging their caseload to focus on their most pressing matters. Yet the triaging can only be so effective, critical aspects of representation get skipped or our client's pre-trial incarceration is extended.

The current status quo of indigent defense is long past unsustainable and has eroded fundamental rights of our clients. My office has over 70 attorneys. As an Office we celebrate every time a trial is completed within the original speedy trial timeframe because it so rare and requires herculean efforts to get a case prepared that quickly, while triaging other equally pressing matters.

Among that nine-person cohort that started together, only myself and another attorney remain in public defense. Speaking to Defenders statewide, this is not atypical. I would again emphasize, by and large my colleagues that left wanted to continue to work as Defenders. Pass the revision in caseload standards to allow Defenders statewide to continue to practice in this essential part of law and to honor the Constitutional rights of indigent defendants.

With respect,

Dustin Drenguis

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