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To: [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)
Subject: FW: Washington State Proposed Caseload Changed for Public Defense
Date: Monday, September 30, 2024 2:52:16 PM

From: Angous, Elizabeth <Elizabeth.Angous@kingcounty.gov>
Sent: Monday, September 30, 2024 2:52 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Washington State Proposed Caseload Changed for Public Defense

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To Whom it May Concern:

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Under the [current WSBA standards](#), each public defender is expected to handle as many as 150 felony cases or 400 misdemeanor cases a year—a workload that works out to as little as 11 hours per felony, or 4.5 hours per misdemeanor.

I am a Legal Assistant for The Defender Association Division of the King County Department of Public Defense. I have worked with our attorneys for more than a dozen years, and I have seen the toll this work has had on so many compassionate, intelligent, dedicated individuals. I have seen the early mornings and late nights spent at the office, seen them in the office on weekends prepping for another trial, seen lunches eaten at their desks or not at all. These are dedicated people who CARE about their clients. And they are overwhelmed! I cover the felony desk that oversees assignment of felony cases. I know how many cases our attorneys are assigned weekly, monthly, yearly, and the degree of difficulty involved in defending these clients. The time spent on felony cases far exceeds 11 hours per case! Yet they persevere.

I am writing in support of the proposed court rule amendments to codify the WSBA's recently passed criminal caseload standards for public defenders. The WSBA Board of Governors approved these long-overdue updates to the maximum workload public defenders can reasonably be expected to carry.

This is not an academic matter – as unsustainable workloads drive experienced attorneys out of public defense, those who remain are forced to take on more and more cases carrying potential life-altering consequences for our clients. They do everything they can to vindicate our clients' constitutional right to a speedy trial, but

with near-constant trials many clients have no choice but to continue their case – and prolong their pre-trial incarceration – until their latest attorney has capacity to prepare for yet another trial.

I know you will hear from judges and prosecutors claiming that these standards are impractical or would be prohibitively expensive. These concerns are real, but they cannot justify continuing a status quo that makes a mockery out of most clients' constitutional right to a speedy trial. Without the relief that these caseloads would bring, the quality of the representation our public defenders can provide to people who do not have the ability to choose their own lawyer will continue to get worse. At some point, they will reach the same conclusion as many of their former colleagues: that they can no longer practice in public defense while claiming to honor their ethical obligations to their clients.

The Supreme Court did not condition the right to an attorney on a government's ability to afford one when it decided *Gideon v. Wainwright*. They rightly placed the obligation to find funding to pay for a public defender at public expense on the government seeking to take away an indigent person's liberty.

I urge you to adopt the proposed court rules that would codify the WSBA's caseload standards for public defenders.

Thank you for your time and kind consideration.

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