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Subject: FW: Comment in support of passing the Proposed Standards for Indigent Defense
Date: Thursday, September 26, 2024 1:30:25 PM

From: Emilie Eagan <emilieeagan@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 26, 2024 1:26 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Comment in support of passing the Proposed Standards for Indigent Defense

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Dear Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court,

I am writing to strongly urge you to adopt the proposed court rule to codify WSBA's Criminal Caseload Standards for Public Defenders. These caseload standards are essential to protecting and improving the rights of not just the most marginalized and vulnerable but everyone in Washington.

I am an attorney at a civil legal services organization, and my wife is a felony-level public defender with the King County Department of Public Defense. We have both spent our entire legal careers--nearly 20 years each, so far--as public interest attorneys, fighting for equal access to justice for low-income members of our communities. We both want to stay in this work, using our education, our skills, and our experience in the service of protecting the rights and improving the lives of others. And while the funding and structure of my legal services organization allows for a manageable work-life balance, the current caseloads for public defenders make my wife's job incredibly stressful and unsustainable.

The damage of the current, untenable public defender caseloads is readily apparent and felt throughout the community. Participants at every level of the criminal-legal system, including defendants, victims, and witnesses, and the families of these individuals, all experience unnecessary harm when the attorneys appointed to these cases lack the time and resources to do their best. For the attorneys, the physical, mental, and emotional stress of being burdened with impossible loads of essential, high-stakes work is hard to quantify, leading directly to high levels of burnout and turnover. This in turn impacts the efficiency of the already-overburdened courts. This current approach is bad for everyone, and it must change.

I ask the Court to adopt the proposed caseload standards. I ask for this on behalf of my wife and my own family, and of the clients she works so hard for, and for whom she wants to continue to serve.

Thank you for considering,

Emilie Eagan
Seattle, WA