

San Juan County Sheriff's Office  
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Eric Peter, Sheriff  
Mike Hairston, Undersheriff  
Kim Ott, Chief Civil Deputy  
David Alexander, Chief Criminal Deputy

Date October 4, 2024

Washington State Supreme Court

P.O. Box 40929 Olympia, WA 98504

Subject: Proposed Revised Standards for Indigent Defense and Caseload Limits

Chief Justice Gonzalez and Associate Justices:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the recently proposed rule change aimed at reducing indigent defense caseload standards. Subsequently, I request the Court to reject the proposal.

First, I would like to note that I understand and appreciate the need for a healthy public defense system, both here in San Juan County and across Washington State. Public defense is a critical mechanism in protecting citizens' constitutional rights within a criminal justice setting. To the extent that public defense systems should be improved to reflect better working conditions for public defenders and more fairly process accused offenders, then the State should consider solutions for such improvement.

However, a blanket reduction in caseload standards simply cannot be the solution Washington State considers.

The proposal to reduce caseloads by approximately 70% causes some serious public safety concerns to come to mind because (1) there is not a sufficient workforce to support such a reduction, and (2) there is not money to supply the workforce needed. I am very confident the *only* guaranteed result (should the rule change be adopted by the Court) is a drastic increase in case dismissals and, therefore, criminals returning to our communities without any accountability. This is not only profoundly unjust, but may very well increase the workload for the deputies in our Office needlessly.

As a public servant and a long-time protector of victims, I fear this rule will cause more harm than good.

Criminal accountability is a necessary function which local governments are tasked to provide. This is how justice is offered to actual victims and how we proactively protect prospective victims. Allowing a rule to take effect when it would knowingly jeopardize victims of crime is unfathomable. There must be another solution. I would ask this Court to be a part of finding that better, workable solution – the one that doesn't sacrifice public safety along the way.

I respectfully ask this Court to reject the proposed rule change and work with stakeholders in finding a productive way to address the concerns underlying the proposal.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eric Peter".

Sincerely,

Sheriff Eric Peter- San Juan County Sheriff's Office

**From:** [OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK](#)  
**To:** [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)  
**Subject:** FW: SJCSO Statement on Proposed Revised Standards for Indigent Defense and Caseload Limits  
**Date:** Friday, October 4, 2024 4:37:16 PM  
**Attachments:** [SJCSO STATEMENT- Proposed Revised Standards for Indigent Defense and Caseload Limits.pdf](#)  
[image003.png](#)  
[image004.png](#)

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**From:** Eric Peter <[ericp@sanjuancountywa.gov](mailto:ericp@sanjuancountywa.gov)>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 4, 2024 4:30 PM  
**To:** OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <[SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV](mailto:SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV)>  
**Subject:** SJCSO Statement on Proposed Revised Standards for Indigent Defense and Caseload Limits

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Chief Justice Gonzales and Associate Justices,

Please see the attached comment from Sheriff Eric Peter and the San Juan County Sheriff's Office in opposition to the Proposed Revised Standards for Indigent Defense and Caseload Limits. I respectfully request our comments on this proposed revision be added to the list of public comments on this issue.

Sincerely,



**Eric Peter** | *Sheriff*



[San Juan County Sheriff's Office](#)

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