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**Subject:** FW: In Support of Public Defense Caseload Standards  
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**From:** Brunner, Haley <hbrunner@kingcounty.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 7, 2024 9:44 AM  
**To:** OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>  
**Subject:** In Support of Public Defense Caseload Standards

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Dear Honorable Judges,

I writing to express my support for the Proposed Standards for Indigent Defense as a mitigation specialist in King County. Everyday, I witness the detrimental repercussions of high caseloads on our clients, communities, and public defense office. The snowball effect is enormous and leads to staff burnout and turnover. Clients deserve consistency and attuned advocacy from their defense teams. When turnover and burnout occurs, new attorneys and support staff cycle onto cases, which may be otherwise prevented with lower caseloads. Turnover impedes trust and rapport between defense staff and clients, and requires additional time for staff to become familiarized with the cases. Our clients and staff deserve better. I love the work that we do and the clients we serve, and at this rate, it is not sustainable to myself or my colleagues. The urgency and tension in the office is palpable right now, as everyone is navigating inhumanely high caseloads. We need relief in the form of caseload standards for both attorneys and support staff, without which, our office remains on the brink of collapse.

High caseloads trickle down to support staff like myself. As a mitigation specialist, our referrals come from our attorneys. In my division, we only have seven mitigation specialists covering all of our defense practice areas including King County Superior Court; Seattle Municipal Court; Family Defense; Juvenile Court; Contempt of Court cases; and Mental Health Court/Veterans Court. Our work is complex and takes time. We write detailed and well researched mitigation reports for negotiation and sentencing; construct release plans at various stages of the case; do treatment planning and case management; and provide clinical consultation to attorneys for various purposes including competency analysis, expert retainment, and appropriateness of sentencing alternatives or alternative courts. As it stands, it is not humanely possible for our office to juggle of the emergent needs and demands that exist. We do not have the resources, especially sufficient staff, to do true justice to our clients and their cases. It is an impossible situation. Amidst the current circumstances, our clients are suffering the most and our staff are harmed as well.

Public defense has stringent requirements to ensure the government upholds Gideon's Promise. It is part of your important role in Washington State to ensure our residents receive their 6<sup>th</sup> amendment rights.

I love working in public defense and I want to remain in this field. I have only been here for the past two years, but in that time, I have witnessed these dire circumstances. Even in my first week on the job, I was involved in conversations with my peers about the unsustainable nature of this work amidst the current caseload numbers and competing demands. Please accept the proposed rule. We desperately need relief in the form of caseload standards applied to all positions and levels at the office.

Thank you for listening,

Haley Brunner, LIACSW (they/them)

Mitigation Specialist II

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