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**To:** [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Caseload standards for public defense  
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**From:** Hicks, Joshua <Joshua.Hicks@kingcounty.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, September 13, 2024 2:23 PM  
**To:** OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>  
**Subject:** Caseload standards for public defense

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I am writing to advocate the Supreme Court adopt the reduced criminal caseload standards recently passed by the Washington State Bar Association. Revised caseload standards will allow attorneys and their support staff to represent their clients more effectively, giving attention to every case in manner that not only allows for reduced stress among attorneys, but is more humanizing to clients. Public defense can feel like an unending treadmill slog as we struggle to absorb an unreasonable amount of cases. We are often asked to meet demands of prosecutors who lack a visceral sense of the complexities our clients face, or a realistic grasp of the limited capacity community resources have to meet their needs. The sensation of struggling to keep one's head above water is constant, and the motivation to reduce workload just to make our workdays and lives possible is felt by clients who often wait in the countertherapeutic environment of jail just to have a conversation with their attorneys that can be even more frustrating and unsatisfying than the wait. We all tend to feel like cogs in a machine. My colleagues at the King County Department of Public Defense are some of the most dedicated, compassionate people I have ever met. I wish they were more able to serve their clients as well as they would like to. The new caseload standards would be a crucial step toward accomplishing this, and an incentive for more civic-minded attorneys and other professionals to come to and *stay in* public defense, increasing institutional knowledge in the long term.

The recent OpEd in the Seattle Times authored by Judges Young and O'Donnell offers some helpful suggestions about planning for a major change in caseload standards, but appears to oppose the change itself without a complete plan in place ahead of time. However, implementation of new standards will take years of planning regardless. It is not a reckless step into oblivion, it is a process. Effective, humane implementation will depend on how we respond to the change. Much of what Young and O'Donnell suggest (ensuring adequate funding for public defense, reevaluation of prosecutor practice) should be done anyway, and our department has long advocated for several of the proposed "alternatives." I would argue these are not alternatives at all, but parts of a broader process of public defense reform that should *include* reasonable case standards for attorneys.

Please take my comments, and the comments from my colleagues with which your office is no doubt currently being inundated, into account when considering this crucial decision.

Thank you,

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