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Subject: FW: public defense caseload standards
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From: Joshua R. Saunders <josh@marshalldefense.com>
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Subject: public defense caseload standards

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Dear Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court:

I am writing to urge you to adopt the proposed court rule to codify WSBA's Criminal Caseload Standards for Public Defenders. The new standards are critical to protecting the rights of society's most vulnerable and ameliorating the primary and secondary trauma that public defenders labor with daily.

I was a public defender for some fifteen years, routinely carrying a caseload of over 100 cases. (Some of that time was in another state.) I spent nearly four years as a managing attorney at the King County Department of Public Defense, and I want to tell you that I saw the deleterious effects of crushing caseloads—especially for felonies—every day. I watched attorney after attorney burn out after a year or two on a felony caseload. Promising and energetic defenders in the start of their careers would go on FMLA or demand a rotation to a less demanding unit, because they could not cope with the stress from the workload. Even more significantly, they would struggle to do all that they wanted to for their clients. In my experience, the services and advocacy that public defenders provide are often a substantial factor in reducing recidivism. Stretching these resources to the brink, as we have for many years, is short-sighted and unethical.

Public defense has been in crisis for years. I hope that you will take this historic opportunity to make Washington state a national leader in the struggle for humane caseload standards.

Thank you.

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