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**To:** [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Public Comment on Proposed Amendments to Indigent Defense Standards  
**Date:** Friday, November 1, 2024 8:15:17 AM

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**From:** Ridgeway, Karri <[kridgewa@kingcounty.gov](mailto:kridgewa@kingcounty.gov)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 31, 2024 10:19 PM  
**To:** OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <[SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV](mailto:SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV)>  
**Subject:** Public Comment on Proposed Amendments to Indigent Defense Standards

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Justices of the Washington Supreme Court,

I am writing to strongly urge you to adopt the proposed court rule amendments to officially codify WSBA's approved criminal caseload standards for indigent defense. I write to you in my capacity as a public defender, as a supervisor who wants nothing more than to see the attorneys and staff I work with succeed, and as a native Washingtonian who cares deeply not just about my colleagues but about the citizens of our State who deserve so much more than broken criminal justice system that we have allowed to crumble before our eyes.

You have heard countless stories of public defenders across this state who have been forced to pick and choose which clients, which issues, which cases they can give their time to. They work tirelessly to provide effective representation and meaning to enshrined Constitutional rights and yet are always left with a sense of having left someone behind. Imagine spending your life desperately working to patch holes and fix leaks in a boat knowing that you will never not be underwater and those you are trying to help will slip under as well. We labored through years of school and exams to enter into this field. We did not choose it for the prestige or the respect (so many of us have lost count of being asked by a client whether they should hire a "real lawyer") and certainly not for the paychecks. And yet, thousands of public defenders across this State show up every single day to fiercely advocate for the rights that this system would so quickly trample. I've spent my legal career reading opinions of this Court, championing the Constitutional rights of Washington's citizens, yet by and large it is the public defenders in this State who make those Constitutional rights a reality.

I fear that it is all too easy to declare from the safety of the bench that the rights of our clients are sacred and that meaningful and effective legal representation must mean something, but that when the time has come to actually stand up and give life to those statements, this Court will go silent.

I have been a public defender in Washington for seven years. I have spent the past five years practicing as a felony attorney, quickly thrust into a caseload that required experience well beyond my years. I have lived the reality of what it means to be a public defender: sleepless nights, anxiety attacks at the thought of the mountain of work which needs to be tackled, the client visits and calls attempting to explain why (always) I need more time and am still working on their case, the battles with judges in court demanding to know why we can't just hurry up and process these cases, and the constant guilt that I am never and could never be doing enough. The numbers of our caseloads are crushing. I have handled over 100 felony cases at a time. The decades, centuries even, of prison time that I have seen clients receive on my watch is staggering. The number of guilty pleas from clients who just couldn't bear waiting is unconscionable. The numbers of unreturned calls or missed meetings are shameful. These numbers speak for themselves and the story they tell is that *Gideon* means nothing in this current broken system. The studies that support these caseload changes have looked closely at these statistics to show you in the most concrete way possible that the way this system operates is not tenable. I urge you to really look at and consider these statistics, but also to remember that behind each number there is a human being. A person who has a family and a life and a future that our first instinct should always be to protect instead of to quickly condemn.

This year I stepped into a role as a supervising attorney. I did so with a true desire to support and build up our attorneys to help ease even a bit of the burden that so many of them have bravely shared with you. I have to admit that I've looked back at this desire and optimism as a bit naïve. I can spend my days providing support and guidance and reassurance, but without meaningful caseload relief I'm just another temporary patch on this sinking ship and how can I possibly expect these attorneys to not choose to simply jump off at some point? I can never provide the real fix that is needed, less cases and more time.

The opponents of this proposed amendment pose questions and fears of what-ifs. What if we don't have the money? What if we can't find attorneys to fill these roles? These concerns aren't illogical, but knowing what we know and having heard the stories you have of what already is – how can you choose these hypothetical fears over the realities of the broken system that appears before you? How can you not do everything in your power to provide meaningful substance to the rights you all purport to uphold?

I urge you to face the reality that is so clearly before you. To choose to vindicate the rights of Washingtonians and to demand a meaningful fix to our broken and unjust criminal system. Actions speak louder than even the most polished words. Adopt these proposed standards and show us that the words you have all so eloquently spoken aren't empty.

Thank you,

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