

October 31, 2024

Washington State Supreme Court  
PO Box 40929  
Seattle, WA 98504-0929

Re: Comment on Proposed Amendments to the Court's Standards for Indigent Defense

Dear Chief Justice Gonzales and Members of the Court:

I am honored to currently work at Thurston County Public Defense as a Paralegal I in the Adult Felony Division. In this role, I get to mentor other legal support professionals and I get the opportunity to expand my skillset. I love the clients we serve and often feel like I am making a difference in their lives.

I will not be speaking for Thurston County Public Defense specifically, but as a criminal defense paralegal working in Thurston County in general.

I support six full-time felony matter attorneys and one attorney who divides their time 50/50 doing treatment reviews/noncompliance and felony matters. That means at any given time, I could have roughly 300 cases actively being worked on. As part of my job, I am responsible for many tasks. I am choosing to only speak about two to be brief:

1. **Assisting with retaining experts:** Researching expertise, requesting and reviewing CVs, setting up conferences, requesting funding and purchase order numbers for billing, providing documents to the experts to review, tracking deadlines and outstanding reports, drafting pleadings and internal documents associated with experts, and other misc. tasks.
2. **Discovery organization and digestion:** Organizing the discovery we receive in the many different forms it comes in from the Prosecutor's Office (body worn cameras, dash cameras, video/audio statements, 911 calls, written reports, photos, medical records, etc.) We also seek out our own discovery to aid in our client's defense which requires organizing. Additionally, all this information needs to be digested, processed, and easily identified for the attorneys I support. This is done by creating indexes, bates stamping, relabeling items, drafting supplemental discovery demands for the attorneys to review for items we are missing, drafting subpoenas, etc. Body worn cameras and dash cameras are often capturing the same information, but from different points of view and capture hours of video.

We are appointed dozens of serious violent offenses every year. This year alone, the number of homicides our clients have been accused of has impacted my mental health in ways I was not prepared. It has impacted all of us in the criminal defense field in this manner and we are barely surviving. I am lead paralegal for at least nine active homicide cases and the massive amount of discovery that is associated with those cases. There are also multiple experts that need to be retained and provided discovery and due dates tracked. Our clients are often held without bail or bail is set astronomically high for these charges. Even as a full-time county employee, I would not be able to pay the amount that is being set and our clients are found to be indigent. Clients are also mentally unwell and we are their only source of hope and connection to the outside. The professional staff are on the front lines taking these calls day in and day out. Our clients are high needs, call often, and are angry because their case is not

moving quickly and honestly, they have every right to be. Their life is at stake and are only ACCUSED of these charges.

The way things are currently with the standards for indigent defense is not realistic or sustainable. I personally know that burn out is happening daily, attorneys are having strokes in their offices, and attorneys are having to drink before bed in order to sleep at night. Professional staff are subject to the same discovery and the same violence as the attorneys. I can only imagine how my peers are handling the stress from the crushing caseloads and expectations.

We need updated and realistic standards that support and foster effective representation for our clients. We need the ability to take an hour to go to the doctor's office instead of putting our physical, emotional, and mental health on the backburner because there isn't enough of us to get everything done in a day. We need the ability to go to trainings to keep up and get educated on the everchanging technology that we are receiving in discovery. We are waving our SOS flag and are asking for help. I specifically am asking for help for my coworkers and those that are to come behind me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Katie Colacurcio