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From: Kimberly D. Ambrose <kambrose@uw.edu>
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Justices —

I urge you to adopt the public defense standards recommended by the Washington State Bar Association. I have served as a public defender in King County, Washington (1993-99), on the WSBA Council on Public Defense (UW representative), and on the King County Public Defense Advisory Board. I currently direct the University of Washington School of Law Race and Justice Clinic where for the past several years we have provided pro bono post-conviction representation to indigent individuals across Washington State. We have reviewed many cases where under-resourced public defense attorneys represent youth charged with serious crimes resulting in life and long sentences. I also teach Professional Responsibility and Juvenile Justice.

Reduced caseloads as proposed by the standards are critical for two reasons:

(1) The consequences of an underfunded indigent defense system on criminal legal system participants are costly — particularly to youth and their families. We have seen the consequences of high caseloads on the lives of our clients, on survivors and others who are impacted by the criminal and juvenile legal systems. We have regularly met with youth in prison where we have consistently heard about how their experiences with their public defenders impact how they view the legal system as a whole. When children are charged with crimes (in juvenile or adult court) they face lengthy delays where they often remain in youth jails for months to resolve their cases. The costs of overworked underfunded defense attorneys are born by more than the public defenders themselves or the courts. An under-resourced public defense system significantly harms young people and their communities.

(2) The current system is unsustainable. I have been teaching law students for more than 20 years, many of whom aspire to be public defenders. I work hard to inspire and encourage them to pursue what I believe is a fulfilling, challenging and rewarding career. But increasingly, our students are

uninterested in careers that are not sustainable for them, i.e. careers that will negatively impact their health and their relationships. As an ethics professor, I believe this is a very good thing. The only way to maintain a pipeline of public defenders is through addressing the structural problems in the provision of public defense services, particularly caseloads.

Thank you

Kim Ambrose

Teaching Professor

Director, Race and Justice Clinic

University of Washington School of Law

(In my personal capacity, and not on behalf of UW Law).