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To: [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)
Subject: FW: Proposed Amendments to the Standards for Indigent Defense, CrR 3.1, CrRLJ 3.1, JuCR 9.2
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From: Laura Martin <lmartin@snocopda.org>
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To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Proposed Amendments to the Standards for Indigent Defense, CrR 3.1, CrRLJ 3.1, JuCR 9.2

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Dear Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court,

I am writing to you as a public defender with 22 years of experience who is deeply invested in the integrity and effectiveness of our criminal legal system. My extensive career in this field has provided me with a profound understanding of the challenges we face as public defenders, and I wholeheartedly support the proposed adoption of revised public defense caseload standards. I urge you to consider the pressing need for these changes based on both my experiences and the realities faced by my colleagues and clients alike.

The current state of public defense is in crisis. Surveys consistently show that excessive workloads deter new attorneys from entering this field and drive experienced defenders away. Many of my colleagues, who have dedicated their lives to public service, are leaving due to overwhelming caseloads, inadequate compensation, and insufficient support. The proposed standards not only aim to lower these burdens but also require fair compensation for all public defense providers, which is vital for attracting and retaining skilled attorneys to do this important work.

Throughout my two decades in this role, I have witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects of excessive caseloads on both defenders and our clients. The ethical obligations we hold cannot be met under the current standards, which were established nearly 50 years ago. Since then, significant changes in criminal law, forensics, and technology have further complicated our work. The findings from the 2023 National Public Defense Workload Study (NPDWS) underscore the untenable situation we face.

For example, under the current limit of 400 misdemeanors per year, each case receives less than five hours of dedicated time. This is simply insufficient for meaningful client engagement, comprehensive discovery review, thorough investigation, and adequate preparation for court proceedings. As a result, many clients are unable to receive the representation they deserve. The same applies to felony cases, where the limit of 150 cases provides fewer than 11 hours per case—which is impossible when complex trials can demand many months, sometimes years, of preparation and attention.

Additionally, the inconsistent application of these standards across Washington leads to inequitable access to justice. Some jurisdictions benefit from lower workloads and better support staff, while others are overwhelmed. Establishing uniform standards will promote fairness in the provision of public defense across our diverse state.

The revised standards also promise to increase professional support staff, including investigators and social workers, who are crucial for effective representation. The proposed changes in qualification requirements will empower defenders to handle the most serious cases with the skill and dedication our clients need and deserve.

As public defenders, our mission is to ensure that every individual receives a fair trial and effective representation. The revised caseload standards are not merely a proposal; they are a necessary step towards restoring balance and justice in our system. I urge you to adopt these revised standards to help us better serve our clients and uphold the principles of our legal system.

Thank you for considering this urgent matter.

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