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Subject: FW: Letter in support of Reduced Caseload Standards
Date: Wednesday, September 25, 2024 3:55:07 PM

From: Swope, Leah <lswope@kingcounty.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, September 25, 2024 3:54 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Letter in support of Reduced Caseload Standards

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Dear Washington Supreme Court,

I am writing in strong support of the proposed court rule amendments that would implement new caseload standards adopted by the WSBA, reducing caseloads for public defenders. I've worked as a paralegal in public defense for the past 1.5 years and have seen the toll the current unsustainable caseloads take on the attorneys at our office. The burden of these caseloads trickles down and overwhelms our office's investigators, mitigation specialists, legal assistants, and paralegals.

I work primarily with attorneys in our Misdemeanor practice, who tend to be attorneys coming straight from law school. I see how the burden of the caseloads they are immediately assigned leaves them no choice but to work excruciatingly long hours to provide the level of representation they came here to. I see how they must grapple with the reality that it may not be physically possible to do their jobs as effectively as they hope given the number of clients they are expected to represent. This problem only grows as the attorneys eventually move on to representing clients on felony cases. Coming into this job I thought I may want to go to law school myself to become a public defender, but it's discouraging to see firsthand the mental and physical toll attorneys at our office are forced to endure for the sake of representing our clients.

I truly love this job and feel a great sense of pride working to help represent our clients, who so often in their lives haven't received the support and kindness they deserve. It's painful to see the staff at our office work so hard, but simultaneously be forced to acknowledge there will always be tasks we can't get done. We will never be able to provide the level of representation our clients deserve given the sheer number of cases we currently handle. We are not given the resources to do our jobs effectively; it harms our clients, and it harms every one of us who are forced daily to choose between our own welfare and that of our clients.

The current caseload standards make effective representation impossible. They don't serve our community, our clients, or any of my colleagues. Public Defense is a unique calling where people are willing, and often expected, to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of our clients, but it shouldn't have to be this way. We cannot wait for years of discussion and slow movement; we need help now. I urge this Court to adopt the proposed new standards.

Thank you, Leah Swope

Leah Swope (*she/her*)

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