



October 1, 2024

Washington State Supreme Court – Rules Committee
Post Office Box 40929
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Comment to proposed changes to Indigent Defense standards for
misdemeanor practice, in CrRLJ 3.1

Dear Honorable Justices,

The City of Kennewick respectfully requests the Washington State Supreme Court reject the proposed amendments to the Standards for Indigent Defense in CrRLJ 3.1. The City fully supports a defendant's constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel but disagrees with the drastic changes proposed by these amendments. Anyone familiar with the City of Kennewick knows that we have a history of working collaboratively with our criminal justice system partners to address the needs of our community. While Public Safety is a priority for this council, the City has taken a measured approach by supporting social services outreach, victim support, the Columbia Valley Center for Recovery, Therapeutic Courts and Pre-Trial Diversion in partnership with Greater Columbia Behavioral Health.

The success of the above noted programs requires the coordination of all the components of the criminal justice system including public defense. While staffing the Office of Public Defense for District Court has been a challenge in Benton County, it is the City's position that this community can overcome the staffing shortage if the current indigent defense standards for misdemeanor practice remain the same. If the amendments are approved as presented, this will become the single point of failure in the system. The preliminary estimate from Benton County for the City's share of the Office of Public Defense budget for the 2025/2026 biennium with the amendments is \$ 3,527,897. If the standards remain the same the estimate for the City will be \$2,011,298. Without an independent funding source, this will be unsustainable for the City's budget moving forward. Even if the City had the funding, there are not enough attorneys available in Benton County to meet the timeframe presented in the proposed standards. The proposed amendments to the standards for indigent defense will break the criminal justice system in our community.



Leading the Way

In addition to issues raised by this letter, the City supports the points raised in the public comment letters submitted by the Association of Washington Cities and the Benton County Board of Commissioners. We appreciate the opportunity to provide public comment and request the Washington State Supreme Court thoughtfully consider the real world concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

Mayor Gretl Crawford
Kennewick City Council

cc: 8th, 14th, 15th & 16th District Legislative Delegation
Briahna Murray, Gordon Thomas Honeywell Governmental Affairs
Erin Erdman, City Manager



CITY OF KENNEWICK
P.O. BOX 6108
KENNEWICK, WA 99336-0108

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