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From: Megan Peyton <mpeyton@vandef.org>
Sent: Friday, October 25, 2024 9:34 AM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Standards update

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My name is Megan Peyton and I am a public defender in Clark County, Washington. I have been doing public defense for 17 years in the state of Washington handling all types of criminal cases.

When I first heard about the proposed reductions in numbers, my first thought was that was really low and why did they reach that number? It seems impossible almost to get to that number and where do we find the attorneys for all these cases? Then I listened to a presentation about how that number came to be - and, in the end, it was simple math based on a 40 hour work week. So it became hard to argue with when it is based on numbers and what should be involved in working a case.

I also then started to reflect on a huge issue we have been having - finding attorneys willing and qualified to work as a public defender. I have assisted in hiring for many years now and it is so much harder than it was previously. We have lost many attorneys over the years to either other public defenders' offices who outbid us, or prosecutor's offices that can pay more or switching to private practice for more pay. We have also lost a couple of very experienced attorneys due to medical issues that I attribute to Covid and the fallout from that.

While this has always been somewhat of an issue, it has become a huge problem. We are constantly outbid. And we have gotten some increases in our pay in the last few years but as we have been fighting here in Clark County for pay parity we are then way behind on asking for the other general support our office needs - more legal support staff and social workers to assist with clients' needs. We have had to pay more for medical and make compromises in order to get or keep the attorneys we have.

Finally, we have also been dealing with the retirement of our most experienced defense attorneys which has created a lack of knowledge and/or need for additional training as we have had to hire new, inexperienced attorneys. It is a lot more work and time to get a new attorney courtroom ready to represent clients. As a supervisor my time should be focused on

that but has been divided because I have constantly had to cover cases when we have had people leave.

I know this is hard. I know there are a lack of resources statewide. But having adequate resources for defense work is essential to a working justice system which is essential to having safe communities.

Megan Peyton
Vancouver Defenders