

I am a licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW) in the state of Washington and am asking you to approve the proposed public defense standards. I have been devoted to public defense as a social worker and mitigation specialist since I obtained my MSW ten years ago in 2014. I believe approving these standards will ensure my next ten years and hopefully a lifelong career working in public defense.

Public defenders advocate for their clients and uphold the principles of justice and fairness. In the time I have worked in public defense at DPD, I have worked solely with juvenile and felony caseloads, mostly working with clients charged with the most serious offenses our state allows. Over the course of seven years, my caseload has more than doubled. The ripple effect of the current caseloads is far reaching and there are many things I could say about the consequences of the current standards. Since the Board of Governors recommended these standards, many attorneys and colleagues our office have left for other opportunities. Far too many clients have had multiple attorneys and team turnovers due to movement and mass exoduses. I am the person who sits with them, telling it will be okay. This movement and disruption only leads to further chaos and difficulties (and delays) in the units left to respond, that we cannot recover from.

In my role as a social worker/mitigation specialist, I am often left with the difficult decisions of which tasks or cases to prioritize. Which clients do I check in on, which do I see to release plan, or which cases to begin mitigation on? This is often an impossible decision to make; all our clients deserve the time and resource necessary to thoroughly and meaningfully prepare for each case.

There has also been the personal impact on my own life; I have seen two different therapists over the years to manage my own mental health that have told me to consider other areas of social work that are less stressful.

Our clients deserve fair and competent representation, and my colleagues deserve workloads that are sustainable. The impact I have seen on attorneys especially has been profound. As a social worker, I am guided by the ethical principles of *service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence*. I believe proposed caseload standards are aligned with these values and will be small steps towards a more just system. It is my hope intimidation over potential funding will not deter a considerate and thoughtful analysis of what is right and equitable for the people of Washington and these standards will be adopted with the urgency they deserve. These caseload standards will only aid our teams in performing their duties more effectively and strengthen the integrity of the system.

Please accept the proposed rules.

Respectfully,

Molly Hennessey, MSW, LICSW