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From: Rajan, Naresh <nrajan@kingcounty.gov>
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Good Morning,

I write to urge the Court to adopt the new standards for public defense caseloads.

My opinion is based on the experience of serving in the King County DPD Seattle felony unit from December 2020 to March 2024. Apart from daily practice, I tried nine cases, from Assault 2 to Murder 1 and Rape of a Child, with five acquittals or mistrials that were subsequently dismissed.

I regularly worked from 8 am after dropping children off for school to the close of regular business hours and then again from 8pm to midnight and often to 2am. As a parent, I was not able to work through the evening hours when family obligations required my attention. I often found it necessary to catch up with motions practice or trial preparation on weekends.

The caseload in that time period made it seem as though I could work non-stop for weeks without making a significant dent in the work. When in trial, which could be for weeks at a time, the tasks necessary to keep the non-trial cases moving ate up much of my sleep hours. I gained about twenty pounds and for the first time in my life, my blood pressure was high. I felt tired all the time.

I do not mention these facts as complaints because the work was rewarding, and I felt fulfilled professionally. The ethos of mission accomplishment I imbued during my service in the Marine Corps before law school kept me focused on providing the best service possible for my clients. The toll on my health, however, made me realize that I needed to step back from the felony unit and transition into a less intense practice group. If the caseloads at that time had allowed for exercise and self-care, I would have happily remained in the felony unit.

The new caseload standards will ensure that defenders have the bandwidth to maintain their health as well as to provide excellent representation to each client. This change is long overdue and will

greatly benefit our society as a whole. Lower case loads will allow more effective representation which will help indigent criminal defendants recover from their mistakes and transition back into the community avoiding recidivism. Systemic changes much beyond the scope of merely lowering case loads are necessary to actually achieve justice for our society as a whole, but this is a much-needed rung in the ladder for justice.

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