

October 31, 2024

Washington State Supreme Court  
PO Box 40929  
Seattle WA 98504-0929

Re: Comment on Proposed Amendments to the Court's Standards for Indigent Defense

Dear Chief Justice Gonzales and Members of the Court:

I'm writing as a career public defender to support all of the WSBA's proposed amendments to the standards for indigent defense, including the new case credits and caseload numbers, and the three-year implementation timeline.

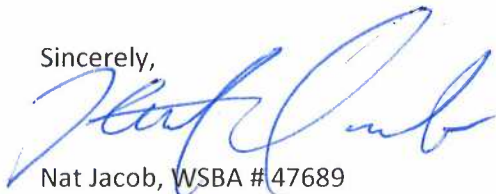
When stakeholders across the state talk about the public defense crisis, it is often with a sort of resignation born from a history of underfunded and undervalued public defense. This history has metabolized in our popular culture to an almost farce-like degree; the only thing most ordinary people could tell you about Public Defenders is that we are 'overworked and underpaid.' I submit to you that it is not a good sign of a healthy criminal legal system that the most widely known fact about the people who have devoted their lives to defending our rights is that they are chronically, almost comically undervalued. I dream of a day where I can respond to this trope by saying that while we may still be underpaid, we are no longer overworked.

When I first became a public defender, there was a culture of fetishizing the lack of work/life boundaries that our trade is profession is infamous for. We have become so accustomed to being undervalued that we came up with a way to justify not being able to go on road trips with our families, spend a weekend recreating with our friends, or simply get a full night of sleep. To be a public defender is to embrace the churn—to sacrifice ourselves so that our clients can maybe receive a modicum of the justice that our system promises, or simply so that they can know that somebody cares enough to fight for them

We have an opportunity to break the cycle.

Please don't take our sacrifices for granted. Please don't kick the can down the road, or allow good to be sacrificed on the alter of perfection. We are here every day fighting for the fundamental rights of everybody in Washington. Please acknowledge our work by allowing us to continue to be excellent advocates while living good, fulfilling, and healthy lives. We deserve it.

Sincerely,



Nat Jacob, WSBA # 47689