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Subject: FW: PD Caseload Standards
Date: Friday, November 1, 2024 8:14:30 AM

From: Paul Wagner <pwagner@snocopda.org>
Sent: Thursday, October 31, 2024 7:06 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: PD Caseload Standards

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Hi All,

I am writing in support of the proposed rule change, reducing the maximum caseload for public defenders. I have been on a felony caseload for four years now. I deal with every type of criminal case. There is never enough time.

Hundreds of hours of surveillance and body camera footage, hundreds and thousands of pages of reports, records, and statements. Hundreds of witnesses and interviews. Many of my clients are in jail, living on the street, and dealing with serious mental health, addiction, and trauma. The consequences many of my clients face put them in a state of constant near-panic. And I am often the only one they feel safe enough to express these emotions to. It all takes a toll, and there is never enough time.

Being a public defender requires value judgments in the name of efficiency. How much time can I meet with this client? How much time can I work on this motion? Can I work on this cross? Making these decisions isn't easy, and it will never be easy, but reducing our caseloads will reduce the toll of making them.

As it stands, it's a toll that many cannot handle for long. The stress and time commitment of being a public defender means that my office is a constantly revolving door for attorneys. It makes being a career public defender a daunting proposition. This is especially well known to our clients.

Many of my clients believe that being a public defender is not a career, and that once I gain enough experience, I'll graduate into private practice or the judiciary. They know that I have limited time and energy to dedicate to their cases. Some of them react to this knowledge with rage and despair. Many more have quietly resigned themselves to it. Some are simply grateful that they have someone

to defend them.

Public defense is a noble profession. We defend anyone who needs it, no matter the allegations. We give everyone the benefit of the doubt. It is rewarding to help people in need. Everyone has the right to a defense

High caseloads erode that right. They limit the efficacy of attorneys actively in the profession, and drive out many more who can't handle the stress and compromise that comes along with this work. With reduced caseloads, we would attract, retain, and develop better and better attorneys.

Justice in an adversarial system requires a robust defense, and public defenders handle the vast majority of cases. I know I am lucky compared to many other offices to only have 65-80 felony cases at any given time, even handling murders, third strikes, and sex cases, but it still takes a toll, and there is never enough time. I have seen many incredible attorneys who couldn't handle the stress of the profession or who sought a healthier work/life balance for themselves and their families. Justice suffers for it.

Please reduce our caseloads. Everyone deserves a defense, even us.

Best,
Paul Wagner
WSBA# 53205