

Honorable Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court
Temple of Justice
Email: supreme@courts.wa.gov

Subject: Support for the Revised WSBA Standards for Indigent Defense Services

Dear Justices of the Washington State Supreme Court,

I have worked as a public defender for Snohomish County for over four years, my entire career as an attorney. I have managed misdemeanor, felony, and juvenile caseloads. For me to capably fight for my clients and their constitutional rights, public defense caseloads must be lowered through the passage of the revised WSBA Standards for Indigent Defense Services.

Realistic and sensitive caseload standards for attorneys are vital. The quality of the service we give to our clients (and thereby to the community in general) hinges on the amount of time, attention, and energy we can give to a case. There are limited hours in our days, weeks, and years, and simple math shows that higher caseloads mean lower quality work for any given case or client.

The current caseload standards disregard how our work surpasses legal research and arguments in court. I cannot count the number of juvenile clients who have described to me how they lost a parent or found shelter on the street. I will always remember the clients I've lost to suicide after their mental health disintegrated in the filthy and freezing Snohomish County Jail. I love representing my community, offering kindness during people's darkest hours, and fighting for the constitutional rights of all. But the immense volume of cases, low salary, and long hours are unmanageable.

We additionally need improved standards for non-attorney staff at public defender agencies. Administrative staff, investigators, social workers, technical support, and HR are all vital components of public defense. These non-attorney positions are indispensable parts of the process, not luxuries. By short-staffing these roles, the jurisdictions that pay for public defense services risk paying attorneys (the highest-paid employees at a defender office) to conduct investigative interviews, track down records, fix computers, help clients access treatment and housing, and more. While these tasks are necessary, they do not require a lawyer, and the best trained lawyer is ill-equipped to perform the tasks of these professionals.

Please consider this input and adopt the new, proposed standards. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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