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**To:** [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Proposed Changes CrR3.1/CrRLJ3.1/JuCR9.2 STDS - Standards for Indigent Defense  
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**From:** Ramona Brandes <Ramona.Brandes@outlook.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 28, 2024 12:51 PM  
**To:** OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>  
**Subject:** Proposed Changes CrR3.1/CrRLJ3.1/JuCR9.2 STDS - Standards for Indigent Defense

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Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court,

I am writing in support of the proposed changes to CrR3.1/CrRLJ3.1/JuCR9.2 STDS - Standards for Indigent Defense now. I quit working for King County Department of Public Defense in February 2024 after twenty-six years as a public defender because of the untenable caseload. I was absolutely convinced that the unrelenting strain, stress, and long hours would take my life if I stayed doing that work. My normally low blood pressure was sky-rocketing, and I frequently worked between sixteen and twenty hours a day, particularly when in trial. Trials lasted two to three months at a time on a Class A case, and I would go to trial four to six times a year. I was exhausted constantly, and I had been telling my supervisors that the amount of work required to competently represent my clients was not sustainable. As one of the most experienced attorneys in my office, I was one of a rapidly shrinking few defenders qualified to handle Class A felonies at my office. My ongoing normal caseload involved representing a dozen homicide defendants, another dozen defendants facing adult or child sex offense charges--most facing indeterminate sentences, another two dozen defendants charged with violent/serious violent strike offense, some of whom were facing their third strike offense, and then additionally another dozen assorted non-strike felonies. In addition, I was assigned between four to six additional complicated *Blake* or juvenile resentencing matters requiring extensive mitigation work. At 150 cases per year, new cases poured in each month. Each new homicide assignment was soul crushing in particular because I was already using all the hours of the day and most of the hours of the night to provide competent representation. Homicide cases are extremely complex and time-consuming, and I refused to short-change my clients, but finding time for another one, and another one was becoming impossible. I absolutely loved being a public defender, but I came to realize that the only survivable way forward was to leave. I knew if I remained a public defender I would eventually suffer the heart attack, stroke, or aneurysm that, along with suicide, I have watched claim the life of so many of my colleagues. Seeing my own death on the horizon if I didn't change course was shocking and is why I left public defense.

I read with some dismay the comments from legislators, council members, prosecutors and others who lament the cost of caseload relief or claim that having more attorneys in the system will lead to vigilante justice. Public defense has long gotten short shrift in funding while system continues to rely on public defenders carrying abusive workloads and operating on the stressful edge of ineffective assistance in order to keep the wheels of justice turning. No longer. It's not that there are not enough attorneys to do the work—there are plenty of attorneys. It's that attorneys have determined that the cost of being a public defender is too high a price and they are not willing to pay the ferryman. We suffer the loss of our health, our family relationships --this job requires the sacrifice of everything else, and is just not worth it. There was no amount of money that could have lured me into staying in public defense, the only relief I sought was caseload relief, which never came. I am not alone in my position. My micro-experience is being replicated over and over on the macro level statewide.

Some opponents are calling for delay because change is hard, or for SB 5780 to take effect, or to wait for better funding. Delay won't help the situation, and will make things worse because relief is needed now and public defense is collapsing right now. The potential action from the Supreme Court is the only thing keeping many public defenders holding on instead of jumping ship like I did. Waiting for SB 5780 also will not save public defense or improve the situation. According to the State Office of Public Defense the funding from SB 5780 only provides funding for a total of six new intern positions statewide --which is but a tiny drop in the bucket of need. Frankly, without new caseload standards even those six interns aren't likely going to want to stay in public defense. On the funding argument, it's clear that neither local jurisdictions or the legislature will properly fund public defense until the Supreme Court makes caseload reduction mandatory. Feet dragging and lamenting about funding is a diversion, and literally asking for the status quo to continue, and no funding is coming unless and until the Supreme Court changes the status quo. Prosecutors aren't suffering in the status quo, local politicians and state legislators aren't suffering under the status quo, its defendants and public defenders suffering under the status quo. Changing the public defense system is a hard choice, but the alternative is much worse. Please implement the proposed Changes to CrR3.1/CrRLJ3.1/JuCR9.2 STDS - Standards for Indigent Defense now, establish a reasonable timeline for implementation, and the funding will come.

Most Sincerely,

Ramona C. Brandes