

From: [OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK](#)
To: [Martinez, Jacquelynn](#)
Subject: FW: Comment on Public Defense
Date: Thursday, October 31, 2024 8:04:07 AM

From: Renee Alsept <renee.alsept@co.thurston.wa.us>
Sent: Wednesday, October 30, 2024 5:32 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Cc: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Comment on Public Defense

You don't often get email from renee.alsept@co.thurston.wa.us. [Learn why this is important](#)
External Email Warning! This email has originated from outside of the Washington State Courts Network. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender, are expecting the email, and know the content is safe. If a link sends you to a website where you are asked to validate using your Account and Password, **DO NOT DO SO!** Instead, report the incident.

My name is B. Renee Alsept and I have been a public defender for 35.5 years. I spent 20 years with The Defender in Seattle, 13 years as a public defense contractor in Clark County, two years with Thurston County defense where I am at right now, and on Monday morning I start a job with the newly created defender's office in Clark County. At age 17, I decided I wanted to be a "public defender" and I have spent my entire career committed to my clients.

In the 90's when the standards were much worse than they are today, I often became sick from being over worked. As a contract public defender I had control over my caseloads, but being alone and working for no benefits can be hard. I have loved my time at Thurston County Public defense, but last year as a felony attorney doing the most serious cases it was hard. I had a stroke in July of 2023, while I was working, and after my six week absence my boss Patrick O'Connor worked hard to get me a job I would be able to physically do during my continued recovery. Fortunate for me, my stroke impacted me physically but not the part of my brain required for my work.

As an NGRI attorney with a caseload that has strict standards, I am actually able to do my work at the highest level, but not cause physical harm to myself. All public defenders deserve to have the standards that have been put in place for child representation and NGRI representation. I have personally done all the different types of caseloads, and can not only be considered an expert on explaining how it impacts us, but I had a physical breakdown in 1997 while on the job and over worked, and I had a stroke last year. I know first hand the harm. And when I had to take a sudden leave, my poor clients! My workmates rushed in to help, but that was more work for them, compounding other problems.

Additionally, as a person who chose to have children, the job was so physically hard on me in 1992 and 1999, that I had to go on bed rest for three months prior to the birth of both my daughters. I

had a miscarriage in between and I often wonder how much the physicality of my job played in to that. I continue to struggle with the physical fall out that having so many cases you literally don't have time to eat some days, and what the stress of never been done does to you.

I find it outrageous that prosecutors got to show up and speak out about these standards when I was watching the first hearing earlier this month. They are the gatekeepers of what gets charged. I can't tell you how many times cases have been filed that should have never been filed, yet they have the power to file. They have always had far more support on their side of things than defense has because they have the police officer sitting by their side and assisting them, even during the trials. I have also been a victim of crime over the years, so it's not as if I don't believe that we need this justice system to hold people accountable, we certainly do. However, we don't get to have a say on the prosecutor's caseloads and how they work, and they should not get that say on ours. I truly believe their concerns should be disregarded.

But what's concerning are the lower numbers of people going in to public defense. My daughter will be starting law school in the fall of 2025. She is considering public defense but she also has seen first hand how hard it can be sometimes, so part of her is hesitating. When I talked to her about what this body is doing right now regarding standards and caseloads, she was listening. She is watching and she is our future!

My clients deserve to have attorneys who can truly work on their cases. If the defense is able to prepare their cases as well as the prosecutor, then and only then will there truly be justice for our clients.

Renee Alsept