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Subject: FW: Public Comment on Indigent Defense Standards from the City of Aberdeen
Date: Wednesday, October 23, 2024 4:53:51 PM

From: Ruth Clemens <rclemens@aberdeenwa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, October 23, 2024 4:38 PM
To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Cc: Forest Worgum <FWorgum@aberdeenwa.gov>; Dani Smith <DSmith@aberdeenwa.gov>; Douglas Orr <dorr@aberdeenwa.gov>
Subject: Public Comment on Indigent Defense Standards from the City of Aberdeen

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Dear Honorable Justices:

The City of Aberdeen respectfully requests the Washington State Supreme Court reject the requested amendments to the Standards for Indigent Defense.

The City of Aberdeen supports a defendant's constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel. In the face of significant workforce challenges across the criminal justice system, we are working to solve the issues and ensure that every adult misdemeanor defendant has effective assistance of counsel.

The proposed revisions to the state's Standards for Indigent Defense will not solve current issues, but rather, these standards will result in new and greater challenges than before.

Aberdeen is a geographical area that is rural, low-income and experiences high volume of crime for our size. We believe justice must be equal to all, regardless of geography. Rural areas like ours, experience lower tax revenues and struggle to recruit and retain public defense attorneys. Modifying the caseload standards will bring even greater hardship to our small city as we enter 2025 with a \$3.5 million deficit budget.

Our City pays for public defense costs out of our general fund budgets. Funding sources for our general fund are statutorily and constitutionally limited, in addition to being constrained by residents' ability and willingness to pay. After many failed attempts, our city struggles to get critical rate increases to pay for these types of services. The State offers only a small fraction of what is needed. Our City is on track

to spend close to \$500,000 on indigent defense and State contributions equals about \$40,000.

I am asking that you consider small rural communities like Aberdeen and the tremendous impact this will have on our City's operation as well as the safety of our community.