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Subject: FW: Support for Revised Public Defense Caseload Standards
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From: Mann, Travis <tmann@kingcounty.gov>
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To: OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>
Subject: Support for Revised Public Defense Caseload Standards

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I am writing to urge you to support the revised caseload standards that have been proposed. I have been a public defender with King County for almost 7 years. I have held misdemeanor, ITA, dependency, and serious felony caseloads throughout my career. I am currently a felony attorney, defending some of the most serious and violent criminal charges an individual can face.

I love my job, and I believe this work is inherent to a functioning criminal legal system. However, it is not hyperbole to say that the job as it currently exists is killing us. In the limited amount of time I've been with King County Department of Defense, I've watched numerous colleagues suffer mental health crises and have anxiety-related medical concerns. I've watched incredible attorneys, attorneys who I never thought would do anything other than public defense, leave our office for jobs in other sectors. Public defense under the current caseload standards is wholly unsustainable. There is an ongoing stream of highly skilled and experienced attorneys leaving the work because it is not feasible to be an effective attorney while also having a semblance of life outside of the work. That stream extends to the support staff that are part of the public defense team – investigators, mitigation specialists, paralegals, legal assistants, etc. Every person I work with, including our support staff, is well past their capacity to provide effective assistance on cases. This is not just, and there is a solution that you have a unique opportunity to provide.

Our work product dictates the outcome of some of the most serious consequences that exist in our society. By maintaining the current caseloads, we are ensuring that there is a severe disservice to our most vulnerable neighbors. Serious cases are taking years to adequately investigate and prepare for trial. Speedy trial rights are nonexistent. Innocent individuals are forced to languish in jail or make the defeated decision to enter a plea to reach a resolution. Corners are cut out of necessity – it is impossible with the amount of discovery that exists today to effectively prepare every single case with the current standards, even if we were to work every waking hour. This is not what justice looks like. The status quo is broken. Please do what is right. Please provide us with the necessary change.

The idea that caseloads might reduce to a more sustainable amount has given everyone in my office a feeling of hope – hope that this job can be a career for life, rather than a stepping stone until we burn out; hope that we will no longer have to choose between our job and our family; hope that we can provide the representation that everyone deserves; hope that we aren't afflicted with a crushing anxiety by the weight of our caseload.

This is a moment that can change the trajectory of public defense forever. Please do not stand on the wrong side. We have an opportunity to develop changed caseload standards that align with the recent changes in discovery and onslaught of filed cases. When making this decision, please ask yourself this: if your loved one was accused of a serious crime, would you want them to be represented by a public defender with crushing caseloads? We have some of the best attorneys in the country working in our office. Your answer should assuredly be YES in a world where we have appropriate caseloads. Without relief, though, even the best attorney cannot provide the representation that our clients deserve.

Please adopt the proposed revised caseload standards. To do otherwise would only cosign our failed system of public defense.

Thank you for taking the time to review my letter and the letters of my colleagues. We do not write our pleas lightly.

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