



Washington State Bar Association

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COUNCIL ON PUBLIC DEFENSE  
JANUARY 24, 2025 - 9:30AM – 12:00PM  
MINUTES

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**CPD Voting Members:** Jason Schwarz (Immediate Past Chair), Jonathan Quittner, Karen Denise Wilson, Justice Sheryl Gordon McCloud, Maya Titova, Molly Gilbert, Judge Dee Sontag, David Montes, Victoria Blumhorst, Abraham Ritter, Louis Frantz, Arian Noma

**CPD Emeritus members (non-voting members):** Ann Christian, Bob Boruchowitz

**WSBA Staff:** Bonnie Sterken

**Guests:** Geoff Hulse, Joe Dozal, Rachel Cortez, Lindsey Townsend, George Yeannakis, Katrin Johnson, Sarah Hudson, Aaron Seda, Sophia Byrd McSherry, Angela Colaiuta, Liz Mustin, Jana Richards, Emily Arneson, Lei Young, Janna Richards, Nat Jacob

**Absent:** Larry Jefferson, Abigail Pence, Judge Marla Polin, Maialisa Vanyo (Chair), Christopher Swaby (Vice-Chair), Christie Hedman, Paul Holland, Kathleen Kyle, Eileen Farley

**Vacancies:** Two current or former prosecutors, one local government/public defense agency representative

**Minutes:** The minutes were approved without edits.

**Office of Public Defense Updates:** Sophia Byrd McSherry provided updates to the legislative session. She shared about the County bill related to increasing state funding for trial-level criminal public defense. There are companion bills in the House and Senate. It is not yet scheduled and may be added to agendas in the coming weeks. The fiscal note will be large and may be the largest issue concern. Sophia encouraged people to sign up for email notifications on the legislators' website about the process of bills. The other bill with a lot of interest relates to the state loan repayment assistance program. However, this bill has a large fiscal note, which may be a barrier. Regarding the OPD's budget request, the legislator is carefully looking at all the agency budgets, and they are being asked to review everything, including current spending. OPD is taking extra steps to show how their budget is critically important and managed well. Sophia addressed questions.

Katrin Johnson shared about bills from last year regarding recruitment and training. The criminal defense training academy is coming up again this Spring for new attorneys. Rachel Cortez also shared about ramping up the rural public defense fellowship program for rural programs, attending career fairs, and exploring ways to get people connected. Rachel and Nat addressed questions. They support spreading the word on this program and making connections with local public defense offices. Rachel and Nat addressed questions.

**Public Defense Investigators:** Molly Gilbert and Joe Dozal gave a presentation on the recruitment of WA public defense investigators. Molly started with the status of the profession, which has changed a lot in recent years to keep pace with the overall burden on public defense. She provided important elements of investigation, including the need for independence, in-house experts, seen as subject matter experts, and the creation of investigation-specific training materials. She also shared the qualities of an investigator team, including the importance of diversity, closer to blue-collar the better, analytical and focused, charismatic and people-centered, comfortable with computers and social networking, able to write contemporaneous notes, isn't easily intimidated, can handle vigorous discourse, and is curious and tenacious. She also outlined challenges: no professional training program for investigators, pipeline often comes from former law enforcement, and the need for entry-level opportunities. She suggests removing college degree requirements and providing entry-level internships, entry-level curriculum, and minimum standards. She recommended the CPD launch a Defense Investigator Subcommittee to attempt to launch some of these ideas. Joe Dozal shared about how Whatcom County is using investigator internships, as an example. The Council had a conversation and Milly and Joe addressed questions.

**Subcommittee Updates:** Postponed until next meeting.

**Standards Process Update:** Jason Schwarz that the Court's next en banc where Standards will be discussed is at the end of February. We are waiting to hear from the Court to prepare for next steps. Since the last CPD meeting the proposed Family Defense and Appellate Standards have been posted to the Court's website for comment by April 30, 2025.

**Announcements:** The February meeting will be short and include legislative and subcommittee updates.

The meeting adjourned at 10:54 am