



Washington State Bar Association

Standards for Indigent Defense Services

[Revised September 1, 2021]

STANDARD ONE: Compensation

Standard:

Public defense attorneys and staff should be compensated at a rate commensurate with their training and experience. To attract and retain qualified personnel, compensation and benefit levels should be comparable to those of attorneys and staff in prosecutorial offices in the area.

For assigned counsel, reasonable compensation should be provided. Compensation should reflect the time and labor required to be spent by the attorney and the degree of professional experience demanded by the case. Assigned counsel should be compensated for out-of-pocket expenses.

Contracts should provide for extraordinary compensation over and above the normal contract terms for cases which require an extraordinary amount of time and preparation, including, but not limited to, death penalty cases. Services which require extraordinary fees shall be defined in the contract.

Attorneys who have a conflict of interest shall not have to compensate the new, substituted attorney out of their own funds.

Flat fees, caps on compensation, and lump-sum contracts for trial attorneys are improper in death penalty cases. Private practice attorneys appointed in death penalty cases should be fully compensated for actual time and service performed at a reasonable hourly rate with no distinction between rates for services performed in court and out of court. Periodic billing and payment should be available. The hourly rate established for lead counsel in a particular case should be based on the circumstances of the case and the attorney being appointed, including the following factors: the anticipated time and labor required in the case, the complexity of the case, the skill and experience required to provide adequate legal representation, the attorney's overhead expenses, and the exclusion of other work by the attorney during the case. Under no circumstances should the hourly rate for lead counsel, whether private or public defender, appointed in a death penalty case be less than \$125 per hour (in 2006 dollars).

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 5-2.4 and 5-3.1.

American Bar Association, *Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance in Death Penalty Cases*, 1988, Standard 10-1.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standards 13.7 and 13.11.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard IV-4.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Legal Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard III-10 and III-11.

STANDARD TWO: Duties and Responsibilities of Counsel

Standard:

The legal representation plan shall require that defense services be provided to all clients in a professional, skilled manner consistent with minimum standards set forth by the American Bar Association, applicable state bar association standards, the Rules of Professional Conduct, case law and applicable court rules defining the duties of counsel and the rights of defendants in criminal cases. Counsel's primary and most fundamental responsibility is to promote and protect the interests of the client.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 4-1.1, 5-5.1 and 5-1.1.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standards 13.1.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard II-2.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984, Guideline III-18.

American Bar Association *Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Defense Counsel in Death Penalty Cases*. [\[Link\]](#)

STANDARD THREE: Caseload Limits and Types of Cases

Standard:

1. The contract or other employment agreement or government budget shall specify the types of cases for which representation shall be provided and the maximum number of cases which each attorney shall be expected to handle.
2. The caseload of public defense attorneys shall allow each lawyer to give each client the time and effort necessary to ensure effective representation. Neither defender organizations, county offices, contract attorneys nor assigned counsel should accept workloads that, by reason of their excessive size, interfere with the rendering of quality representation. As used in this Standard, "quality representation" is intended to describe the minimum level of attention, care and skill that Washington citizens would expect of their state's criminal justice system.
3. **General Considerations:** Caseload limits reflect the maximum caseloads for fully supported full-time defense attorneys for cases of average complexity and effort in each case type specified. Caseload limits assume a reasonably even distribution of cases throughout the year.

The increased complexity of practice in many areas will require lower caseload limits. The maximum caseload limit should be adjusted downward when the mix

of case assignments is weighted toward offenses or case types that demand more investigation, legal research and writing, use of experts, use of social workers, or other expenditures of time and resources. Attorney caseloads should be assessed by the workload required, and cases and types of cases should be weighted accordingly.

If a defender or assigned counsel is carrying a mixed caseload including cases from more than one category of cases, these standards should be applied proportionately to determine a full caseload. In jurisdictions where assigned counsel or contract attorneys also maintain private law practices, the caseload should be based on the percentage of time the lawyer devotes to public defense.

The experience of a particular attorney is a factor in the composition of cases in the attorney's caseload.

The following types of cases fall within the intended scope of the caseload limits for criminal and juvenile offender cases in Standard 3.4 and must be taken into account when assessing an attorney's numerical caseload: partial case representations, sentence violations, specialty or therapeutic courts, transfers, extraditions, representation of material witnesses, petitions for conditional release or final discharge, and other matters that do not involve a new criminal charge.

Definition of case: A case is defined as the filing of a document with the court naming a person as defendant or respondent, to which an attorney is appointed in order to provide representation. In courts of limited jurisdiction multiple citations from the same incident can be counted as one case.

4. **Caseload Limits:** The caseload of a full-time public defense attorney or assigned counsel shall not exceed the following:

150 Felonies per attorney per year; or

300 Misdemeanor cases per attorney per year or, in jurisdictions that have not adopted a numerical case weighting system as described in this Standard, 400 cases per year; or

250 Juvenile Offender cases per attorney per year; or

80 open Juvenile Dependency cases per attorney; or

250 Civil Commitment cases per attorney per year; or

1 Active Death Penalty trial court case at a time plus a limited number of non death penalty cases compatible with the time demand of the death penalty case and consistent with the professional requirements of Standard 3.2 *supra*; or

36 Appeals to an appellate court hearing a case on the record and briefs per attorney per year. *(The 36 standard assumes experienced appellate attorneys handling cases with transcripts of an average length of 350 pages. If attorneys do not have significant appellate experience and/or the average transcript length is greater than 350 pages, the caseload should be accordingly reduced.)*

Full time Rule 9 interns who have not graduated from law school may not have caseloads that exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the caseload limits established for full time attorneys.

5. **Case Counting:** The local government entity responsible for employing, contracting with or appointing public defense attorneys should adopt and publish written policies and procedures to implement a numerical case-weighting system to count cases. If such policies and procedures are not adopted and published, it is presumed that attorneys are not engaging in case weighting. A numerical case weighting system must:
 - A. recognize the greater or lesser workload required for cases compared to an average case based on a method that adequately assesses and documents the workload involved;
 - B. be consistent with these Standards, professional performance guidelines, and the Rules of Professional Conduct;
 - C. not institutionalize systems or practices that fail to allow adequate attorney time for quality representation; and
 - D. be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect current workloads; and
 - E. be filed with the State of Washington Office of Public Defense.

Cases should be assessed by the workload required. Cases and types of cases should be weighted accordingly. Cases which are complex, serious, or contribute more significantly to attorney workload than average cases should be weighted upwards. In addition, a case weighting system should consider factors that might justify a case weight of less than one case.

Notwithstanding any case weighting system, resolutions of cases by pleas of guilty to criminal charges on a first appearance or arraignment docket are presumed to be rare occurrences requiring careful evaluation of the evidence and the law, as well as thorough communication with clients, and must be counted as one case.

6. **Case Weighting:** The following are some examples of situations where case weighting might result in representations being weighted as more or less than one case. The listing of specific examples is not intended to suggest or imply

that representations in such situations should or must be weighted at more or less than one case, only that they may be, if established by an appropriately adopted case weighting system.

- A. **Case Weighting Upwards:** Serious offenses or complex cases that demand more-than-average investigation, legal research, writing, use of experts, use of social workers and/or expenditures of time and resources should be weighted upwards and counted as more than one case.

- B. **Case Weighting Downward:** Listed below are some specific examples of situations where case weighting might justify representations being weighted less than one case. However, care must be taken because many such representations routinely involve significant work and effort and should be weighted at a full case or more.
 - i. Cases that result in partial representations of clients, including client failures to appear and recommencement of proceedings, preliminary appointments in cases in which no charges are filed, appearances of retained counsel, withdrawals or transfers for any reason, or limited appearances for a specific purpose (not including representations of multiple cases on routine dockets).

 - ii. Cases in the criminal or offender case type that do not involve filing of new criminal charges, including sentence violations, extraditions, representations of material witnesses, and other matters or representations of clients that do not involve new criminal charges. Non-complex sentence violations should be weighted as at least 1/3 of a case.

 - iii. Cases in specialty or therapeutic courts if the attorney is not responsible for defending the client against the underlying charges before or after the client's participation in the specialty or therapeutic court. However, case weighting must recognize that numerous hearings and extended monitoring of client cases in such courts significantly contribute to attorney workload and in many instances such cases may warrant allocation of full case weight or more.

 - iv. Cases on a criminal or offender first appearance or arraignment docket where the attorney is designated, appointed or contracted to represent groups of clients on that docket without an expectation of further or continuing representation and which are not resolved at that time (except by dismissal). In such circumstances, consideration should be given to adjusting the caseload limits appropriately, recognizing that case weighting must reflect that attorney workload includes the time needed for appropriate client contact and preparation as well as the appearance time spent on such dockets.

- v. Representation of a person in a court of limited jurisdiction on a charge which, as a matter of regular practice in the court where the

case is pending, can be and is resolved at an early stage of the proceeding by a diversion, reduction to an infraction, stipulation on continuance, or other alternative non-criminal disposition that does not involve a finding of guilt. Such cases should be weighted as at least 1/3 of a case.

Related Standards

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 4-1.2, 5-4.3.

American Bar Association *Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Defense Counsel in Death Penalty Cases*. [\[Link\]](#)

American Bar Association, *Ethical Obligations of Lawyers Who Represent Indigent Criminal Defendants When Excessive Caseloads Interfere With Competent and Diligent Representation*, May 13, 2006, *Formal Opinion 06-441*. [\[Link\]](#)

The American Council of Chief Defenders *Statement on Caseloads and Workloads*, (2007). [\[Link\]](#)

American Bar Association *Eight Guidelines of Public Defense Related to Excessive Caseloads*. [\[Link\]](#)

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.12.

American Bar Association *Disciplinary Rule 6-101*.

American Bar Association *Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System*. [\[Link\]](#)

ABA Standards of Practice for Lawyers who Represent Children in Abuse & Neglect Cases, (1996) American Bar Association, Chicago, IL.

The American Council of Chief Defenders Ethical Opinion 03-01 (2003).

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standards IV-I.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Model Contract for Public Defense Services* (2002). [\[Link\]](#)

NACC Recommendations for Representation of Children in Abuse and Neglect Cases (2001). [\[Link\]](#)

City of Seattle Ordinance Number: 121501 (2004). [\[Link\]](#)

Seattle-King County Bar Association Indigent Defense Services Task Force, Guideline Number 1.

Washington State Office of Public Defense, *Parents Representation Program Standards Of Representation* (2009). [\[Link\]](#)

Keeping Defender Workloads Manageable, Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, Indigent Defense Series #4 (Spangenberg Group, 2001). [\[Link\]](#)

STANDARD FOUR: Responsibility for Expert Witnesses

Standard:

Reasonable compensation for expert witnesses necessary to preparation and presentation of the defense case shall be provided. Expert witness fees should be maintained and allocated from funds separate from those provided for defender

services. Requests for expert witness fees should be made through an ex parte motion. The defense should be free to retain the expert of its choosing and in no cases should be forced to select experts from a list pre-approved by either the court or the prosecution.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 5-1.4.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard IV 2d, 3.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1983, Standard III-8d.

National Advisory Commission, Task Force on Courts, 1973, Standard 13.14.

STANDARD FIVE: Administrative Costs

Standard:

1. Contracts for public defense services shall provide for or include administrative costs associated with providing legal representation. These costs should include but are not limited to travel, telephones, law library, including electronic legal research, financial accounting, case management systems, computers and software, office space and supplies, training, meeting the reporting requirements imposed by these standards, and other costs necessarily incurred in the day-to-day management of the contract.
2. Public defense attorneys shall have an office that accommodates confidential meetings with clients and receipt of mail, and adequate telephone services to ensure prompt response to client contact.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, Providing Defense Services.

National Study Commission on Defense Services, *Guidelines for Legal Defense Systems in the United States*, (1976), Guideline 3.4.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, 1976 I-3, IV 2a-e, IV 5.

STANDARD SIX: Investigators

Standard:

1. Public defense attorneys shall use investigation services as appropriate.
2. Public defender offices, assigned counsel, and private law firms holding public defense contracts should employ investigators with investigation training and experience. A minimum of one investigator should be employed for every four attorneys.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 4-4.1 and 5-1.14.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.14.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard IV-3.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard III-9.

Seattle-King County Bar Association Indigent Defense Services Task Force, *Guidelines for Accreditation of Defender Agencies*, 1982, Guideline Number 8.

STANDARD SEVEN: Support Services**Standard:**

Public defense attorneys shall have adequate numbers of investigators, secretaries, word processing staff, paralegals, social work staff, mental health professionals and other support services, including computer system staff and network administrators. These professionals are essential to ensure the effective performance of defense counsel during trial preparation, in the preparation of dispositional plans, and at sentencing.

1. Legal Assistants - At least one full-time legal assistant should be employed for every four attorneys. Fewer legal assistants may be necessary, however, if the agency or attorney has access to word processing staff, or other additional staff performing clerical work. Defenders should have a combination of technology and personnel that will meet their needs.
2. Social Work Staff - Social work staff should be available to assist in developing release, treatment, and dispositional alternatives.
3. Mental Health Professionals - Each agency or attorney should have access to mental health professionals to perform mental health evaluations.
4. Investigation staff should be available as provided in Standard Six at a ratio of one investigator for every four attorneys.
5. Each agency or attorney providing public defense services should have access to adequate and competent interpreters to facilitate communication with non-English speaking and hearing-impaired clients for attorneys, investigators, social workers, and administrative staff.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 4-8.1 and 5-1.4.

National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, Standard 13.14.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard IV-3.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard III-8.

Seattle-King County Bar Association Indigent Defense Services Task Force, *Guidelines for Accreditation of Defender Agencies*, 1982, Guideline Number 7.

STANDARD EIGHT: Reports of Attorney Activity

Standard:

The legal representation plan shall require that the defense attorney or office maintain a case-reporting and management information system which includes number and type of cases, attorney hours and disposition. This information shall be provided regularly to the Contracting Authority and shall also be made available to the Office of the Administrator of the Courts. Any such system shall be maintained independently from client files so as to disclose no privileged information.

A standardized voucher form shall be used by assigned counsel attorneys seeking payment upon completion of a case. For attorneys under contract, payment should be made monthly, or at times agreed to by the parties, without regard to the number of cases closed in the period.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 5-3.3 (b) xii, The Report to the Criminal Justice Section Council from the Criminal Justice Standards Committee, 1989.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984 Standard III-22.

National Study Commission on Defense Services, *Guidelines for Legal Defense Systems in the United States*, 1976, Guideline 3.4, 4.1, and 5.2.

STANDARD NINE: Training

Standard:

The legal representation plan shall require that attorneys providing public defense services participate in regular training programs on criminal defense law, including a minimum of seven hours of continuing legal education annually in areas relating to their public defense practice.

In offices of more than seven attorneys, an orientation and training program for new attorneys and legal interns should be held to inform them of office procedure and policy. All attorneys should be required to attend regular in-house training programs on developments in criminal law, criminal procedure and the forensic sciences.

Attorneys in civil commitment and dependency practices should attend training programs in these areas. Offices should also develop manuals to inform new attorneys of the rules and procedures of the courts within their jurisdiction.

Every attorney providing counsel to indigent accused should have the opportunity to

attend courses that foster trial advocacy skills and to review professional publications and other media.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 5-1.4.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.16.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard V.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Legal Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard III-17.

Seattle-King County Bar Association Indigent Defense Services Task Force, *Guidelines for Accreditation of Defender Agencies*, 1982, Guideline Number 3.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Counsel in Death Penalty Cases*, 1988, Standard 9.1.

STANDARD TEN: Supervision

Standard:

Each agency or firm providing public defense services should provide one full-time supervisor for every ten staff lawyers or one half-time supervisor for every five lawyers. Supervisors should be chosen from among those lawyers in the office qualified under these guidelines to try Class A felonies. Supervisors should serve on a rotating basis, and except when supervising fewer than ten lawyers, should not carry caseloads.

Related Standards:

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.9.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Legal Defense Contract*, 1984, Standard III-16.

Seattle-King County Bar Association Indigent Defense Services Task Force, *Guidelines for Accreditation of Defender Agencies*, 1982, Guideline Number 4.

STANDARD ELEVEN: Monitoring and Evaluation of Attorneys

Standard:

The legal representation plan for provision of public defense services should establish a procedure for systematic monitoring and evaluation of attorney performance based upon publicized criteria. Supervision and evaluation efforts should include review of time and caseload records, review and inspection of transcripts, in-court observations, and periodic conferences.

Performance evaluations made by a supervising attorney should be supplemented by

comments from judges, prosecutors, other defense lawyers and clients. Attorneys should be evaluated on their skill and effectiveness as criminal lawyers or as dependency or civil commitment advocates.

Related Standards:

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard III-16.

National Study Commission on Defense Services, *Guidelines for Legal Defense Systems in the United States*, 1976, Recommendations 5.4 and 5.5.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.9.

STANDARD TWELVE: Substitution of Counsel

Standard:

The attorney engaged by local government to provide public defense services should not sub-contract with another firm or attorney to provide representation and should remain directly involved in the provision of representation. If the contract is with a firm or office, the contracting authority should request the names and experience levels of those attorneys who will actually be providing the services, to ensure they meet minimum qualifications. The employment agreement shall address the procedures for continuing representation of clients upon the conclusion of the agreement. Alternate or conflict counsel should be available for substitution in conflict situations at no cost to the counsel declaring the conflict.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, Standard 5-5.2.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.1.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984, Guideline III-23.

STANDARD THIRTEEN: Limitations on Private Practice

Standard:

Private attorneys who provide public defense representation shall set limits on the amount of privately retained work which can be accepted. These limits shall be based on the percentage of a full-time caseload which the public defense cases represent.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 4-1.2(d), 5-3.2.

American Bar Association, *Ethical Obligations of Lawyers Who Represent Indigent Criminal Defendants When Excessive Caseloads Interfere With Competent and Diligent Representation*, May 13, 2006, Formal

Opinion 06-441. [\[Link\]](#)

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.7.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, Standard III-3 and IV-1.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Legal Defense Contracts*, 1984, Guideline III-6.

STANDARD FOURTEEN: Qualifications of Attorneys

Standard:

- 1. In order to assure that indigent accused receive the effective assistance of counsel to which they are constitutionally entitled, attorneys providing defense services shall meet the following minimum professional qualifications:**
 - A. Satisfy the minimum requirements for practicing law in Washington as determined by the Washington Supreme Court; and
 - B. Be familiar with the statutes, court rules, constitutional provisions, and case law relevant to their practice area; and
 - C. Be familiar with the Washington Rules of Professional Conduct; and
 - D. Be familiar with the Performance Guidelines for Criminal Defense Representation approved by the Washington State Bar Association; and, when representing youth, be familiar with the Performance Guidelines for Juvenile Defense Representation approved by the Washington State Bar Association; and when representing respondents in civil commitment proceedings, be familiar with the Performance Guidelines for Attorneys Representing Respondents in Civil Commitment Proceedings approved by the Washington State Bar Association; and
 - E. Be familiar with the Washington State Guidelines for Appointed Counsel in Indigent Appeals; and,
 - F. Be familiar with the consequences of a conviction or adjudication, including possible immigration consequences and the possibility of civil commitment proceedings based on a criminal conviction; and
 - G. Be familiar with mental health issues and be able to identify the need to obtain expert services; and
 - H. Complete seven hours of continuing legal education within each calendar year in courses relating to their public defense practice.

2. Trial attorneys' qualifications according to severity or type of case:¹

Death Penalty Representation. Each attorney acting as lead counsel in a criminal case in which the death penalty has been or may be decreed and in which the decision to seek the death penalty has not yet been made shall meet the following requirements:

- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and ii. At least five years criminal trial experience; and
- iii. Have prior experience as lead counsel in no fewer than nine jury trials of serious and complex cases which were tried to completion; and
- iv. Have served as lead or co-counsel in at least one aggravated homicide case; and
- v. Have experience in preparation of mitigation packages in aggravated homicide or persistent offender cases; and
- vi. Have completed at least one death penalty defense seminar within the previous two years; and
- vii. Meet the requirements of SPRC 2.²

The defense team in a death penalty case should include, at a minimum, the two attorneys appointed pursuant to SPRC 2, a mitigation specialist and an investigator. Psychiatrists, psychologists and other experts and support personnel should be added as needed.

- A. Adult Felony Cases - Class A. Each attorney representing a defendant accused of a Class A felony as defined in RCW 9A.20.020 shall meet the following requirements:

¹ Attorneys working toward qualification for a particular category of cases under this standard may associate with lead counsel who is qualified under this standard for that category of cases.

² SPRC 2 APPOINTMENT OF COUNSEL

At least two lawyers shall be appointed for the trial and also for the direct appeal. The trial court shall retain responsibility for appointing counsel for trial. The Supreme Court shall appoint counsel for the direct appeal. Notwithstanding RAP 15.2(f) and (h), the Supreme Court will determine all motions to withdraw as counsel on appeal.

A list of attorneys who meet the requirements of proficiency and experience, and who have demonstrated that they are learned in the law of capital punishment by virtue of training or experience, and thus are qualified for appointment in death penalty trials and for appeals will be recruited and maintained by a panel created by the Supreme Court. All counsel for trial and appeal must have demonstrated the proficiency and commitment to quality representation which is appropriate to a capital case. Both counsel at trial must have five years' experience in the practice of criminal law be familiar with and experienced in the utilization of expert witnesses and evidence, and not be presently serving as appointed counsel in another active trial level death penalty case. One counsel must be, and both may be, qualified for appointment in capital trials on the list, unless circumstances exist such that it is in the defendant's interest to appoint otherwise qualified counsel learned in the law of capital punishment by virtue of training or experience. The trial court shall make findings of fact if good cause is found for not appointing list counsel.

At least one counsel on appeal must have three years' experience in the field of criminal appellate law and be learned in the law of capital punishment by virtue of training or experience. In appointing counsel on appeal, the Supreme Court will consider the list, but will have the final discretion in the appointment of counsel. [\[Link\]](#)

- i. Minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and ii. Either:
 - a. has served two years as a prosecutor; or
 - b. has served two years as a public defender; or two years in a private criminal practice, and
 - iii. Has been trial counsel alone or with other trial counsel and handled a significant portion of the trial in three felony cases that have been submitted to a jury.
- B. Adult Felony Cases - Class B Violent Offense. Each attorney representing a defendant accused of a Class B violent offense as defined in RCW 9A.20.020 shall meet the following requirements:
- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and
 - ii. Either:
 - a. has served one year as prosecutor; or
 - b. has served one year as public defender; or one year in a private criminal practice; and
 - iii. Has been trial counsel alone or with other counsel and handled a significant portion of the trial in two Class C felony cases that have been submitted to a jury.
- C. Adult Sex Offense Cases. Each attorney representing a client in an adult sex offense case shall meet the following requirements:
- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1 and Section 2(C); and
 - ii. Been counsel alone of record in an adult or juvenile sex offense case or shall be supervised by or consult with an attorney who has experience representing juveniles or adults in sex offense cases.
- D. Adult Felony Cases - All other Class B Felonies, Class C Felonies, Probation or Parole Revocation. Each attorney representing a defendant accused of a Class B felony not defined in Section 2(C) or (D) above or a Class C felony, as defined in RCW 9A.20.020, or involved in a probation or parole revocation hearing shall meet the following requirements:
- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1, and ii. Either:
 - a. has served one year as a prosecutor; or

- b. has served one year as a public defender; or one year in a private criminal practice; and
 - iii. Has been trial counsel alone or with other trial counsel and handled a significant portion of the trial in two criminal cases that have been submitted to a jury; and
 - iv. Each attorney shall be accompanied at his or her first felony trial by a supervisor if available.
- E. Persistent Offender (Life Without Possibility of Release) Representation.
 Each attorney acting as lead counsel in a “two-strikes” or “three strikes” case in which a conviction will result in a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole shall meet the following requirements:
 - i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1³; and ii. Have at least:
 - a. four years criminal trial experience; and
 - b. one year experience as a felony defense attorney; and
 - c. experience as lead counsel in at least one Class A felony trial; and
 - d. experience as counsel in cases involving each of the following:
 - (1) Mental health issues; and
 - (2) Sexual offenses, if the current offense or a prior conviction that is one of the predicate cases resulting in the possibility of life in prison without parole is a sex offense; and
 - (3) Expert witnesses; and
 - (4) One year of appellate experience or demonstrated legal writing ability.

³ RCW 10.101.060 (1)(a)(iii) provides that counties receiving funding from the state Office of Public Defense under that statute must require “attorneys who handle the most serious cases to meet specified qualifications as set forth in the Washington state bar association endorsed standards for public defense services or participate in at least one case consultation per case with office of public defense resource attorneys who are so qualified. The most serious cases include all cases of murder in the first or second degree, persistent offender cases, and class A felonies.”

F. Juvenile Cases - Class A. Each attorney representing a juvenile accused of a Class A felony shall meet the following requirements:

- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1, and ii. Either:
 - a. has served one year as a prosecutor; or
 - b. has served one year as a public defender; one year in a private criminal practice; and
- iii. Has been trial counsel alone of record in five Class B and C felony trials; and
- iv. Each attorney shall be accompanied at his or her first juvenile trial by a supervisor, if available.

G. Juvenile Cases - Classes B and C. Each attorney representing a juvenile accused of a Class B or C felony shall meet the following requirements:

- i. Minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and ii. Either:
 - a. has served one year as a prosecutor; or
 - b. has served one year as a public defender; or one year in a private criminal practice, and
- iii. has been trial counsel alone in five misdemeanor cases brought to a final resolution; and
- iv. Each attorney shall be accompanied at his or her first juvenile trial by a supervisor if available.

H. Juvenile Sex Offense cases. Each attorney representing a client in a juvenile sex offense case shall meet the following requirements:

- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1 and Section 2(H); and
- ii. Been counsel alone of record in an adult or juvenile sex offense case or shall be supervised by or consult with an attorney who has experience representing juveniles or adults in sex offense cases.

I. Juvenile Status Offenses Cases. Each attorney representing a client in a "Becca" matter shall meet the following requirements:

- i. The minimum requirements as outlined in Section 1; and ii. Either:
 - a. have represented clients in at least two similar cases under the

supervision of a more experienced attorney or completed at least three hours of CLE training specific to “status offense” cases; or

- b. have participated in at least one consultation per case with a more experienced attorney who is qualified under this section.

J. Misdemeanor Cases. Each attorney representing a defendant involved in a matter concerning a simple misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor or condition of confinement, shall meet the requirements as outlined in Section 1.

K. Dependency Cases. Each attorney representing a client in a dependency matter shall meet the following requirements:

- i. The minimum requirements as outlined in Section 1; and
- ii. Attorneys handling termination hearings shall have six months dependency experience or have significant experience in handling complex litigation.
- iii. Attorneys in dependency matters should be familiar with expert services and treatment resources for substance abuse.
- iv. Attorneys representing children in dependency matters should have knowledge, training, experience, and ability in communicating effectively with children, or have participated in at least one consultation per case either with a state Office of Public Defense resource attorney or other attorney qualified under this section.

L. Civil Commitment Cases. Each attorney representing a respondent shall meet the following requirements:

- i. Minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and
- ii. Each staff attorney shall be accompanied at his or her first 90 or 180 day commitment hearing by a supervisor; and
- iii. Shall not represent a respondent in a 90 or 180 day commitment hearing unless he or she has either:
 - a. served one year as a prosecutor, or
 - b. served one year as a public defender, or one year in a private civil commitment practice, and
 - c. been trial counsel in five civil commitment initial hearings; and

- iv. Shall not represent a respondent in a jury trial unless he or she has conducted a felony jury trial as lead counsel; or been co-counsel with a more experienced attorney in a 90 or 180 day commitment hearing.
- M. Sex Offender “Predator” Commitment Cases. Generally, there should be two counsel on each sex offender commitment case. The lead counsel shall meet the following requirements:
- i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and ii. Have at least:
 - a. Three years criminal trial experience; and
 - b. One year experience as a felony defense attorney or one year experience as a criminal appeals attorney; and
 - c. Experience as lead counsel in at least one felony trial; and
 - d. Experience as counsel in cases involving each of the following:
 - (1) Mental health issues; and
 - (2) Sexual offenses; and
 - (3) Expert witnesses; and
 - e. Familiarity with the Civil Rules; and
 - f. One year of appellate experience or demonstrated legal writing ability.

Other counsel working on a sex offender commitment cases should meet the Minimum Requirements in Section 1 and have either one year experience as a public defender or significant experience in the preparation of criminal cases, including legal research and writing and training in trial advocacy.

- N. Contempt of Court Cases. Each attorney representing a respondent shall meet the following requirements:
- i. Minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and
 - ii. Each staff attorney shall be accompanied at his or her first three contempt of court hearings by a supervisor or more experienced attorney, or participate in at least one consultation per case with a state Office of Public Defense resource attorney or other attorney qualified in this area of practice.

- O. Specialty Courts. Each attorney representing a client in a specialty court (e.g., mental health court, drug diversion court, homelessness court) shall meet the following requirements:
 - i. The minimum requirements set forth in Section 1; and
 - ii. The requirements set forth above for representation in the type of practice involved in the specialty court (e.g., felony, misdemeanor, juvenile); and
 - iii. Be familiar with mental health and substance abuse issues and treatment alternatives.

3. **Appellate Representation.**

Each attorney who is counsel for a case on appeal to the Washington Supreme Court or to the Washington Court of Appeals shall meet the following requirements:

- A. The minimum requirements as outlined in Section 1; and
- B. Either:
 - i. has filed a brief with the Washington Supreme Court or any Washington Court of Appeals in at least one criminal case within the past two years; or
 - ii. has equivalent appellate experience, including filing appellate briefs in other jurisdictions, at least one year as an appellate court or federal court clerk, extensive trial level briefing or other comparable work.
- C. Attorneys with primary responsibility for handling a death penalty appeal shall have at least five years' criminal experience, preferably including at least one homicide trial and at least six appeals from felony convictions, and meet the requirements of SPRC 2.

RALJ Misdemeanor Appeals to Superior Court: Each attorney who is counsel alone for a case on appeal to the Superior Court from a Court of Limited Jurisdiction should meet the minimum requirements as outlined in Section 1, and have had significant training or experience in either criminal appeals, criminal motions practice, extensive trial level briefing, clerking for an appellate judge, or assisting a more experienced attorney in preparing and arguing an RALJ appeal.

4. **Legal Interns.**

- A. Legal interns must meet the requirements set out in APR 9.
- B. Legal interns shall receive training pursuant to APR 9 to inform them of office procedure and policy Standard Nine, Training.

Related Standards:

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, Standard 13.15.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Public Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard III-7.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for the Appointment and Performance of Counsel in Death Penalty Cases*, 1987, Standard 5.1.

STANDARD FIFTEEN: Disposition of Client Complaints

Standard:

Each agency or firm or individual contract attorney providing public defense services shall have a method to respond promptly to client complaints. Complaints should first be directed to the attorney, firm or agency which provided representation. If the client feels that he or she has not received an adequate response, the contracting authority or public defense administrator should designate a person or agency to evaluate the legitimacy of complaints and to follow up meritorious ones. The complaining client should be informed as to the disposition of his or her complaint within one week.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, 4-5.1 and 4-5.2.

STANDARD SIXTEEN:

Cause for Termination of Defender Services and Removal of Attorney

Standard:

Contracts for indigent defense services shall include the grounds for termination of the contract by the parties. Termination of a provider's contract should only be for good cause. Termination for good cause shall include the failure of the attorney to render adequate representation to clients; the willful disregard of the rights and best interests of the client; and the willful disregard of the standards herein addressed.

Removal by the court of counsel from representation normally should not occur over the objection of the attorney and the client.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, Standard 5-1.3, 5-5.3.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Defense Contracts*, 1984, Guideline III-5.

National Study Commission on Defense Services, *Guidelines for Legal Defense Systems in the United States*, 1976, Recommendations 2.12 and 2.14.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts*, 1973, Standard 13.8.

STANDARD SEVENTEEN: Non-Discrimination

Standard:

Neither the Contracting Authority, in its selection of an attorney, firm or agency to provide public defense representation, nor the attorneys selected, in their hiring practices or in their representation of clients, shall discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, age, marital status, gender, sexual orientation or disability. Both the contracting authority and the contractor shall comply with all federal, state, and local non-discrimination requirements.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Standards for Criminal Justice*, Providing Defense Services, Standard 5-3.1.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for Defender Services*, 1976, Standard III-8.

STANDARD EIGHTEEN: Guidelines for Awarding Defense Contracts

Standard:

Recruitment for public defense contracts and assigned counsel lists should include efforts to achieve a diverse public defense workforce.

Attorneys or firms applying for contracts or placement on assigned counsel lists must demonstrate their ability to meet these Standards and the Supreme Court Standards for Indigent Defense. Their contracts must comply with Rules of Professional Conduct 1.8(m).

The county or city should award contracts for public defense services and select attorneys for assigned counsel lists only after determining that the applicant has demonstrated professional qualifications consistent with both these Standards and the Supreme Court Standards for Indigent Defense. Under no circumstances should a contract be awarded on the basis of cost alone.

Judges, judicial staff, city attorneys, county prosecutors, and law enforcement officers shall not select the attorneys who will be included in a contract or an assigned counsel list.

Related Standards:

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Indigent Legal Defense Contracts*, 1984, Standard IV-3.

King County Bar Association Indigent Defense Services Task Force, Guidelines for Accreditation of Defender Agencies, 1982, Statement of Purpose.

(The WSBA Board of Governors adopted revisions to Standard 18 in May 2021)

STANDARD NINETEEN: Independence and Oversight of Public Defense Services⁴

Standard:

Public defense providers should not be restrained from independently advocating for the resources and reforms necessary to provide defense related services for all clients. This includes efforts to foster system improvements, efficiencies, access to justice, and equity in the legal system.

Judges and judicial staff shall not manage and oversee public defense offices, public defense contracts, or assigned counsel lists. Judges and judicial staff in superior courts and courts of limited jurisdiction shall not select public defense administrators or the attorneys who provide public defense services.

Attorneys with public defense experience insulated from judicial and political influence should manage and oversee public defense services.

The terms “manage” and “oversee” include: drafting, awarding, renewing, and terminating public defense contracts; adding attorneys or removing them from assigned counsel lists; developing case weighting policies; monitoring attorney caseload limits and case-level qualifications; monitoring quality; monitoring compliance with contracts, policies, procedures, and standards; and recommending compensation.

The agencies, organizations, and administrators responsible for managing and overseeing public defense services shall apply these Standards, the Supreme Court Standards for Indigent Defense, and the WSBA Performance Guidelines in their management and oversight duties.

Jurisdictions unable to employ attorneys with public defense experience to manage and oversee public defense services shall consult with established city, county, or state public defense offices, or engage experienced public defense providers as consultants regarding

⁴ See Principle 1 of the ABA Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System and Commentary, including the recommendation a nonpartisan commission or advisory board oversee the public defense function, thus safeguarding against undue political pressure while also promoting efficiency and accountability for a publicly funded service.

management and oversight duties.

Related Standards:

American Bar Association, *Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System*, 2002, Principle 1.

National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force on Courts, The Defense*, 1973, Chapter 1.3.

American Bar Association *Standards for Criminal Justice, Providing Defense Services*, 1992, Standards 5-1.3, 5-1.6, 5-4.1.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Standards for the Administration of Assigned Counsel Systems*, 1989, Standards 2, 3.2.1.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association, *Guidelines for Negotiating and Awarding Contracts for Criminal Defense Services*, 1984, Guidelines II-1, II-2, II-3, IV-2.

National Conference of Commissioners on State Law, *Model Public Defender Act*, 1970, Section 10(d).

Institute for Judicial Administration/American Bar Association, *Juvenile Justice Standards Relating to Counsel for Private Parties*, 1979, Standards 2.1(D), 3.2.

National Study Commission on Defense Services, *Guidelines for Legal Defense Systems in the United States* 1976, Guidelines 2.8, 2.10-2.13, 2.18, 5.13.

Michigan Indigent Defense Commission, 2020, *Minimum Standard 5*.

Additional References:

American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), *Resolution in Support of Public Defense*, 2019, Independence and Equality.

<https://sixthamendment.org/the-right-to-counsel/national-standards-for-providing-the-right-to-counsel/the-constitutional-imperative-for-defender-independence-aba-principle-1/>

<https://sixthamendment.org/the-right-to-counsel/national-standards-for-providing-the-right-to-counsel/the-preeminent-need-for-independence-of-the-defense-function-aba-principle-1/>

<https://sixthamendment.org/the-right-to-counsel/national-standards-for-providing-the-right-to-counsel/understanding-judicial-interference-with-the-defense-function-aba-principle-1/>

<https://sixthamendment.org/the-right-to-counsel/national-standards-for-providing-the-right-to-counsel/understanding-political-interference-with-the-defense-function-aba-principle-1/>

<https://sixthamendment.org/the-right-to-counsel/national-standards-for-providing-the-right-to-counsel/systemic-accountability-through-an-independent-commission-aba-principle-1/>

(The WSBA Board of Governors adopted Standard 19 in May 2021)