

## Public Defense Standards

July 8, 2024

10:02 a.m.

Present: Commissioner Brummer, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, County Manager Ryan Barrett, Becky Butler, Prosecuting Attorney Jonathan Meyer, Washington State Association of Counties Interim Executive Director Derek Young, Curtis Steinhauer, Rachel Tiller, Ruth Petersen, Judge Wade Samuelson, Monique Shedd, Sheriff Snaza, Undersheriff Kevin Engelbertson, Ricolena Anders, Sen. Jeff Wilson, Josh Weiss, Judge Andrew Toynbee, Judge Jim Lawler, Meja Handlen, Susie Palmateer, Chris Baum, Jacob Clark, Don Blair

Guest(s): KC (no last name listed)

Recorder: Rieva Lester

**Public comment:** None.

**Public defense:** The meeting participants discussed indigent defense and the drastic caseload reductions the State Bar Association has proposed.

As the meeting participants noted, the county uses public tax dollars to contract with area attorneys to represent individuals who are unable to afford representation on their own. Commonly referred to as “indigent defense,” this tax-funded representation is constitutionally guaranteed.

The meeting participants (including judges, the prosecuting attorney, the sheriff, contracted defense attorneys, county staff and representatives from the Washington State Association of Counties) shared numerous concerns about the proposed changes. Among the concerns cited:

- It addresses the needs of counties that don’t have properly-working programs. Lewis County – and several others statewide – already has a successful program. The proposed changes would only negatively affect that.
- The proposal is skewed in that it doesn’t reflect the time efficiencies seasoned attorneys enjoy. The proposal instead focuses on how much time newer employees spend on cases.
- A recent news article showed the bar association following two novice attorneys as it developed its caseload recommendations.
- The proposal amounts to a broad-state solution to a King County-type problem.
- It will be “an unmitigated disaster.”

The group discussed whether an injunction could be filed to prevent the state from putting the caseload standards into effect, and participants discussed drafting a joint letter to the state Supreme Court.

Derek Young said it’s imperative that public defenders weigh in and share their thoughts with the state Supreme Court.

Meeting adjourned at 11:18 a.m.