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**SENATE BILL 5781**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Torres, Dhingra, Padden, Boehnke, L. Wilson, Braun, Frame, Kuderer, Lovick, Mullet, Nguyen, Nobles, Shewmake, Warnick, C. Wilson, and J. Wilson

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1 AN ACT Relating to establishing a law student rural public  
2 defense program; adding a new section to chapter 2.70 RCW; and  
3 creating a new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that the lack of  
6 availability of public defense attorneys is an increasing problem in  
7 Washington and neighboring states which threatens the ability of  
8 court systems to process criminal filings, particularly within rural  
9 areas. The legislature intends to encourage law students to enter  
10 public defense practice and to remove barriers to practice in  
11 underserved areas and rural areas of the state.

12 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 2.70 RCW  
13 to read as follows:

14 (1) Subject to appropriations, the office of public defense shall  
15 administer a law student rural public defense program. The program  
16 shall coordinate with one or more law schools to place second year  
17 law students and/or recent law school graduates as legal interns with  
18 experienced public defense attorneys located in underserved areas and  
19 rural areas of the state. The program must allow the intern to gain  
20 real-world public defense experience under the mentorship of the

1 experienced public defense attorney, including active representation  
2 and litigation opportunities, with the purpose of encouraging the  
3 intern to consider, or not be deterred from pursuing, employment  
4 opportunities in public defense in underserved areas and rural areas  
5 of Washington state. The internship may be structured to correspond  
6 with time periods relevant to the academic calendar. Eligible  
7 internship placements shall include government and nonprofit public  
8 defense agencies as well as private firms that contract to provide  
9 public defense services.

10 (2) Contracts established by the office of public defense under  
11 this section shall include monthly compensation and housing stipends  
12 for program participants. Contracts may include partial reimbursement  
13 for the supervising attorney.

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