
SENATE BILL 5453

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senators Slatter, Torres, Chapman, Frame, Hasegawa, Holy, Saldaña, and Valdez

Read first time 01/23/25. Referred to Committee on Law & Justice.

1 AN ACT Relating to public defense recruitment and retention;
2 adding new sections to chapter 2.70 RCW; creating a new section; and
3 providing an effective date.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature recognizes a critical
6 workforce shortage of public defense attorneys and public defense
7 professional staff, who are necessary to ensure the right to counsel
8 and due process guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States
9 and the Washington state Constitution. The legislature recognizes
10 that a variety of barriers impede recruitment and retention of public
11 defense attorneys and public defense professional staff, particularly
12 impacting certain underserved areas of the state. The legislature
13 intends to promote policies that remove barriers and streamline
14 pathways to public defense practice for attorneys and professional
15 legal staff.

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

18 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
19 specific purpose, the office of public defense shall administer a

1 training program for public defense mitigation specialists and
2 paralegals who are new to public defense.

3 (2) The training program must incorporate public defense and
4 applicable standards, client communication, and relevant ethical
5 standards. The training program must also offer networking
6 opportunities.

7 (3) The training program may be provided in an in-person or
8 remote format and may incorporate recorded resources.

9 (4) Recruitment for the training program should include outreach
10 to justice-impacted persons and formerly incarcerated persons.

11 (5) By June 30, 2027, the office of public defense shall offer
12 the training to at least one class of paralegals and one class of
13 public defense mitigation specialists.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 2.70 RCW
15 to read as follows:

16 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this
17 specific purpose, the office of public defense shall administer a
18 pool of public defense paralegals to provide support to the office of
19 public defense contracted counsel on an as-needed basis.

20 (2) In providing paralegal support to contracted counsel pursuant
21 to this section, the office of public defense shall prioritize solo
22 practitioners and very small private law firms contracted with the
23 office of public defense, as well as practitioners contracted to
24 provide postconviction representation.

25 (3) Procurement notices for the paralegal pool should include
26 outreach to justice-impacted persons and formerly incarcerated
27 persons who have paralegal training or prior relevant work
28 experience.

29 (4) By June 30, 2027, the office of public defense shall have at
30 least 10 full-time paralegals in the public defense paralegal pool.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** This act takes effect July 1, 2026.

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