



King County

Public Defense Advisory Board Meeting

Thursday, April 3, 2025
9:30am – 12:00pm

Teams Meeting and Conference Room 245

AGENDA

1. **Welcome**

Attending virtually: Kevin Hollinz, Chris Carney, Jackie Walsh, Chris Petroni, George Yeannakis

Attending in Person: NONE

Not present: Sara Rankin, Shrounda Selivanoff, John Strait

2. **Approval of Minutes from Meeting on February 6, 2025**

Chris Petroni moved and Jackie Walsh seconded, no objections. Approved.

3. **Public Comment**

None.

4. **Remarks from SEIU Representatives**

Molly Gilbert:

- On March 5, multiple paralegals were given instructions to return to office 3 days per week. A week later, meeting with management revealed that this directive did not come from the DO and would investigate.
- Next communication from Deputy Director Matt Pang did not clarify where the directive came from but clarified contractual authority in CLA to adjust telecommuting policies.
- Members are deeply concerned, as return to office has widespread impacts on other aspects in their lives.
- Attrition slowed briefly following adoption of the new standards but now is picking up again. Confusion persists around caseload policy and case assignment procedures, and lack of caseload relief is causing concern among membership about the sustainability of the status quo.
- Overall, SEIU perceives communications from the DO are not clear and believe there has not been collaborative approach to solving problems on caseload policy implementation.

5. Remarks from Teamsters Representatives

Rachael Schultz:

- Teamsters have been working with the DO to implement the caseload standards and ensuring implementation happens on time.
- No other pressing issues, but this is the first time she has heard from SEIU about supervisors coming to them instead of their stewards in Teamsters.
- She believes there may be some miscommunication with the supervisors who Molly reported speaking with, as Rachael has not heard concerns about return to office policies.
- Rachael clarified for Chair Carney that Teamsters is not aware of any change to return to work policies during regular LMCs with the DO.

6. Department of Public Defense Director's Report

Interim Director Matt Sanders:

Sanders reiterated that the DO is 100% committed to the new caseload standards taking effect in July and is strongly opposed to any potential change in the timeline for the standards taking effect.

Interim Deputy Director Matt Pang:

Pang began walking through the presentation provided to board members ahead of the meeting. He described initial plans for developing more formal pathways for professional development for legal administrative specialists, investigators, and paralegals and sought input from the Board members. The presentation then moved to a discussion of training and development, recognizing the contributions of Tara Urs who recently resigned on April 1st. Sanders highlighted the importance of improving and standardizing training procedures as the new caseload standards require attorneys to take felony cases earlier in their careers.

A data error in the new CMS led to an incorrect measurement of falling open felony cases that has now been corrected. Though the trend is increasing rather than decreasing, the absolute number of open felony cases is lower than what was reported due to the data error. DO has worked with managing attorneys and supervisors to move more attorneys from misdemeanors to felony units to prepare for caseload standards implementation in July. Felony filings are approaching capacity, exceeding capacity in Kent and over 90% capacity in Seattle. Assignments are even higher than filings. Misdemeanor filings in district court are just as high, exceeding capacity in Kent and Seattle over the last ninety days. Assignments in juvenile court are also exceeding capacity while SMC and ITA assignments are over 90% of our capacity in the last ninety days.

Hiring for professional staff is going well, posting for LAS position had more than 200 applicants. Also seeing robust application numbers for paralegals and other positions as well. Hiring for attorneys has also improved since bringing on in-house recruiter. 10 laterals have started already and 10 more have accepted offers for June or September start dates. 48 graduating 3Ls have accepted offers for October start dates. 4 attorneys have departed in the first quarter of 2025, resulting in a net increase of 6 attorneys since January 1st. Projections for Q2 show a net increase of five attorneys as well.

Special Counsel for Criminal Policy and Practice Katie Hurley:

Hurley provided an overview of SB 5296, which would provide judges in juvenile court with more discretion to allow our clients to serve their sentences locally instead of a dangerously overcrowded and harmful youth prison. The bill would play a key role in alleviating the overcrowding crisis in Washington's youth prison while also significantly reforming the state's outdated determinate sentencing scheme. She also provided updates on several other bills and budget appropriations focused on addressing the crisis in WA's youth prisons that DPD has been engaging lawmakers to improve. SB 5296 has cleared the House policy committee and must still pass House Appropriations and a full floor vote in that chamber to become law. HB 1113, which would have given judges the authority to dismiss misdemeanors once clients complied with certain conditions, passed the House but ultimately died in the Senate Law & Justice Committee.

Interim Deputy Director Matt Pang:

Pang discussed the department's need for additional space as the department grows its staffing. Work continues with the Executive's Performance, Strategy, and Budget team along with Facilities Management Division to develop a plan.

Questions from Board members:

Chris Petroni asked for clarification from DO on return-to-work mandate reported by SEIU.

Sanders clarified that one of the four divisions has provided this instruction to paralegals to return to office 3 days per week. Molly Gilbert disputed this, claiming that staff in NDD, SCRAPD, and ACAD have reported receiving this instruction on April 14th. Sanders explained that his position has been that any formal policy should be decided by the permanent Director. Pang said they confirmed that NDD and SCRAPD have not sent this message from their managing attorneys. A representative from Teamsters confirmed their understanding of the situation matches what Pang described.

Jackie Walsh asked for plans to improve communication between SEIU and the DO.

Sanders responded by saying he and Pang have made a priority out of clear and transparent communication with staff via office hours and all-staff emails. He also stated that he hopes the listening tour upcoming will help increase transparency as well.

Jackie Walsh said she appreciated the plan but remained concerned about SEIU's remarks that they had not heard a specific response to their questions for a month.

Sanders clarified that the DO responded to concerns from SEIU last week and listed various ways in which management has demonstrated public support for the standards.

She then pressed Sanders for a specific commitment on improving prompt communication with SEIU, which he provided.

George Yeannakis asked a question about attrition spurred by a recent presentation from Stev Weidlich at a training conference. He specifically asked Sanders for any plans on how to address concerns on workplace culture and how it intersects with retention.

Sanders informed the Board that the specifics of the policy remain a subject of bargaining with the union and so he could not discuss it in front of represented staff, but confirmed that DPD is treating the standards as a hard cap on attorneys' caseloads. He doesn't not believe attrition is a unique challenge for DPD. Caseload reduction and increasing staffing levels for non-attorney professionals. Pang added that hiring is a

piece of the strategy for improving attrition as additional capacity is an essential part of providing caseload relief.

7. **Executive Session**

Moved to executive session at 11:03 a.m. and asked Sanders and Pang to remain on the call.

8. **Adjourn**

Adjourned at 11:46 a.m.