

Public Defender Association Staff Attorney

Summary

The Public Defender Association (PDA) is looking for a Staff Attorney to provide legal services to Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) clients and advocate for criminal legal system reform through the Racial Disparity Project (RDP). PDA seeks an attorney motivated to help those most frequently disadvantaged by existing criminal legal and social service systems, including those with disabilities and people of color.

The Staff Attorney will assist LEAD clients in a widely-varied legal practice, ranging from criminal and eviction defense to family law. Although broad legal experience is preferred, the most important characteristics applicants can possess are the ability to independently and efficiently learn new legal practice areas and strong legal research and writing skills. Through RDP, the Staff Attorney will assist with impact and appellate litigation, policy advocacy, and King County inquest representation. Qualified candidates will enjoy developing creative legal and policy approaches to address the harms created by conventional responses to crime and public order issues.

Organization Description

PDA advocates for criminal legal system reform and develops alternatives that shift from a punishment paradigm to a system that supports individual and community health. Grounding reform in a public health and safety framework, PDA develops new strategies and implements models that improve on conventional responses to crime and public order issues. In collaboration with community and government partners, PDA uses policy advocacy, organizing, litigation, and public education to achieve its goals. PDA is comprised of several projects: Civil Survival, Collective Justice, JustCARE, King County Eviction Mitigation Program, LEAD, LEAD National Support Bureau, Racial Disparity Project, and VOCAL-WA.

Job Description

The Staff Attorney will offer trauma-informed legal services to clients in the LEAD. The attorney will offer representation across the wide range of LEAD participants' legal needs. Common practice areas include family law, legal financial obligation remission, and warrant quash assistance. However, the legal practice is defined by its varied scope, rather than a single focus area. Due to the varied scope, the Staff Attorney will be required to connect clients to existing legal aid providers and learn new areas of law to provide direct representation.

LEAD clients face a variety of challenges, including homelessness, mental illness, and substance use, that can complicate their ability to engage with legal services. Legal services will be provided through the principles of harm-reduction—meeting clients where they are, in a way that is responsive to their specific needs. The attorney will work closely with client case managers at Evergreen Treatment Services to ensure that the legal representation plan closely aligns with the client's broader social service goals.

The Staff Attorney will be expected to advance criminal legal system reform through the Racial Disparity Project. RDP uses policy advocacy, impact litigation, and legal representation to address racial disparities in the criminal legal system. Examples of current RDP project include assisting several families with loved ones killed by the police or in jail to investigate their loved ones' deaths, litigating a class action lawsuit seeking the refund of legal financial obligations under the WA Supreme Court's *State v. Blake* decision, and representing an individual seeking resentencing under S.B. 6164. In the Staff Attorney's first year of employment, they will co-counsel a police shooting inquest in King County.

The Staff Attorney will work on a team of five attorneys and one paralegal. PDA has a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination requirement for all staff, unless they meet specific exceptions under PDA's COVID-19 Vaccination Policy.

Location

PDA's office is located at 110 Prefontaine Pl. S., Seattle, WA. Although the office remains open for necessary in-person work, staff currently work largely remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person work will be required if necessary to provide legal services. Travel within Washington may be required. In the future, PDA will likely adopt a hybrid model, where staff will work from home and from the office, as needed.

Qualifications

- Member, in good-standing, of the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA); or ability to quickly obtain APR 8(c) admission, with full WSBA admission by January 2022.
- The ability to independently and efficiently learn new legal practice areas and offer representation with a high level of competence.
- Strong legal research and writing skills are required and will be critical to the attorney's success in this position.
- Although no applicant will have experience in all expected areas of practice, greater experience with the following areas will be preferred: family law, landlord-tenant, criminal (warrants, criminal defense, sex offender registration relief, record vacation/sealing), legal financial obligations, employment, and immigration.
- Ability to work on tight, and, sometimes, unpredictable timelines.
- Strong ability to work collaboratively, both with colleagues and with client case managers. The successful applicant will have strong conflict management skills and be able to tactfully engage with external partners.
- Demonstrated cultural competence and sensitivity in working with diverse clients, communities, and colleagues.
- Experience and skill working with individuals with mental illness, substance use disorder, and other disabilities is required. The successful applicant will excel in providing legal services to individuals who have difficulty consistently engaging in their own representation.
- Ability to balance the needs of multiple clients with time-sensitive legal needs, while also maintaining strong communication with clients with less pressing needs is required.

- Strong ability to work collaboratively, both with colleagues and with client case managers is required. The successful applicant will have strong conflict management skills and be able to tactfully engage with external partners.
- Policy advocacy and organizing skills are preferred, including the ability to review and digest core aspects of legislation, organize community in relation to PDA policy priorities, and identify policy advocacy opportunities for PDA.
- Trial advocacy experience is preferred.
- Appellate advocacy skills and experience are preferred.
- Familiarity and strong relationships with local policymakers, community leaders, and marginalized communities are preferred.

Compensation

Salary range is \$69,576-\$117,546, depending on experience. Within the position salary range, salary increases 6% annually, although PDA has paused step increases due to the COVID-19 emergency. An additional annual cost of living increase is provided at the discretion of the Board of Directors. Benefits include:

- 401k match of up to 4% of salary, beginning after six months of employment;
- Annual, 2% of salary, profit sharing contribution to 401k, provided in most years;
- Generous medical and dental benefits for employees and family members;
- 15 days vacation, accrued annually, increasing to 20 days vacation, accrued annually;
- 12 personal days, accrued annually;
- Unlimited ORCA card; and
- Monthly \$50 employer cell phone contribution.

This is a Fair Labor Standards Act exempt, at-will position; continuation in the position depends on both performance and funding.

Equal Opportunity Employer

PDA is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and fosters an environment free of barriers and discriminatory practices. PDA actively promotes mutual respect, acceptance, teamwork and productivity. PDA is committed to maintaining an organization whose staff, Board and clients are diverse in background, experience, race, color, national origin, gender, age, religious affiliation, marital status, sexual identity, sensory, mental or physical abilities, veteran status, and other qualities that strengthen the program while reinforcing its commitment to basic fairness. People of color, those directly impacted by the criminal legal system, people who identify as queer, trans, lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and those with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply. Individuals needing a reasonable accommodation for the application or interview process should contact Corey Guilmette at corey.guilmette@defender.org or (206) 641-5334.

How to Apply

The position will remain open until filled. Applications will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis. Please submit the following to Zahra Al-Najaf (she/her pronouns) at zahra.al-najaf@defender.org:

- Letter of interest.
- Resumé.
- One legal writing sample, unedited by others.
- Names and contact information for three references.