

Public Defender Association

Staff Attorney

Summary

The Public Defender Association (PDA)¹ -- is looking for a Staff Attorney to provide legal services to individuals who have been diverted away from criminal system involvement to LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion/Let Everyone Advance with Dignity) services, and to advocate for criminal legal system reform. PDA seeks an attorney motivated to help those most frequently harmed by existing criminal legal and social service systems, including those with disabilities, people of color, those living unsheltered, and survivors of past incarceration.

The Staff Attorney will assist LEAD participants in a widely-varied legal practice, ranging from criminal and eviction defense to family law and public benefits work. Although diverse/eclectic legal experience is very valuable, the most important characteristics applicants can possess are the ability to work independently and efficiently learn new legal practice areas, strong legal research and writing skills, and strong instinctive advocacy ability. The Staff Attorney may also assist with impact and appellate litigation, and policy advocacy as needs arise. 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: Seattle King County LEAD project management, CoLEAD temporary lodging/outreach/housing advocacy, LEAD Support Bureau (international, national and Washington State technical support for LEAD replication), an eviction mitigation project, and VOCAL-WA. PDA also catalyzed the JustCARE alternative to sweeps/displacement, to assist in resolution of encampments during the first two years of the COVID pandemic.

Job Description

The Staff Attorney will offer trauma-informed legal services to clients in the LEAD and CoLEAD programs, all of whom were referred and approved for program participation because

¹ Soon to be renamed Purpose.Dignity.Action., as we no longer provide public defense services.

of their exposure to enforcement and legal system sanctions; LEAD and CoLEAD are pre-booked community-based alternatives (not court-based). Participants tend to have a wide array of longstanding barriers and obstacles that need to be addressed to improve chances of stabilization, recovery and thriving; the effort to tackle many of these obstacles benefits from help from legal counsel.

The attorney will provide representation across the wide range of participants' legal needs. Common practice areas include family law, public benefits issues, dependency law, debt relief, 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 position will require the Staff Attorney 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 the LEAD direct service provider agencies (presently, Evergreen Treatment Services REACH Program and Community Passageways), and case managers with PDA's lodging-based CoLEAD program, to ensure that the legal representation plan aligns with the client's broader social service goals.

The Staff Attorney will be part of PDA's broader work of advancing criminal legal system reform to address racial disparities in the criminal legal system. This work may be done using policy advocacy, impact litigation, and/or legal representation, and limited lobbying. Examples of past reform work include permit advocacy to allow an art installation at Seattle City Hall on International Overdose Awareness Day; co-counseling the *Trueblood* litigation in the Western District of WA, leading to injunctive relief against the state for delays in providing competency evaluation and treatment services to mentally ill individuals held for months pre-trial in local jails; litigating a class action lawsuit seeking the refund of legal financial obligations under the WA Supreme Court's *State v. Blake* decision; clemency advocacy; and representing an individual seeking resentencing under S.B. 6164.

The Staff Attorney will work on a team of attorneys and a paralegal.

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 may adopt a hybrid model, where staff will work from home and from the office, as needed; at present, however, legal staff work primarily remotely.

Essential Job Qualification

(Any equivalent combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, education, and experience)

Education: J.D.

Licensure: 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 October 2023.

Experience: Combination of criminal and civil practice experience desired; experience specifically with family law, dependency, immigration, and/or civil litigation strongly preferred.

Knowledge and Skills:

- Exceptional legal representation, research, oral and written advocacy skills;
- Demonstrated capacity for flexibility, creativity, and innovation, as well as the ability to work on tight and sometimes unpredictable timelines;
- The ability to issue spot, independently and efficiently learn new legal practice areas, and offer representation with a high level of competence;
- Demonstrated cultural competence and sensitivity in working with diverse clients, communities, and colleagues;
- Experience providing legal services to individuals who have difficulty consistently engaging in their own representation, including those with mental illness, substance use disorder, and other disabilities;
- Demonstrated commitment to partnership with non-attorney colleagues, with strong conflict management skills and the ability to tactfully engage with external partners; and
- Preferred Experience — policy advocacy and organizing skills; familiarity and strong relationships with local policymakers, community leaders, and marginalized communities.

Compensation

Salary range (2023) is \$74,516-\$125,918, depending on comparable experience. Within the position salary range, salary increases 6% annually to the top of the scale (ten steps). An additional annual cost of living increase may be provided at the discretion of the Board of Directors. Benefits presently include:

- 401k match of up to 4% of salary, beginning after six months of employment;
- Annual additional profit sharing contribution to 401k up to 2% at the discretion of the Board;
- Generous medical and dental benefits for employees and family members;

- 15 days vacation, accrued annually, increasing to 20 days vacation, accrued annually;
- 12 Sick Safe & Personal days, accrued annually;
- Unlimited ORCA card for staff who use public transportation for work; and
- Monthly \$50 employer cell phone contribution, or office cell phone.

This is a Fair Labor Standards Act exempt, at-will position; continuation in the position depends on both performance and funding, and employment may be terminated for any lawful reason including organizational business needs.

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, women, 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 Brandi McNeil (she/her pronouns) at Brandi.McNeil@defender.org or 206.627.0207.

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.