



Office of the State Public Defender

Megan A. Ring, State Public Defender

For Immediate Release

September 12, 2023

National Workload Study Highlights the Need for Increased Resources for Colorado's Public Defenders

A [RAND study](#) released today by the National Association for Public Defense addresses the critical need for additional resources in the nation's public defender systems. According to the “National Public Defense Workload Study,” even nationally-recognized public defense systems like Colorado’s have an urgent need for additional resources to properly safeguard the important Sixth Amendment right to counsel.

In support of the findings, the study highlights the significant challenges faced by defenders in today's courtrooms - challenges that have exponentially increased defender workload. “Today's public defender must possess the skills and time to review police and public camera video, social media and cell phone data, forensic evidence from DNA to chemical drug analysis” reports RAND. Further, RAND recognizes that the expanded role of the public defender in addressing “psychological and brain disorders and the impact on clients” has led to a concomitant increase in time necessary to effectively represent the client.

Colorado State Public Defender, Megan Ring, concurs with these findings. In Colorado, video and digital information has exponentially grown in criminal cases, specialized treatment courts, and bond hearing reform all demand more time and tax defender resources. The behavioral health service failures in Colorado particularly add to the problem. “We have a behavioral and mental health crisis in our state,” says Ring, “which routes individuals suffering from disorders into jails and prisons. We have a criminal legal system that is ineffective in addressing the needs of these human beings. Our lawyers are working more than ever to try to address the diverse problems of this population forced into the criminal courts.” These system failures continue despite a 2012 federal lawsuit which is costing Colorado taxpayers millions of dollars per year in fines for violating court orders to treat people living with mental illness.

The RAND study recommends locally-driven workload studies in conjunction with nationally-created workload standards, to best assess and respond to this increased workload and to support public defense agency requests for additional funding. “While we currently monitor, study, and evaluate workload for defenders, we plan to review closely any well-researched attempts to use reliable data to show the need for increased public defender funding” states Ring. “There are many solutions to the massive growth of the criminal legal system that need to be examined by policy makers, including providing needed resources and removing people and cases from the criminal legal system. But at the end of the day, OSPD remains committed to ensuring that no one is standing alone in Colorado’s courts when facing the might of the government.”

For media inquiries, contact Director of Legislative Policy and External Communications James Karbach at 720-530-7099 or James.karbach@coloradodefenders.us.