



OFFICE OF THE STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

MEGAN A. RING
STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

January 31, 2024

Judicial Branch, Office of the State Public Defender, FY 2024-25, Report for SB22-188

Beginning July 2022, The Office of the State Public Defender (OSPD) was allocated \$250,000 in connection with SB22-188, CONCERNING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR ADVOCATES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, MAKING AN APPROPRIATION. The allocation was distributed through the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA). This report is a summary of the expenditures associated with this allocation to date, and some estimations of additional expenditures through June 2024.

The OSPD has utilized a multi-layered approach incorporating training, skill development, and support systems for defenders to assist with the direct and secondary trauma, as well as, other work-related stressors. Because a key component of the allocation asked for the strengthening of peer-to-peer support, the OSPD developed cohorts of a defenders to work on specific traumatic stress-reducing skills and strengthen peer relationships with the goal of disseminating the lessons from the cohorts across the public defender system. The OSPD also created an Employee Peer Support team which provides peer support to colleagues and has been incorporated into onboarding for new employees.

A critical component of the allocation is used for counseling services through both direct service providers and reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses. This portion of the allocation is particularly valuable because it allows for individuals to determine the support they need, making the impact personalized and therefore long-lasting.

Another key component is training and education programs that teach defender to recognize job-related trauma and how to prevent and treat it. Mindful Mondays is a weekly meditation session dedicated to addressing job-related stress through group meditation. A "Lunch and Learn Series" introduced an array of topics related to secondary trauma, burnout, self-care, and emotional intelligence to normalize and encourage discussion and support around these topics. These short but impactful sessions focused on the common struggles that staff experience. The OSPD recorded and retained content as a resource library for staff. The multi-layered approach resulted in the OSPD launching a comprehensive and sustainable program in July 2022 that included the following:

Cohorts

The OSPD launched three cohorts from this allocation. They each consisted of four, ninety-minute meetings throughout FY 2022-23 and included groups of Defenders from all over the state in every job type. They were taught by experts in the field and came with written materials recorded for future use. The focus of the three cohorts were secondary trauma, resilience, and trauma-informed leadership. The leadership cohort was limited to those in official management capacities and included small group meetings in between the ninety-minute sessions. The OSPD created computer-based learning modules for each of these cohorts so that future cohorts could utilize the recordings alongside the computer based micro-learnings.

Lunch and Learn Series

The OSPD launched a series of sixty-minute webinars related to mental health or trauma. They were delivered by experts in the field, came with written materials and were recorded for future use. To date the series includes the following topics.

- Train your brain two-part series led by Jen Graves
- Managing Perfectionism led by Kelley Bonner
- Emotional Intelligence led by Farah Harris
- Cultivating Mental Wellness led by Amy Larmon

Additional trainings include:

- Improving Client Engagement led by Erica Reed
- Burnout, Boundaries and Self-Advocacy led by Kelley Bonner
- Learning Self-Care led by Farah Harris
- Secondary Trauma led by Amy Larmon
- Resilience led by AJ Adams

Direct Service Providers

The OSPD engaged multiple direct service providers including three therapists, one yoga therapist and a mindfulness coach. Direct service providers are experienced and trained with working with public defenders and understand the challenges and needs of the OSPD's staff. The OSPD has spent \$78,768 on direct service providers for its staff through December 2023. We estimate spending a similar amount on direct service providers from January-June 2024.

Reimbursements for other Direct Services

The OSPD has reimbursed \$42,638 to Defenders for out-of-pocket mental health counseling through December 2023. We estimate that approximately the same amount will be spent on reimbursement requests January-June 2024.

Group Meditation

The OSPD has contracted with Denise Ackert, a mindfulness coach who also provides direct service counseling, to provide weekly group meditation sessions. The OSPD has allocated \$3,000 through December 2023 and the same amount for January-June 2024.

Summary

The OSPD has a comprehensive and sustainable program related to mental health and trauma resources. The OSPD will continue to monitor the expenditures related to reimbursements for mental health counseling and direct service costs for staff. If those amounts remain consistent with FY 2022-23 expenditures, it is anticipated that the reimbursements and direct service costs will exceed the allocated amount requiring the OSPD to not provide agency-wide trainings and continuing education. The OSPD will need more funding to provide some of the program elements put into place in FY23 and for other sustainable elements that provide a positive impact for employees to continue the important and difficult work for OSPD clients.