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To: [KCC - Legislative Clerks \(Email Group\)](#)
Subject: Corrected RE: Public Defense: Class A Attorney Attrition Crisis
Date: Tuesday, October 3, 2023 11:41:48 AM

From: Brandes, Ramona
Sent: Tuesday, October 3, 2023 11:39 AM
To: KCC - Legislative Clerks (Email Group) <kcccomitt@kingcounty.gov>
Subject: Public Defense: Class A Attorney Attrition Crisis

I have been a public defender for 27 years, with 22 of those here in King County. I have been a felony attorney for most of that time, but in late 2021 I advised my office that I must quit because of the repeated failure of my office to alleviate my Class A caseload before it physically caused a stroke, a heart attack, or an aneurysm. I had repeatedly advised my office that the caseload I was handling – approximately a dozen homicides, another dozen rape cases, a handful of three strike cases and assorted Class A robberies—was not sustainable and I that I could not provide effective assistance to all the clients and that the level of stress I was experiencing was so severe that I feared for my mortality. Because of the demands of the caseload, I frequently worked more than 16 hours a day, particularly when a case was approaching and in trial. Trials on Class A cases last normally between 1 and 3 months. In the past few years several attorneys I knew have committed suicide, died of heart attack or other stress related conditions, and one attorney I knew had a severe stroke while others have had minor strokes. Whenever I tried to discuss the strain of my Class A caseload, my supervisors were sympathetic, but felt they had no other options because of the limited availability of Class A attorneys. I continued to work the cases to the best of my ability, coming in at 2AM-3AM most days to provide competent representation. Despite my ongoing concerns with the workload, my office continued to pour Class A felonies on me until it literally had me so overwhelmed I was on the brink of tears with each new assignment. I knew that I could not continue in that same vein as the weight of the souls on my shoulders was crushing me and I had no avenue for relief. Multiple other attorneys in my unit had advised they were experiencing the same sense of being overwhelmed that I was –four of those have also left King County Public Defense. Only when I advised my office that I was leaving public defense did my managing attorney transfer me to a less demanding unit so as not to lose another Class A attorney immediately. I committed to completed the outstanding trial cases I had because those are extremely difficult to transfer, both for attorneys and the clients. Only a dozen of my cases were transferred to other attorneys and it took a full year of me straddling two units to complete the scheduled trials on my remaining class A cases. Since January 2023, when I completed that caseload, I have seen my blood pressure drop by 30 points. For my own health I know I can not return to Class A work and have given my office notice that I will be leaving at the end of this year permanently, which costs DPD another Class A attorney as well as the loss of most experienced trial attorney at my particular division. I love this work and this choice was made with a very heavy heart, but I know that I would not survive another felony rotation.

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