



Office of the Public Defender Washoe County, Nevada

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April 10, 2024

Interim Finance Committee Chairperson and Committee Members
Via email: IFC@lcb.state.nv.us

Re: Support for DIDS's Request for Contingency Funds for LASSO Program

Dear Committee Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing to share my support of the Nevada Department of Indigent Defense Services' (DIDS) request for contingency funds to fund the Law Student Supervision Operation program (LASSO). This program would provide stipends to law students and recent law school graduates for internships and pre-bar employment in indigent defense roles in rural and underserved jurisdictions in Nevada. This program is a crucial step towards addressing the critical shortage of indigent defense attorneys in Nevada.

As you already know, there has been a shortage of indigent defense attorneys in rural and underserved jurisdictions for many years. This shortage finally resulted in a lawsuit by the ACLU in 2017 (*Davis v. State*). The lawsuit was resolved with a consent decree, which obligates the State of Nevada to provide adequate resources to indigent defense in rural counties. The consent decree remains in effect.

The Legislature created DIDS in order to carry out its obligations under the consent decree. Through the LASSO program, DIDS is now proposing a program to attract future attorneys to the practice of indigent defense in rural and underserved Nevada communities. In the past, providers of indigent defense in Nevada have lost possible interns and applicants to private practitioners, who have been able to pay interns and post-graduation applicants. Law students and recent law school graduates usually have to pay to relocate, pay for rent and basic living expenses, and pay tuition if they want school credit for internships. The LASSO program will make internships and post-graduate employment for indigent defense programs in rural Nevada more competitive with private opportunities.

The provision of indigent defense should not be undervalued. It is a fundamental constitutional right. If the State wants to prosecute individuals, it has a constitutional obligation to provide defense counsel at public expense. This proposal is, in sum, a great idea to increase the pipeline of indigent defense attorneys to underserved Nevada jurisdictions and an important step forward in the State meeting its obligations under the *Davis* consent decree.

(Con't)



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Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Evelyn Grosenick".

EVELYN GROSENICK
Washoe County Public Defender