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**SENATE BILL 5453**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Slatter, Torres, Chapman, Frame, Hasegawa, Holy, Saldaña, and Valdez

AN ACT Relating to public defense recruitment and retention; adding new sections to chapter 2.70 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature recognizes a critical workforce shortage of public defense attorneys and public defense professional staff, who are necessary to ensure the right to counsel and due process guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and the Washington state Constitution. The legislature recognizes that a variety of barriers impede recruitment and retention of public defense attorneys and public defense professional staff, particularly impacting certain underserved areas of the state. The legislature intends to promote policies that remove barriers and streamline pathways to public defense practice for attorneys and professional legal staff.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 2.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the office of public defense shall administer a training program for public defense mitigation specialists and paralegals who are new to public defense.

(2) The training program must incorporate public defense and applicable standards, client communication, and relevant ethical standards. The training program must also offer networking opportunities.

(3) The training program may be provided in an in-person or remote format and may incorporate recorded resources.

(4) Recruitment for the training program should include outreach to justice-impacted persons and formerly incarcerated persons.

(5) By June 30, 2027, the office of public defense shall offer the training to at least one class of paralegals and one class of public defense mitigation specialists.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 2.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the office of public defense shall administer a pool of public defense paralegals to provide support to the office of public defense contracted counsel on an as-needed basis.

(2) In providing paralegal support to contracted counsel pursuant to this section, the office of public defense shall prioritize solo practitioners and very small private law firms contracted with the office of public defense, as well as practitioners contracted to provide postconviction representation.

(3) Procurement notices for the paralegal pool should include outreach to justice-impacted persons and formerly incarcerated persons who have paralegal training or prior relevant work experience.

(4) By June 30, 2027, the office of public defense shall have at least 10 full-time paralegals in the public defense paralegal pool.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act takes effect July 1, 2026.

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