



**STATE OF NEVADA
DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENT DEFENSE SERVICES**

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Oversight Report – Equal Justice Works Career Fair

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On October 12 and 13, 2023, Deputy Director Qualls attended the Equal Justice Works Career Fair, which was held virtually this year. There were over 250 potential employer vendors who attended and over 2,500 law students participated. Two third year law students signed up for interviews with DIDS, one on each day.

The Department's participation in this fair was necessarily different from all other vendors because we are not a direct employer of public defenders, and we do not have authority to recruit for any of the rural public defender offices. Further, the Department's funding for the summer externship stipend was not renewed, as the State Bar changed its policies for grant eligibility, requiring all applicants to be 501(c)(3) organizations.

Deputy Director Qualls explained to both students the role and functions of the Department, the opportunities for internship/externship with the Department, as well as the possibilities that exist for future employment in public defense in the rural counties.

The first student attendee was only interested in a hands-on courtroom internship/externship and employment experience, and so DIDS was not a good fit for her. The second student attendee was currently working in an appeals clinic at George Washington University and was interested in employment doing appeals and/or post-conviction habeas work. Qualls explained that the Nevada State Public Defenders Office was expanding its focus on complex litigation, including death penalty, appeals, and post-conviction habeas work. The student was very interested in possible opportunities doing this work for NSPD, plans to explore taking the Nevada Bar Exam next July and plans to stay in touch.

The Department will encourage Nevada's rural public defender offices to attend future Equal Justice Works Career Fairs, as well as other career fairs to assist with recruitment. The Department believes county expenditures for public defender offices to attend this fair would be reimbursable as an indigent defense expense. It is questionable, however, whether attending this Fair is a good use of Department resources, since we are not a direct employer, and especially since grant funding for the summer stipends has not been renewed.

Public Interest Law Association – Careers in Public Interest Panel

On October 24, 2023, Executive Director Marcie Ryba travelled to Boyd School of Law to sit on a Careers in Public Interest Panel. The Panel provided a unique opportunity to talk with students about careers at the Department of Indigent Defense Services, as well as public defense, in general. A separate panel for public defenders was held on October 25, 2023, where rural public defenders were able to share insight on a career in public defense.

To encourage a pipeline to the rural counties, the Department purchased coffee mugs with a quote and the Department logo. These mugs were provided at no cost to the students that attended the panel.

Prior to the panel, Marcie took the opportunity to talk with students in attendance. Many were interested in public defense and one student was interested in returning to her hometown of Elko to work in a District Attorney or Public Defender office. After the panel, Marcie was able to get contact information for this student and connect her with Elko County Public Defender Matthew Pennel to explore whether there would be an externship opportunity in the Elko PD office.

After the Panel, Marcie met with Boyd's Assistant Dean of Career Development, Nikki Harris and Boyd's Director of Externships, Dawn Nielsen. We discussed possible pipelines to encourage Boyd graduates to accept employment in the rural counties. Nikki shared that there is a very high need for their law school graduates, especially by private firms. Nikki shared that many of the private firms provide an employment contract to their 2L externs guaranteeing employment after graduation. Both Nikki and Dawn encouraged the Department to open up the summer stipend (if funds are provided by IFC) to 1L students. They believed there would be a higher success rate to find students to place into the summer stipend if more were allowed to apply. Further, Nikki and Dawn encouraged the Department to consider student loan forgiveness to encourage students to take employment in the rural counties. Many of Boyd's students have families and need to ensure financial stability if they are to take such employment. Nikki specifically provided a story where one student was offered a job in public interest, but ultimately turned it down for a higher paying job at a private firm.

After this meeting with Nikki and Dawn, the Department believes it is necessary to (1) explore the possibility of student loan forgiveness for rural public defenders; (2) if funding for the stipend is approved, open the stipend to 1Ls; and (3) consider providing BARBRI (or similar Bar Review Course) and paid time off as an incentive to employment in the rural counties.