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Federal Public Defender, District of Alaska

Vacancy Announcement 2026-01

Application Deadline: January 30, 2026 (Rolling Review)

Location: Anchorage, Alaska

Position: Mitigation Specialist

Position Type: Full-time/Permanent, *subject to the availability of funds*

Salary Range: Judiciary Salary Plan (JSP) Grade 11/Step 1 – Grade 14/Step 10 (\$84,439 - \$184,886)

Starting classification level and salary are dependent upon education, experience, and qualifications.

Promotion potential up to Grade 14 without further competition.

WHO WE ARE

The Federal Public Defender for the District of Alaska is a small but mighty office of approximately 24 people, located in midtown Anchorage. We represent indigent individuals charged with federal crimes across one of the largest and most geographically challenging districts in the country.

Our practice is rooted in a holistic, client-centered defense model. We believe people are more than their worst moments, more than their charges, and more than the paperwork that follows them. Our work is about story, dignity, context, and humanity, and we take seriously our responsibility to tell our clients' stories fully and truthfully.

Alaska's legal community is small, collaborative, and deeply interconnected. That reality strengthens our practice. We know our counterparts. We know the courts. We know the systems our clients are moving through, and we are creative, persistent, and relentless advocates within them.

We are a collaborative and mission-driven office that values teamwork, mutual respect, and pitching in wherever help is needed. Our strong office culture is one of the reasons staff turnover is low and opportunities to join our team are rare.

WHY ALASKA

Alaska is unlike anywhere else.

This position is ideal for someone drawn to big landscapes, tight-knit communities, and meaningful work. Anchorage offers urban amenities surrounded by mountains, wildlife, and access to world-class outdoor recreation. Many of our staff come for the work and stay for the life.

Practicing defense in Alaska requires independence, adaptability, and grit. Resources can be limited. Travel can be complex. Systems are often stretched thin. The reward is work that matters deeply and the opportunity to fight for clients who need strong advocates willing to think ahead, problem-solve, and build solutions where none readily exist.

THE ROLE

The Mitigation Specialist in our office is a hybrid role that combines core responsibilities traditionally performed by Non-Capital Mitigation Specialists and Investigators, with a strong social-work-informed approach.

This position works closely with attorneys and clients at all stages of representation, including pretrial, plea negotiations, sentencing, and post-conviction proceedings. The ideal candidate is someone who can investigate facts, develop mitigation narratives, and connect clients to resources, while maintaining professional judgment, compassion, and cultural competence.

PRIMARY DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Mitigation & Social History Development

- Develop, analyze, and present comprehensive mitigation evidence for court proceedings, including bail, sentencing, and post-conviction matters.
- Conduct in-depth client interviews and interviews of family members, associates, educators, employers, service providers, and community members in a culturally competent manner.
- Gather, review, verify, and synthesize records, including:
 - Medical and mental health records
 - Substance use treatment records
 - Educational, employment, military, and institutional records
 - Social services, housing, and community records
- Identify and analyze patterns of trauma, mental illness, substance use, systemic inequities, and other factors relevant to mitigation.
- Prepare written and visual mitigation materials, including sentencing memoranda, reports, and presentations.
- Assist attorneys in court as requested, including testimony or presentation of mitigation evidence.

Investigation & Case Support

- Review and analyze discovery and case materials to identify investigative leads and mitigation issues.
- Locate and interview witnesses; evaluate credibility and relevance of information obtained.
- Obtain and verify documentary and physical evidence; maintain accurate and complete case files.
- Coordinate with experts, including mental health professionals and evaluators; assist in clarifying scope and focus of expert evaluations.
- Investigate background issues relevant to sentencing guideline departures, variances, or alternative sentencing options.
- Assist attorneys at hearings and trials, including coordinating witnesses, subpoenas, and exhibits.

Client Support & Resource Development

- Facilitate client access to available treatment programs, housing options, vocational and educational services, and community-based resources.
- Maintain and develop a working knowledge of local, statewide, and national resources, including those available in rural and remote Alaska communities.
- Build and maintain relationships with service providers, treatment facilities, and Alaska Department of Corrections and Bureau of Prisons staff.
- Proactively research emerging resources and anticipate client needs in a resource-limited environment.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

We are seeking a self-directed, mission-driven professional who:

- Has demonstrated experience performing social work or social-service-oriented tasks, particularly with justice-involved populations.
- Is comfortable working independently and collaboratively in a small office environment.
- Thinks strategically and proactively, especially when resources are limited.
- Brings cultural humility, strong interpersonal skills, and sound professional judgment.
- Is organized, detail-oriented, and able to manage multiple cases and deadlines.
- Believes deeply in the work of public defense and is ready to be a freedom focused justice warrior, fierce in advocacy and grounded in compassion for our clients.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor's degree required; advanced or graduate degree in social work strongly preferred.
- Degrees or coursework in social work, psychology, anthropology, sociology, criminal justice, or related fields are highly valued.
- Demonstrated experience in mitigation, investigation, social work, case management, or related work with justice-involved individuals.
- Ability to communicate effectively in writing and orally; experience preparing reports or narratives is essential.
- Valid driver's license and ability to travel as required.

SALARY & BENEFITS

This is an Excepted Appointment, full-time position with federal benefits and salary commensurate with experience and qualifications within the following ranges from JSP Grade 11 to JSP Grade 14. The position offers federal government employment benefits, including participation in health and life insurance, retirement, the Thrift Savings Plan, 11 paid federal holidays, 13 paid sick days annually, and 13 paid vacation days annually (to start). Salary is payable only by Electronic Funds Transfer (direct deposit).

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Applicants must be U.S. citizens or eligible to work in and for the United States. Appointment to this position is contingent upon successful completion of an FBI name and fingerprint check. Employees of the Federal Public Defender are members of the judicial branch of government. They are considered at-will employees and are not covered by the Civil Service Reform Act.

HOW TO APPLY

All qualified candidates are strongly encouraged to apply by January 30, 2026. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and interviews may be scheduled as applications are received. The position will remain open until filled.

To apply, send a single .pdf document via email to Loisi_Vailea@fd.org with the subject line, "Mitigation Specialist Application." The single .pdf document should be named, "Your last name, first name," (e.g., Smith, Mary) that contains the following:

- A plain face sheet containing only your last name, first name and current employer or employment status. This should be centered on the page and in size 40 font;
- A brief cover letter;
- Your resume; and
- Three references (references will not be contacted until applicant is advised).
- A writing sample is optional, but strongly encouraged.

Accurate compliance with these application instructions is a factor expressly considered in the evaluation of the applicant. Due to the volume of responses expected, only those invited to interview will be contacted. No inquiries, telephone or otherwise, please.

The Federal Public Defender is an equal-opportunity employer. All applicants regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or age, are encouraged to apply.