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WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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SOCIAL WORKER/MITIGATION SPECIALIST ANNOUNCEMENT

Position: Social Worker/Mitigation Specialist	Location: Pittsburgh, PA
Application Deadline: February 13, 2026 (or until filled)	Posted: January 30, 2026
Office Website: https://paw.fd.org/	Salary Range: \$63,815 - \$169,060

The Federal Public Defender for the Western District of Pennsylvania is accepting applications for the position of **Social Worker/Mitigation Specialist**.

The **Social Worker/Mitigation Specialist** is a key member of the defense team who reviews evidence, develops theories of defense and mitigation, locates and interviews witnesses for fact and mitigation investigation, identifies experts, visits crime scenes, assists in preparation for trial and other court hearings, and testifies in court when required.

This role also gathers, reviews, and analyzes records; serves subpoenas; and works with attorneys to interview clients, document clients' social history, and prepare mitigation summaries for plea negotiation and sentencing.

The **Social Worker/Mitigation Specialist** must be able to establish and maintain good working relationships with individuals and agencies (including prisons), provide oral and written reports, and use technology including software, cameras, and other equipment. This role is an essential part of providing equal justice to individuals unable to afford counsel in federal cases. The ideal candidate brings strong initiative, sound judgment, discretion, and a deep commitment to client-centered advocacy.

This position will primarily support the Trial Unit and the Appeals/Non-Capital Habeas Unit in our Pittsburgh office with additional support provided to cases in the Erie and Johnstown offices as needed.

About Us:

The Federal Public Defender for the Western District of Pennsylvania provides legal representation to persons financially unable to retain counsel in federal criminal and related proceedings. We handle federal trials, direct appeals to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, petitions for writ of certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court, habeas corpus petitions, and related proceedings on behalf of our clients.

Representation includes counsel and investigative, expert and other services, as necessary to meet the demands of the case and the needs of the client.

Our office includes the Federal Public Defender and attorneys known as Assistant Federal Public Defenders. In addition to our attorneys, we have a group of talented administrative staff, paralegals, investigators, social workers, and information technology experts. The Federal Public Defender main office is in Pittsburgh, with branch offices in Erie and Johnstown.

About Pittsburgh:

Pittsburgh is a vibrant, livable city known for its rich history, thriving arts and cultural scene, and strong sense of community. Once an industrial powerhouse, the city has successfully transformed into a national hub for healthcare, education, technology, and innovation, anchored by world-class institutions and a growing startup ecosystem. Pittsburgh is home to top-ranked universities, nationally recognized hospitals, and a diverse workforce that values collaboration and creativity.

Beyond the city, Western Pennsylvania features a wide range of communities—from walkable urban neighborhoods to small towns and suburban areas—providing flexible living options for professionals and families alike. The region is known for its affordable housing, short commutes, and lower cost of living compared to many major metropolitan areas. With access to rivers, state parks, trails, and outdoor recreation, residents can enjoy four distinct seasons and an active lifestyle. Combined with a welcoming culture, strong local pride, and close proximity to other major East Coast and Midwest cities, Western Pennsylvania is an ideal place to build a rewarding career and a fulfilling life.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Investigator:

- Work on interdisciplinary defense teams to investigate allegations of federal criminal conduct and prepare written mitigation materials for court.
- Conduct assessments, develop service plans, and provide client centered support, referrals, crisis intervention and case management assistance.
- Together with paralegals and investigators, obtain and review records including those related to
 - Prior court and prison history
 - Social and family history
 - Neighborhoods and schools
 - Medical and mental health treatment
 - Other relevant subjects impacting the client's life

- Locate and conduct witness interviews to assist the attorney in advocating for pretrial release.
- Develop mitigating circumstances in the client's life to assist at trial or sentencing.
- Develop, assess, and maintain referral and service resources with service providers and experts.
- Attend relevant trainings and conferences, and develop training programs for the FPD staff.

Attributes of the Ideal Candidate:

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

- Is comfortable working both independently and collaboratively in a law office environment.
- Thinks strategically and proactively, especially when resources are limited.
- Brings cultural humility, strong interpersonal skills, and sound professional judgment.
- Believes deeply in the work of public defense.

Qualifications:

Applicants must hold an undergraduate or graduate degree in social work. A variety of experience, including in the application of traditional social work advocacy and clinical skills, would be helpful, as would experience developing and analyzing mitigation evidence for court proceedings and mitigation report writing. The ability to read, write, and speak fluently in the Spanish language is preferred but not required.

This position requires considerable initiative, resourcefulness, creativity and drive; excellent writing skills, computer proficiency, the ability to communicate and work well with others; and a commitment to obtaining justice for indigent persons. The successful applicant can analyze and evaluate facts, evidence, and related information. This position requires regular travel in the Western District of Pennsylvania as well as some overnight and out-of-state stays. Applicants must have a valid driver's license, reliable car, and motor vehicle insurance.

Benefits:

This position is full-time with a comprehensive benefits package that includes:

- Generous Health/Vision/Dental/Life Insurance Coverage
- Dependent and Long-term Care Insurance Programs
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Commuter Benefit Program, including Mass Transit and Parking Reimbursement Accounts
- Earned paid time off, including paid sick leave
- 11 Paid Federal Holidays
- Up to 12 weeks of Paid Parental Leave
- Mandatory participation in the Federal Employees Retirement System
- Optional participation in the Thrift Savings Plan retirement account with up to 5% agency matching contributions
- Eligibility for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)
- Employee Assistance Program (confidential counseling and assistance)
- Credit for prior federal service

Accessibility:

We are committed to an inclusive and accessible application process. If you need an accommodation due to a disability during any stage of the application or interview process, please contact Joe Pisciotta at Joseph_Pisciotta@FD.org. If hired, we are dedicated to providing reasonable accommodations to support your success and ensure equal access to opportunities in the workplace.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:

Our office values diversity, is committed to equity and inclusion, and aspires to create a culture of mutual respect, collaboration, openness, and humility that honors the people we represent. We believe representation is better when members of the defense team have diverse backgrounds and experiences. We seek an individual who shares this belief and commitment. We embrace the unique contributions our employees can bring to the Federal Public Defender because of their backgrounds, social identities, and lived experiences. We are interested in applicants' talent, intelligence, dedication, persistence, and desire to see that all people are treated fairly and respectfully. The Federal Public Defender seeks applications from a diverse group of qualified individuals in terms of race, ethnicity, nation of origin, culture, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual identity, education, opinions, age, languages spoken, veteran status, disability, religion, and socioeconomic circumstance. We especially encourage applications from members of the BIPOC community, people affected by

the criminal legal system, and people from other underrepresented and historically marginalized groups.

Application Process:

Interested applicants are invited to apply by submitting a single pdf document that includes a cover letter, resume, and writing sample via email to the attention of: Elisa A. Long, Federal Public Defender, paw_employment@fd.org, Subject: 2026-05

One or more positions may be filled from this posting. Hiring for this position is dependent on the availability of funds. This office is an equal opportunity employer.