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Federal Public Defender

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Federal Public Defender

WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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ASSISTANT FEDERAL PUBLIC DEFENDER (APPEALS/NON-CAPITAL HABEAS UNIT) ANNOUNCEMENT

Position: Assistant Federal Public Defender

Location: Pittsburgh, PA

Application Deadline: March 13, 2026 (or until filled)

Posted: February 18, 2026

Office Website: <https://paw.fd.org/>

Salary Range: \$79,351 – \$197,100

The Federal Public Defender for the Western District of Pennsylvania is accepting applications for the position of **Assistant Federal Public Defender (AFPD) in the Appeals/Non-Capital Habeas Unit in the Pittsburgh Office.**

The **AFPD** position primary involves legal representation of indigent persons in direct criminal appeals and in federal habeas corpus proceedings in the United States District Court, the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, and the United States Supreme Court. Responsibilities include managing a caseload with cases at varying stages of litigation; researching, briefing, and arguing appeals; handling federal habeas corpus and other post-conviction matters, including briefing and appearing for evidentiary hearings; assisting the office's trial attorneys in identifying and raising legal issues in complex cases by consulting, researching, and drafting district court briefing; and monitoring relevant legal developments and training other lawyers on the impact of those developments. The balance of responsibilities among these duties will vary depending on the office's needs.

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.

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:

The successful applicant must be a graduate from an accredited law school. Excellent research, writing and oral advocacy skills are required, as is a demonstrated commitment to indigent defense. Courtroom experience is preferred. The applicant should be prepared to undertake the representation of clients in serious criminal cases and be able to manage a heavy caseload. Travel and working outside regular business hours are essential for the position, as are effective organizational skills and the ability to work in a team environment. Federal Public Defender attorneys may not engage in the private practice of law. The successful candidate will be subject to a general background check and IRS tax check procedure as a condition of employment.

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: 2026-08

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.