

Elisa A. Long
Federal Public Defender

Sarah Levin
Managing Attorney, Trial Unit

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Federal Public Defender

WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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TRIAL ATTORNEY (FEDERAL CAPITAL CASE)

Position: Trial Attorney

Location: Remote (U.S.)

Application Deadline: Oct. 15, 2026 (or until filled)

Posted: October 2, 2026

Full-Time Salary Range: \$79,351 - \$197,100

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

The Federal Public Defender for the Western District of Pennsylvania is accepting applications for trial counsel in a federal capital case. **This position is fully remote, and candidates may reside anywhere in the United States. It is open to full-time or part-time work.** This is a term appointment expected to last for the duration of the case.

Trial counsel will represent a client facing the federal death penalty as a member of a capital defense team that includes co-counsel, investigators, mitigation specialists, paralegals, and experts. Regular responsibilities include building and maintaining a relationship of trust with the client; digesting voluminous discovery, including forensic evidence such as DNA, fingerprint, digital and cell-site, and medical examiner findings; developing the guilt-phase and penalty-phase strategy; supervising the fact and mitigation investigation; researching and drafting pretrial, evidentiary, and constitutional motions, including challenges to the reliability and admissibility of the government's forensic evidence under Rule 702; retaining and working with defense forensic, mental health, and other experts; litigating evidentiary hearings; conducting capital voir dire; and trying both phases of the case to a jury if required. Representation must meet the standards of the ABA Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Defense Counsel in Death Penalty Cases.

A strong preference will be given to candidates with prior federal capital trial experience. We are especially interested in candidates who bring expertise in areas such as forensic science litigation, mental health and intellectual disability litigation, and capital jury selection. Excellent research and writing skills are required.

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. Our Trial Unit and Capital Habeas Unit bring deep experience in capital litigation, and the attorney hired for this position will have the full support of both units.

Attributes of the Ideal Candidate:

- Has tried, or served as co-counsel in, one or more capital cases through the penalty phase, and understands the distinct demands of federal capital practice under the Federal Death Penalty Act.
- Leads a multidisciplinary defense team with clarity and respect.
- Has litigated the reliability and admissibility of forensic evidence, is comfortable cross-examining government forensic experts and crime laboratory analysts, and can translate scientific findings for a jury.
- Is comfortable working both independently in a remote setting and collaboratively with co-counsel and the broader office.
- Thinks strategically and proactively, especially when resources and time are limited.
- Brings cultural humility, strong interpersonal skills, and sound professional judgment.
- Believes deeply in the work of public defense and in the dignity of every client.

Qualifications:

The successful applicant must be a graduate of an accredited law school and a member in good standing of the bar of a state, territory, or the District of Columbia, and must possess excellent research, writing, and oral advocacy skills and a demonstrated commitment to indigent defense. Experience litigating forensic evidence in homicide cases, including work with defense forensic experts, is strongly preferred. Candidates who satisfy the qualifications for appointment as learned counsel under 18 U.S.C. § 3005 are especially encouraged to apply. Proficiency in Spanish or Portuguese is preferred but not required.

The applicant should be prepared to devote the time and attention required to a federal capital prosecution and to work outside regular business hours as the case demands. **This position requires regular travel** for client visits, team meetings, hearings, and trial, which will involve extended stays, and to wherever witnesses, experts, and records are located. Travel expenses are reimbursed in accordance with federal judiciary travel regulations. Applicants must have a suitable, private workspace and reliable high-speed internet access; the office will provide necessary computer equipment and secure access to office systems.

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 may be filled on a full-time or part-time basis. Full-time employees receive a comprehensive benefits package that includes the following; part-time employees working a regular schedule of at least 16 hours per week are generally eligible for the same benefits on a prorated basis:

- Generous Health/Vision/Dental/Life Insurance Coverage
- Dependent and Long-term Care Insurance Programs
- Flexible Spending 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: **2026-13**. Please indicate in your cover letter whether you are seeking full-time or part-time work, and describe your capital trial and forensic litigation experience, including the cases in which you served as lead or co-counsel and their outcomes.

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. No phone calls, please.