

Elisa A. Long
Federal Public Defender

Sarah Levin
Managing Attorney, Trial Unit

Samantha L. Stern
*Managing Attorney,
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Federal Public Defender

WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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ASSISTANT FEDERAL PUBLIC DEFENDER (TRIAL UNIT) ANNOUNCEMENT

Position: Assistant Federal Public Defender
Application Deadline: Until filled
Location: Pittsburgh, Erie, or Johnstown, PA

Posted: October 5, 2026
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)**. This position is open to candidates interested in working out of our Pittsburgh office or one of our branch offices in Erie or Johnstown.

The **AFPD** will represent clients charged with federal criminal offenses and involved in other matters covered under the Criminal Justice Act. Regular responsibilities include working with clients; digesting large case files and investigative materials; developing litigation strategies, including negotiation and mitigation; researching and drafting motions and other filings; conducting evidentiary hearings and trials; working with experts and other witnesses; and leading teams of investigators, mitigation specialists, paralegals, and legal assistants. Cases are complex and diverse and require comprehensive legal research, extensive motions practice, and frequent courtroom litigation, including jury trials and sentencing hearings. Caseloads may involve drug offenses, fraud, robbery, firearms offenses, immigration offenses, and internet-related crimes.

Experience, knowledge, or interest in working on immigration-related work, including 28 U.S.C. § 2241 petitions, is preferred but not required. Case assignments may require the AFPD to handle cases in any of our three offices (Pittsburgh, Erie, and Johnstown).

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.

Attributes of the Ideal Candidate:

- 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. Courtroom experience is preferred, and excellent research, writing and oral advocacy skills are required, as is a demonstrated commitment to indigent defense. Proficiency in the Spanish language is preferred but not required. 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: 2026-16

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.