

FEDERAL DEFENDERS OF SAN DIEGO, INC.

THE COMMUNITY DEFENDER ORGANIZATION FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

Position: Appellate Attorney

Location: San Diego, CA

Application Deadline: March 15, 2026

Posted: February 12, 2026

Office Website: www.fdsdi.com

Salary Range: AD-21 (\$87,671) to AD-29 (\$197,100)

Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc. (FDSDI) is seeking a full-time Appellate Attorney for its Appellate Department, based in the San Diego office, beginning by the fall of 2026. Appellate Attorneys provide zealous, client-centered representation to individuals accused of federal crimes in the Southern District of California.

FDSDI is the Federal Community Defender Organization for the Southern District of California, with offices in San Diego and El Centro. We are appointed to represent low-income individuals charged with federal offenses and are independent from the federal judiciary. Our work is funded through a sustaining grant awarded by Congress under the Criminal Justice Act.

Our location near the U.S.–Mexico border significantly shapes our caseload. The majority of our clients face drug and immigration-related charges, as well as a wide range of other federal offenses, including fraud, firearms offenses, bank robbery, counterfeiting, assault, and other serious charges.

Duties and Responsibilities:

Under the supervision of the Appellate Chief, the Appellate Attorney will:

- Litigate federal criminal appeals before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and, when appropriate, the United States Supreme Court.
- Handle district court matters, including sentencing-related motions and habeas corpus petitions under 28 U.S.C. §§ 2241, 2254, and 2255.
- Conduct legal research, draft appellate briefs, motions, and other substantive pleadings with a high level of accuracy and clarity.
- Present oral argument in appellate and district court proceedings, as required.
- Collaborate with trial attorneys, investigators, paralegals, and other defense team members to support effective appellate advocacy.
- Participate in and help develop in-house and community training programs related to appellate and criminal defense practice.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Training Program:

Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc. provides extensive training for all new attorneys, including training in federal criminal procedure and practice. Appellate Attorneys actively participate in, and help lead, in-house and community-based training programs.

Qualifications:

- Membership in good standing with the bar of any state.
- Strong legal research, writing, and analytical skills.
- Demonstrated ability to manage multiple matters and meet deadlines in a fast-paced environment.
- Commitment to public defense and client-centered representation.

Preferred Qualifications:

- Two to six years of relevant legal experience, or at least one year of federal appellate clerkship experience.
- Prior experience in criminal defense, federal litigation, and/or immigration law.
- Law review and/or judicial clerkship experience.
- Membership in the California Bar.

Salary and Benefits:

Salary will be commensurate with experience and is within the AD pay scale, ranging from AD-21 (\$87,671) to AD-29 (\$197,100). The position does include employee benefits including health and life insurance as well as a 401k plan. Salary is payable only by Electronic Funds Transfer (direct deposit). This position is at will and is subject to the availability of funds. Employment is subject to a satisfactory background investigation. Full-time telework is not available. After the first eight months of employment, appellate attorneys may be eligible for one day of remote work per week.

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 our Personnel Administrator at Kym_Bryant@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. In our hiring, we seek individuals who share this belief and commitment. We embrace the unique contributions our employees can bring to the office because of their backgrounds, social identities, and lived experiences.

How to Apply:

Interested applicants are invited to apply by submitting a single pdf document that includes a cover letter, resume, and three references via email to the attention of:

Kasha Castillo, Executive Director

[hiring@fd.org](mailto: hiring@fd.org)

Subject: Appellate Attorney Position – San Diego

Hiring Timeline:

We value transparency in our hiring process and want applicants to know what to expect. Below are the key dates:

- **Application Deadline:** March 15, 2026 (priority consideration given to applications received by this date; applications will be accepted until the position is filled)
- **Interviews:** Conducted on a rolling basis
- **Anticipated Start Date:** The start date is flexible based on candidate availability. We anticipate onboarding the selected candidate as soon as practicable, and no later than August 31, 2026.