

FEDERAL DEFENDERS OF SAN DIEGO, INC.

THE COMMUNITY DEFENDER ORGANIZATION FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

Position: Trial Attorney

Location: San Diego, CA

Application Deadline: March 01, 2026

Posted: January 15, 2026

Salary Range: AD-21 (\$87,671) to AD-29 (\$197,100), based on bar status (\$85,307 if pending admission)

Office Website: www.fdsdi.com

Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc. (FSDSI) seeks passionate attorneys and law school graduates with a strong commitment to public defense to join our defense team as Trial Attorneys. Trial Attorneys provide zealous, client-centered representation to individuals accused of federal crimes in the Southern District of California.

FSDSI 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.

This is a full-time, in-person position based in our San Diego office. After the first eight months of employment, trial attorneys may be eligible for one day of remote work per week.

Duties and Responsibilities:

Under the supervision of senior attorneys and office leadership, Trial Attorneys will:

- Represent clients at all stages of federal criminal proceedings, including initial appearances, detention hearings, preliminary hearings, arraignments, motion practice, evidentiary hearings, sentencings, supervised release proceedings, and trials.
- Conduct client interviews, review discovery, negotiate and convey plea offers, and provide thorough, client-centered legal counsel.
- Perform legal research, writing, oral advocacy, investigation, negotiation, and litigation in support of effective defense representation.
- Collaborate closely with investigators, interpreters, mitigation specialists, paralegals, and other support staff to provide holistic defense services.
- Represent clients in appellate matters before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and, when necessary, assist with petitions for certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Training Program:

All newly hired Trial Attorneys participate in FSDSI's comprehensive training program. New attorneys receive approximately three months of full-time intensive training focused on client-centered representation, federal criminal law, and trial advocacy. This is followed by an additional three to four months of bi-weekly training while attorneys gradually assume responsibility for their own felony and supervised release caseloads.

Qualifications:

- Must be a licensed attorney in good standing with the California State Bar, or a third-year law student committed to sitting for the next available California Bar Examination.
- Demonstrated commitment to zealous, creative, and client-centered representation.
- Strong legal research, writing, analytical, and oral advocacy skills.
- Ability to work effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences.
- Ability to manage multiple priorities and meet deadlines in a fast-paced environment.
- Sound judgment and strict adherence to confidentiality and ethical obligations.
- Interest in and sensitivity to issues affecting clients at the U.S.–Mexico border.

Salary and Benefits:

Salary will be commensurate with experience and bar status. Attorneys who are admitted to the bar at the time of hire will be paid on the AD scale, ranging from AD-21 (\$87,671) to AD-29 (\$197,100). Attorneys hired pending bar admission will be paid on the graded scale, with a starting salary of \$85,307, and will transition to the AD scale upon bar admission. 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.

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 Michelle Betancourt at Michelle_Betancourt@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
CAS_AttorneyCareers@fd.org
Subject: Trial 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 1, 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:** August 31, 2026