

FEDERAL PUBLIC DEFENDER
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
321 EAST 2nd STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-4202
213-894-2854
213-894-0081 FAX

CUAUHTEMOC ORTEGA

Federal Public Defender

AMY M. KARLIN

Chief Deputy

C. PAMELA GÓMEZ

Capital Habeas Chief

LISA LABARRE

Los Angeles Trial Chief

KELLEY MUNOZ

Santa Ana Branch Chief

YOUNG KIM

Riverside Branch Chief

MARGARET A. FARRAND

Appeals Chief

JONATHAN AMINOFF

Non-Capital Habeas Chief

NEHA CHRISTERNA

Collaborative Courts Chief

Vacancy Announcement

Position: Appellate Attorney - First Step Act Specialist

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Deadline: March 22, 2026

The Federal Public Defender's Office for the Central District of California is accepting applications for a full-time attorney position in its appellate unit, stationed in Los Angeles, California. The appellate unit is committed to the pursuit of justice by aggressively advocating in federal court for the constitutional rights and inherent dignity of individuals who are convicted of crimes and cannot afford their own lawyer. This attorney will be primarily dedicated to helping clients obtain sentencing relief under the First Step Act.

Job Duties: Appellate attorneys primarily represent indigent federal defendants in direct criminal appeals and indigent habeas petitioners in the district court and in the Ninth Circuit. This position will primarily involve identifying clients eligible for potential sentencing relief under the First Step Act, managing the office's growing docket of First Step Act-eligible clients, coordinating with relevant stakeholders to obtain early release, and preparing briefs and presenting oral argument in the district court and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, when necessary, regarding First Step Act and related sentencing issues. Appeal unit attorneys are expected to develop and maintain expertise in multiple areas of law and provide training and oversight as needed by the office. Varying hours including nights, weekends, and holidays may at times be required.

Requirements: All applicants must have graduated from an accredited law school and be members in good standing of the California Bar or must be willing to sit for the next California Bar exam. Preference will be given to applicants with at least three years of experience in state or federal criminal law or in appeals, and federal judicial clerkship experience.

A background investigation is required as a condition of employment. In line with current federal appropriations law, applicants must be United States citizens or permanent residents seeking citizenship as described here: <https://www.uscourts.gov/careers/search-judiciary-jobs/citizenship-requirements-employment-judiciary>.

Selection Criteria: Candidates must have a demonstrated commitment to indigent criminal defense and/or public interest law; must have superior oral and written communication skills; possess excellent research skills; have the ability to manage a high-volume caseload; and work well in teams.

Salary/Benefits: This is a full-time, at-will position. This position is approved for one year and a day, with a possible extension based on need, budget, or the discretion of the Federal Public Defender. Salary is commensurate with qualifications and experience and is subject to direct deposit. Benefits include health and life insurance, retirement, and a Thrift Savings Plan. After successful completion of a probationary period, eligible employees may elect to telework up to two days per week, subject to certain conditions. For more information on benefits, see <http://www.uscourts.gov/careers/benefits>.

How to Apply: Apply by submitting a letter of interest, résumé, two representative writing samples (limited to 25 - 30 pages each), and three references through our website at <https://fpdcdca.org/careers/current-openings/>. We will accept applications until March 22, 2026, or until filled. Interviews will occur on a rolling basis and the open position may be filled before that date. Priority will be given to early applicants. The Federal Public Defender's Office may fill current and future positions from this vacancy announcement. Please, no phone calls.

The Federal Public Defender's Office for the Central District of California is committed to equal opportunity in the workplace. All applicants, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or age, are encouraged to apply.