

FEDERAL DEFENDER SERVICES OF EASTERN TENNESSEE, INCORPORATED

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Position Announcement – Investigator/Mitigation Specialist, Capital Habeas Unit

Who We Are

Federal Defender Services of Eastern Tennessee, Inc. (FDSET) stands on the front lines every day to keep people out of prison and halt state executions. Guided by our core values of compassion, courage, competency, creativity, and collaboration, we provide client-centered representation to those who need it most. Our clients are indigent defendants charged with federal offenses ranging from drug crimes to complex white-collar conspiracies, as well as individuals sentenced to death. Through holistic lawyering, we safeguard our clients' constitutional rights while championing their dignity, humanity, and future at every stage of their case. We actively embrace diversity, cultivate inclusion, and foster a workplace grounded in fairness, flexibility, and shared purpose. We are united by a deep commitment to standing beside our clients in their most critical moments.

FDSET is a nonprofit community defender organization funded by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, with offices in Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Greeneville. Each location has a trial unit, and our Knoxville office is also home to our Capital Habeas Unit—where we handle some of the most complex and high-stakes litigation in the federal system.

The Place

Nestled in the heart of the South, East Tennessee is a place where breathtaking landscapes meet vibrant community life. Framed by the rolling foothills of the Smoky Mountains and laced with miles of rivers and lakes, the region offers postcard-worthy views in every direction. Here, even the largest cities maintain a warm, small-town charm—yet surprise visitors with a dynamic culinary and cultural scene. Savor farm-to-table fare, soulful Southern classics, slow-smoked barbecue, and authentic international cuisine, all perfectly paired with locally crafted beers. Stroll through lively farmers markets, celebrate at year-round festivals, and enjoy performances in venues such as the historic Bijou Theatre or Niswonger Performing Arts Center, which feature Broadway productions, concerts, opera, ballet, and more. Explore award-winning history, science, and children's museums or cheer on your favorite



team—from the Tennessee Volunteers to professional hockey, baseball, roller derby, and even the Bassmaster Elite Series.

With a mild climate that still showcases the beauty of all four seasons, East Tennessee invites outdoor adventure year-round. Spend the day at Dollywood, take in sweeping mountaintop views at Anakeesta, marvel at marine life at the Tennessee Aquarium, or experience beloved traditions like the Greene County Fair and the National Storytelling Festival. With more than 60 state and national parks, including the iconic Great Smoky Mountains National Park, adventure is always just minutes away. And if you're bringing a four-legged friend, you'll feel right at home. The area proudly embraces a pet-friendly spirit, with cozy cat cafés, playful goat yoga sessions, ample public water bowls, and wide-open spaces where your pup, horse, cows, and so on, can roam free. In East Tennessee, life moves at the perfect pace.

The Job

We are hiring a full-time investigator/mitigation specialist for our Knoxville office, Capital Habeas Unit (CHU). The CHU represents clients in federal courts in Tennessee and clients in six states who have been sentenced to death by state or federal courts.

Duties

CHU investigators/mitigation specialists work collaboratively with a team of attorneys, paralegals, and other investigators/mitigation specialists under the supervision of the CHU supervising assistant federal defender. This position is responsible for identifying, locating, and interviewing witnesses; completing fact and mitigation investigations in support of habeas and clemency efforts; and identifying, collecting, and reviewing a vast array of records. We expect all members of the client's team to contribute to strategy discussions. Investigators/mitigation specialists are expected to take ownership over cases; proactively brainstorm, propose, and complete creative investigation tasks; and comply with the ABA standards for capital mitigation specialists.

Requirements

Applicants must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in social work or a related field such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, or criminal justice. An advanced or graduate degree in social work or related field is preferred. Candidates must have at least three years of experience conducting fact and/or mitigation investigations, preferably in the criminal justice arena. Experience in capital habeas, non-capital habeas, or capital post-conviction work is preferred. Applicants must possess substantial investigative skills to assist in a team approach to planning and developing litigation strategies and in investigating, analyzing, and developing fact and mitigation evidence.

Applicants should possess excellent interpersonal skills, the ability to establish and maintain good working relationships, and the ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing and as a witness in court proceedings. This is a very active position that requires initiative and creative

thinking by a self-starter without the need for substantial attorney oversight.

Because of the geographic location of our clients, extensive travel is required. Overnight travel for client visits and investigative trips may be needed up to two to three times a month. Applicants must have a driver's license and appropriate motor vehicle insurance.

Salary & Benefits

Salary is commensurate with years of experience and qualifications in accordance with the Defender Organization Classification System and the Federal Judicial Salary Plan (JSP). The current starting salary range is \$74,678 to \$163,514 annually.

FDSET offers a generous benefits package, which includes paid vacation and sick leave, 11+ paid annual holidays, medical, dental, vision, life/AD&D, long-term disability, EAP, HSA/FSA, hospital, critical illness, accident, identify theft protection, and 401K retirement. FDSET provides medical (employee-only plans), dental, vision, basic life/AD&D, and long-term disability at no monthly premium cost to employees.

A partial remote work week is available to employees after an initial probationary period.

How To Apply

Qualified individuals may apply by sending ALL the following documents in a *combined PDF file* to **Sharon_Buckingham@fd.org** by **Monday, October 26, 2026**.

- (1) Cover Letter
- (2) Resume
- (3) Three References
- (4) Writing Sample

An email confirming receipt of the application materials will be sent to all applicants. Only those selected for interviews will receive further communication.

**FDSET VALUES A DIVERSE WORKFORCE
AND IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
EMPLOYER**