

OFFICE OF THE
FEDERAL PUBLIC DEFENDER
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

Chief Federal Defender
Dumaka Shabazz

164 Rosa L. Parks Blvd. Nashville, TN 37203 615-736-5047

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT No. 2026-08

Position: Term Research and Writing Attorney - Capital Habeas Unit (CHU)

Nashville, TN (Chapter 154 / Opt-In Special Litigation) - Telework

Position Type: Term Position (1 to 3 Years)

Application Deadline: Open until filled.

The Federal Public Defender for the Middle District of Tennessee is accepting applications for a **Term Research and Writing Attorney** to join our Capital Habeas Unit (CHU). This position is a **term appointment for one to three years**, funded specifically to address extraordinary litigation arising under Chapter 154 of the Judicial Code (28 U.S.C. § 2261 *et seq.*).

Guided by an office philosophy of inspiration, connection, and empowerment, the CHU provides client-centered, team-based representation to death-sentenced individuals in federal habeas corpus proceedings.

ABOUT CHAPTER 154 (OPT-IN) & THIS ROLE:

In July 2026, the State of Tennessee received certification under Chapter 154 ("Opt-In"), a specialized statutory framework that significantly alters federal habeas corpus procedure in capital cases. Opt-In imposes shortened statutes of limitations, strengthens procedural default doctrines, curtails execution stays, and requires fast track disposition of all claims.

The successful candidate will serve as **Opt-In Litigation Counsel**, handling a dedicated caseload affected by Chapter 154. This role involves complex constitutional and statutory challenges to the applicability and operation of Chapter 154, detailed investigation and review of historical state post-conviction appointment mechanisms, and direction of complex, expedited habeas investigation and litigation.

REQUIREMENTS:

Candidates must be admitted to the practice of law and eligible for admission to the federal bar and the bar of the State of Tennessee. The ideal candidate will have significant capital litigation

experience in trial, direct appeal, state post-conviction, or federal habeas corpus proceedings, along with demonstrated familiarity with complex statutory and constitutional interpretation.

Experience advocating handling high-stakes, time-sensitive litigation is strongly preferred. This is an advanced position requiring an experienced advocate who can assume substantial responsibility immediately.

The ideal candidate will demonstrate:

- Exceptional legal writing and persuasive oral advocacy skills, with the ability to synthesize complex statutory and constitutional frameworks clearly.
- Excellent interpersonal skills, sound judgment, and strong technical skills, with the ability to collaborate effectively as part of a multidisciplinary team.
- A deep commitment to the dignity and humanity of indigent clients, as well as personal integrity.
- Strong computer proficiency, including familiarity with Windows and proficiency with Microsoft Office applications.

DUTIES:

- Serve as Opt-In Research and Writing Counsel for capital clients, directing fact investigation and litigating issues concerning the threshold applicability, retroactivity, and constitutionality of Chapter 154.
- Re-investigate the state post-conviction mechanism to develop factual records regarding the appointment and competency of state post-conviction counsel, their compensation, and available litigation expenses under 28 U.S.C. § 2261.
- Prepare complex, fact- and law-intensive pleadings, emergency stay applications, and district and circuit court briefs under accelerated statutory deadlines.
- Work closely with a multidisciplinary team, including co-counsel, paralegals, investigators, mitigation specialists, and experts.
- Travel as required and work outside normal business hours and on weekends as required by litigation schedule.

SELECTION CRITERIA:

Successful applicants will demonstrate a strong commitment to indigent defense and a dedication to fearless, client-centered representation. We seek experienced advocates who are creative legal thinkers, strong collaborators, and exceptional communicators.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT:

This is a **term position tied to specialized funding for Chapter 154 litigation for a duration of one to three years**. The selected candidate will be subject to a comprehensive background investigation, including FBI fingerprint checks, and must receive a favorable suitability determination.

Employees of the Federal Public Defender's Office are in the excepted service, are considered "at-will" employees, and are not covered by the Civil Service Reform Act.

Consistent with current appropriations law, applicants must be United States citizens or permanent residents seeking citizenship. See [Judiciary Citizenship Requirements](#).

SALARY AND COMPENSATION:

Starting salary is commensurate with experience and qualifications under the Judiciary salary structure. Salary range is from JSP Grade 12 (\$89,508) to JSP Grade 15 (\$187,399) depending on experience. Benefits include health and life insurance, retirement benefits, and participation in the Thrift Savings Plan. For details on benefits, visit [Judiciary Benefits](#). Salary is payable by direct deposit.

TO APPLY:

To apply for this specialized term position, please email a letter of interest, resume, and three references in **a single combined PDF document** with the subject line “**Term R&W - Opt-In CHU**” to Federal Public Defender Dumaka Shabazz at HR_TNM@FD.ORG.

Incomplete applications will not be considered. The position is open until filled. No phone calls, please. Multiple positions may be filled from this announcement.

The Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Middle District of Tennessee is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All qualified applicants are encouraged to apply.