

Visiting Federal Defender Program United States Sentencing Commission

The United States Sentencing Commission has a Visiting Federal Defender program in Washington, D.C. that allows an Assistant Federal Defender (AFD) to be detailed to the Commission for one year. We are now hiring for this position. The detail start date is flexible but no later than June 1, 2026, and will run through May 31, 2027. **Due to budgetary constraints, unlike in past years, the U.S. Sentencing Commission is unable to provide housing and travel stipends to support a detailee from out of town. Thus, interested candidates must already live in the general DMV area (District of Columbia, Maryland, or Virginia) by the start of the detail and be able to regularly commute to the Commission building in Washington, DC.**

Detailee responsibilities include: (1) in-depth legal research on issues related to federal sentencing and the federal sentencing guidelines, including analyzing statutes, proposed legislation, case law, and governmental and other reports; (2) participating in staff working groups that focus on new legislation, guideline amendments, and other sentencing issues; (3) preparing and drafting (a) legal memoranda and analytical reports; (b) responses to inquiries from Commissioners, Commission staff, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, judges, and the public; (c) training materials for practitioners and judges on sentencing and guidelines practice; and (d) memoranda and draft language of proposed amendments to the federal sentencing guidelines.

The Visiting Federal Defender program benefits federal defenders by providing an in-depth view of the Commission's amendment process and exposure to the development of sentencing priorities and policy. It also offers an opportunity to hone a specialized set of research and analytical skills. The program enhances the communication and working relationships between the Commission and the federal defender community by providing the Commission direct input from AFDs from across the country.

Applicants must possess excellent written and oral communication skills. Applicants must be able to explain and analyze complex legal and policy issues in clear and succinct language lawyers and non-lawyers alike can understand. Applicants must also demonstrate their capacity to work effectively with others.

Prior to applying to the program, applicants must obtain the approval of their Defender. Upon the request of a Federal Defender, additional funding may be provided to that office to support the hiring of a temporary replacement for up to one year. The person selected for this temporary duty assignment will continue to be an employee of their respective federal defender office, which will continue to pay all salary and benefits. However, for the duration of the detail, the person selected will work for the Commission.

Please direct any questions to Beth Blackwood, Sentencing Resource Counsel, at Elizabeth.Blackwood@fd.org. Applications (cover letter, résumé, and writing sample) should be sent to Heather Williams, Chair, Federal Defender Sentencing Guideline Committee, c/o Valerie Duckett, at Valerie.Duckett@fd.org by **November 3, 2025**.