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Federal Public Defender, District of Alaska

Vacancy Announcement 2026-03

Application Deadline: Open Until Filled, Rolling Review

More than one position may be filled from this announcement

Location: Anchorage, Alaska

Position: Assistant Federal Defender (Trial Attorney)

Position Type: Full-time/Permanent

Salary Range: AD-21 (\$86,779) through AD-29 (\$197,100)

Starting classification level and salary are dependent upon experience and qualifications.

Promotion potential up to AD-29 without further competition.

WHO WE ARE

The Federal Public Defender for the District of Alaska is a small but mighty office located in midtown Anchorage. We represent indigent individuals charged with federal crimes across one of the largest and most geographically challenging districts in the country.

Our practice is rooted in a client-centered defense model. We believe people are more than their charges, more than their histories, and more than the government's version of events. Our clients come to us at some of the most difficult moments of their lives, and we take seriously both sides of our role: the obligation to push back and test the evidence, and the responsibility to tell our clients' stories fully, honestly, and with dignity, even when the system makes that difficult.

Alaska's legal community is small, collaborative, and deeply interconnected. That reality strengthens our practice. We know our counterparts. We know the courts. We know the systems our clients are moving through, and we are creative, persistent, and relentless advocates within them.

We are a collaborative and mission-driven office that values teamwork, mutual respect, and pitching in wherever help is needed. Our strong office culture is one of the reasons staff turnover is low and opportunities to join our team are rare. We see public defense as both legal advocacy and social justice work. We fight for our clients not only because the law requires it, but because fairness, dignity, and accountability in the criminal legal system depend on it.

WHY ALASKA

Federal criminal defense in Alaska is unlike anywhere else. The size and geography of the district create a practice that is demanding, independent, and deeply grounded in our culture. Anchorage offers the amenities of a midsize city, surrounded by mountains, wildlife, and access to world-class outdoor recreation, and many of our attorneys come for the work and stay for the life.

Attorneys practicing here quickly develop a deep familiarity with the courts, counsel, and systems that shape the work. The combination of scale, geography, and community makes this a rewarding and meaningful place to build a long-term defense practice.

THE ROLE

The Assistant Federal Defender (Trial Attorney) provides every aspect of legal representation to clients charged with federal criminal offenses who are unable to retain counsel. The role includes jury trials, evidentiary hearings, and contested litigation at all stages of a case, as well as sentencing, supervised release matters, post-conviction proceedings, and related appeals, as assigned.

This work requires independent judgment, grit, and a willingness to take real responsibility for your cases. Attorneys are expected to prepare thoroughly, litigate contested issues, and exercise professional judgment in high-stakes situations. The work is demanding, but it is grounded in trust. You will be trusted to make difficult decisions in an office that believes strong defense work requires courage, preparation, and backbone. While not every case goes to trial, every case is prepared with the seriousness required to do so when necessary, and that preparation is central to achieving fair outcomes for our clients.

AFDs manage a full caseload and work closely with investigators, mitigation specialists, paralegals, and administrative staff in a team-based defense model. The role offers genuine ownership of cases and the opportunity to practice public defense with purpose, integrity, and conviction.

PRIMARY DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Trial & Courtroom Advocacy

- Provide zealous, professional legal representation, including challenging the government's evidence, litigating suppression issues, and taking cases to trial when appropriate.
- Appear in court for trials, evidentiary hearings, motion practice, sentencing, and supervised release proceedings.
- Conduct jury trials and bench trials, including witness examination and oral advocacy.

Case Preparation & Litigation

- Prepare and litigate pretrial motions, suppression issues, and evidentiary disputes.
- Review and analyze discovery, transcripts, exhibits, and investigative materials.
- Prepare legal memoranda, sentencing memoranda, and trial briefs.
- Collaborate with investigators and mitigation specialists to develop defense strategy.

Legal Research & Writing

- Conduct complex legal research involving federal statutes, case law, sentencing guidelines, and procedural rules.
- Draft motions, briefs, and other pleadings for magistrate, district, and appellate courts.
- Prepare appellate briefs and assist with oral argument preparation as assigned.

Client & Stakeholder Communication

- Communicate regularly with clients, family members, witnesses, probation officers, opposing counsel, and the court.
- Maintain ethical obligations and professional judgment at all stages of representation.

Professional Development

- Maintain current knowledge of federal criminal law and trial practice.
- Participate in training opportunities, including national defender trainings, as workload and funding permit.
- Perform other duties as assigned in support of office operations.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

We are seeking a trial attorney who:

- Wants to be in the courtroom and is prepared to stand up, make objections, and make a record.
- Is comfortable pushing back—on prosecutors, probation officers, and the system—when necessary.
- Exercises sound professional judgment and understands that independence comes with responsibility.
- Can try cases independently while valuing collaboration, brainstorming, and feedback.
- Writes clearly, argues clearly, and prepares obsessively.
- Brings creativity and persistence to defense work, particularly when the odds are stacked.

- Treats clients with dignity and respect, even when the system does not.
- Believes deeply that public defense is not a steppingstone, but a calling.

QUALIFICATIONS

Required:

- Juris Doctor (J.D.) from an accredited law school.
- Admission and good standing with the highest court of a state, federal territory, or the District of Columbia (or commitment to obtain admission as required).
- Demonstrated commitment to criminal defense and indigent representation.
- Strong trial advocacy skills and oral communication ability.
- Excellent legal research and writing skills.

SALARY & BENEFITS

This is an Excepted Appointment, full-time position with federal benefits and a salary set under the Judiciary's Administratively Determined (AD) attorney pay table for Assistant Federal Public Defenders. Starting salaries range from AD-21 (\$86,779) through AD-29 (\$197,100) and are commensurate with experience, qualifications, and demonstrated trial skill. The position includes a comprehensive federal benefits package, including participation in health and life insurance programs, retirement benefits, the Thrift Savings Plan, 11 paid federal holidays, 13 paid sick days annually, and 13 paid vacation days annually (to start). Salary is payable only by Electronic Funds Transfer (direct deposit).

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Applicants must be U.S. citizens or eligible to work in and for the United States. Appointment to this position is contingent upon successful completion of an FBI name and fingerprint check. Employees of the Federal Public Defender are members of the judicial branch of government. They are considered at-will employees and are not covered by the Civil Service Reform Act. If hired, the private practice of law and notarial practice is prohibited.

HOW TO APPLY

All qualified candidates are strongly encouraged to apply. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and interviews may be scheduled as applications are received. The position will remain open until filled.

To apply, send a single .pdf document via email to Loisi_Vailea@fd.org with the subject line, "Trial AFD Application." The single .pdf document should be named, "Your last name, first name," (e.g., Smith, Mary) that contains the following:

- A plain face sheet containing only your last name, first name and current employer or employment status. This should be centered on the page and in size 40 font;
- A letter of interest;
- Your resume; and
- Three professional references familiar with the applicant's legal skills;
- A writing sample.

Accurate compliance with these application instructions is a factor expressly considered in the evaluation of the applicant. Due to the volume of responses expected, only those invited to interview will be contacted. No inquiries, telephone or otherwise, please.

The Federal Public Defender is an equal-opportunity employer. All applicants regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or age, are encouraged to apply.