



OFFICE OF THE STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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Judicial Branch, Office of the State Public Defender, FY 2023-24, Report for SB22-188

Beginning July 2022, The Office of the State Public Defender (OSPD) was allocated \$250,000 in connection with SB22-188, CONCERNING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR ADVOCATES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, MAKING AN APPROPRIATION. The allocation was distributed through the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA). This report is a summary of the expenditures associated with this allocation for FY 2023-24.

The OSPD utilized a multi-layered approach incorporating training, skill development, and support systems for defenders to assist with the direct and secondary trauma, as well as, other work-related stressors. As part of the support system, OSPD created an Employee Peer Support team which provides peer support to colleagues and has been incorporated into onboarding for new employees. Employee peer supporters are trained in recognizing when employees are struggling and reach out directly to them.

A critical component of the allocation is used for counseling services through both direct service providers and reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses. This portion of the allocation is particularly valuable because it allows for individuals to determine the support they need, making the impact personalized and therefore long-lasting.

Another key component is training and education programs that teach defenders to recognize job-related trauma and how to prevent and treat it. Mindful Mondays is a weekly meditation session dedicated to addressing job-related stress through group meditation. The OSPD recorded and retained prior educational training content as a resource library for staff. Additional training and education programs have not occurred due to limited resources.

Direct Service Providers

The OSPD engaged multiple direct service providers including three therapists, one yoga therapist and a mindfulness coach. Direct service providers are experienced and trained with working with public defenders and understand the challenges and needs of the OSPD's staff. The OSPD spent \$182,987 on direct service providers for its staff in FY 2023-24. We estimate spending a similar amount on direct service providers in FY 2024-25.

Reimbursements for other Direct Services

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The OSPD has reimbursed \$126,376 to Defenders for out-of-pocket mental health counseling during FY 2023-24. We estimate that approximately the same amount will be spent on reimbursement requests in FY 2024-25.

Group Meditation

The OSPD contracted with Denise Ackert, a mindfulness coach who also provides direct service counseling, to provide weekly group meditation sessions.

Summary

The OSPD has a comprehensive and sustainable program related to mental health and trauma resources. The OSPD continues to monitor the expenditures related to reimbursements for mental health counseling and direct service costs for staff. If those amounts remain consistent with FY 2023-24 expenditures, it is anticipated that the reimbursements and direct service costs will continue to exceed the allocated amount requiring the OSPD to not provide agency-wide trainings and continuing education. The OSPD needs more funding to sustain the same program elements put into place in FY23 and for other sustainable elements that provide a positive impact for employees to continue the important and difficult work for OSPD clients.