

***MINI-CASSIA
PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE***

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Public Defense Reform Interim Committee
January 13, 2016

The Mini-Cassia Public Defender Office is a joint full time office, for both Minidoka and Cassia Counties. We have four (4) full time attorneys, two (2) for District court matters, two (2) for Magistrate court matters, and one (1) part time attorney for Juvenile court matters. We were organized in October 2005 and the idea of the joint county offices has been excellent. The operation of the office solved many of the prior difficulties of the contract public defenders. Financial parity with the prosecutors has been our biggest obstacle to overcome. In the last ten (10) years, we have had to hire eight (8) new attorneys. Five (5) were hired away by prosecutor offices, one (1) by a bank, 1 by another public defender office, and one (1) to private practice. In 2006 we had 1,607 new cases, but in 2014 we had 2,173 new cases. The large increase in our case load limits the time for the experienced attorneys to supervise and train new attorneys. Our budget does not allow us to compete for experienced attorneys and we have had to hire newly licensed attorneys with little or no experience. In addition, we need another attorney and another secretary to handle the increased workload. To help, we have not been excepting post-conviction nor civil cases with criminal contempt matters, except for the failure to pay child support cases. The time to learn the law in these and other specialty type cases is impossible. It is not that our attorneys can't be prepared, but there is just not enough time to barely competently handle the workload that we have. We realize that we do not do all of the criminal cases in the counties, but the four and a half (4 ½) attorneys in our office must deal with two (2) Burley city prosecuting attorneys, three (3) Cassia County prosecuting attorneys, and three (3) Minidoka County prosecuting attorneys. The prosecutors often represent other cities and agencies and have private practices. The income from all of the sources should be considered in parity comparisons. Additional money for public defender training has been spent, which is good and is helpful, but if we cannot keep our new young attorneys the training and money is going to prosecutor offices who then have to train less and spend less because of the public defender monies. Public Defenders with the ability to compete financially to hire and keep attorneys will greatly solve many of the issues being considered in Public Defender reform.

DENNIS R. BYINGTON