

ATASCOSA AREA ADVOCATES PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

(AAAPDO)

Seeking AAAPDO CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER

SALARY: \$135,000

BENEFITS: Health insurance, retirement plan, and paid time off

REPRESENTED AREAS: Atascosa, Wilson, Karnes and Frio Counties (Four counties of the 81st-218th Judicial District)

DEADLINE: MAY 11, 2026

Please submit resume and cover letter via mail or email to:

Kayla Fournier

Human Resources Director,

Human Resources Department

1 Courthouse Circle Drive Suite 3-B Jourdanton, TX 78026

kfournier@co.atascosa.tx.us

Position Description:

The Chief Public Defender is responsible for overseeing and managing all operations within the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office, which aims to provide high-quality, holistic representation to people with low incomes within the counties of Atascosa, Wilson, Karnes and Frio. A key responsibility of this role is to expand the office's capacity to effectively handle the majority of cases involving individuals facing the loss of liberty. This position is essential for transforming the office into a leading provider of criminal defense that complies with national best practices, state and federal constitutions, and all ethics rules and for advancing the four counties' strategic priorities on justice and safety. The county is seeking a passionate leader who can drive this expansion while ensuring quality representation. The Chief will oversee holistic defense and investigatory staff and supervise professional and support personnel. The Chief will also develop and implement strategic plans, goals, and initiatives, establish office policies and procedures, propose and manage budgets, resolve complex legal situations, collaborate with county agencies to enhance the quality of indigent defense in the four counties and strive to ensure indigent defendants receive equal justice under the law.

The Chief Public Defender must possess a strong commitment to indigent defense and experience in organizational growth, supervision, and stakeholder relationship management. Essential qualities include the ability to engage constructively with authority, a passion for justice, and a commitment to upholding the presumption of innocence. The Chief must demonstrate assertiveness, compassion, and empathy, along with effective leadership skills. This role demands resilience and a proactive approach to improving representation for low-income individuals, high standards of legal defense, and prioritizing the well-being of clients and staff. The Chief is appointed by the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office Oversight Board.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- **Operational Management:** Directs and oversees the daily operations of the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office, ensuring efficiency and alignment of team members with the larger goal of delivering effective public defense and quality representation for indigent clients. This role includes guiding the leadership team, setting strategic goals, direction, and policies for the office, and demonstrating principled leadership and sound ethics while promoting an equitable environment for staff and clients. Responsibilities encompass problem-solving, managing all operational aspects of the Public Defender's Office, preparing and approving budgetary inputs, attending management meetings, and performing related managerial responsibilities.
- **Strategic Planning & Leadership:** Provides vision and spearheads strategic planning for office expansion. Also, provides leadership in administering all activities and functions of the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office. In addition, this role is responsible for the supervision of managerial personnel and coordinates with them to ethically resolve problems, integrate, and modify operational strategies, policies, and tactics, formulate responses to changing internal and external conditions, and develop plans, long-range goals, and objectives.
- **Legal Functions:** Performs various tasks to ensure the effective delivery of legal services, including but not limited to supporting legal operations, ensuring commitment to the vigorous defense of client rights and interests, offering expertise or guidance on particularly challenging or complicated legal cases, and collaborating with other attorneys as needed to develop effective strategies.
- **Financial Operations:** Works closely with the Atascosa County Auditor and other relevant county departments to develop a budget for executing the functions and capabilities of the Public Defender's Office and implement plans and strategies for operating within the budget approved by the Commissioners Court.
- **Personnel Management:** Supervises, counsels, evaluates, and trains staff within the Public Defender's Office, ensuring a robust talent pipeline to meet the office's evolving needs. Conducts interviews for staff selection, demotion, and promotion. Develops procedures and policies that promote staff accountability, productivity, recruitment, retention, and continuous professional development. Responsible for workforce and succession planning, including assessing current and future staffing needs and implementing strategies to effectively scale operations and support the increased demands on the office.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Represents, speaks for, and acts on behalf of the Public Defender's Office, engaging with the Commissioners Court, county management, the judiciary, the District and County Attorney's Offices, local law enforcement, administrative services, local advocacy groups, representatives from the Texas Legislature, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC), local bar associations, and other relevant stakeholders.
- **County Goal Advancement:** Works with key criminal legal system stakeholders to advance the four counties' indigent defense system in alignment with the counties' safety and justice goals, particularly those related to fairness, equity, and effectiveness of criminal legal system operations.

Requirements:

Education and Experience:

- Juris Doctor from an accredited law school.
- Ten years of experience practicing criminal law.
- Experience with budget management, budget development, and securing funding for an organizational budget, including preparing, monitoring, and analyzing budgetary allocations to ensure effective resource allocation within the office.
- Substantial demonstrated experience managing criminal defense attorneys and other legal, administrative, and professional staff.

Licensure:

- Licensed to practice law in the State of Texas or eligible to be licensed to practice law in the State of Texas.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- Candidates for Chief Public Defender should possess leadership, litigation, public defense, supervision, management, and budgeting skills.
- Has managerial or supervisory experience.
- Has litigated criminal cases for at least ten years.
- Has worked as a lawyer in a public defender's office.
- Has managed daily operations for a legal organization.
- Has helped create or oversee an organizational budget.
- Has the ability to manage simultaneous projects effectively while maintaining attention to detail.
- Has skills in handling high-stress situations and making quick, informed decisions.
- Demonstrated commitment to racial, social, and economic justice and creating a fair, equitable, and effective criminal justice system.
- Comprehensive knowledge of methods, practices, and applications of pleading criminal cases, as well as effective case presentation techniques in court.
- Excellent leadership, organizational, change management, problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation, and evaluation skills.
- Excellent verbal, written, interpersonal, and team-building skills.
- Ability to motivate, train, supervise, and develop attorneys and support staff.

- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with departmental clientele, representatives of outside agencies, other county employees and officials, and the public.
- Ability to develop and execute budgets within a governmental organization, allocate resources, and evaluate programs.

General Information:

Position Type and Typical Hours of Work:

- Regular Full-time
- Monday – Friday | 8:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.
- Salary: Based on 26 pay periods

Work Environment and Physical Demands:

- This position is based in an office environment, where the use of standard office equipment and computers is routine.
- The physical demands associated with this job are minimal, with occasional lifting and moving objects weighing up to 10 pounds. The role may sometimes be sedentary, involving mainly sitting with occasional standing and walking.
- Must have a valid driver's license and a personal vehicle.
- Reports to the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office Oversight Board.
- Supervises attorneys, investigators, administrators, social workers, and other professional and support personnel.