

Minnesota Board of Public Defense

Program Evaluation
Released October 6, 2026

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Key Findings

- BoPD's caseload standards do not reflect public defenders' actual workloads.
- Public defenders in several judicial districts reported high workloads.
- BoPD's governing board has not provided effective leadership.

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Background

- Public defenders represent individuals in:
 - Felony, gross misdemeanor, or misdemeanor cases.
 - Juvenile and child protection cases.



Rights of Accused in Criminal Prosecutions

The accused shall enjoy the right to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor and to have the assistance of counsel in his defense.

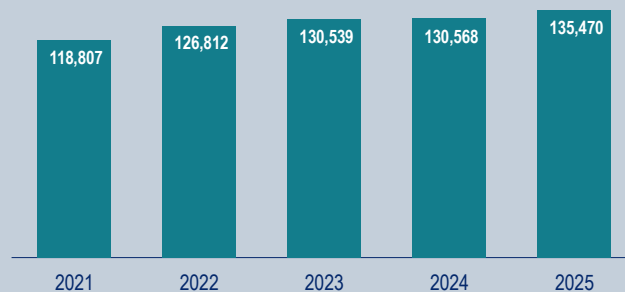
— **Minnesota Constitution, art. I, sec. 6.**

Appointment of a Public Defender (pp. 4–5)

District courts:

- Determine financial eligibility.
- Appoint public defenders.

Number of New Cases Assigned to Public Defenders,
Fiscal Years 2021–2025



Minnesota's Public Defender System (pp. 6–10)

Minnesota Board of Public Defense (BoPD)

**Governing
Board
("the Board")**

**Leadership
and
Management
Staff**

**Public
Defense
Staff**

Key Duties in Law (p. 7)

The Board

- Appoint leadership and management staff
- Approve BoPD's budget and establish procedures for distributing funding

State Public Defender

- Supervise the operation and activities of the statewide system
- With approval from the Board, set standards for public defender offices

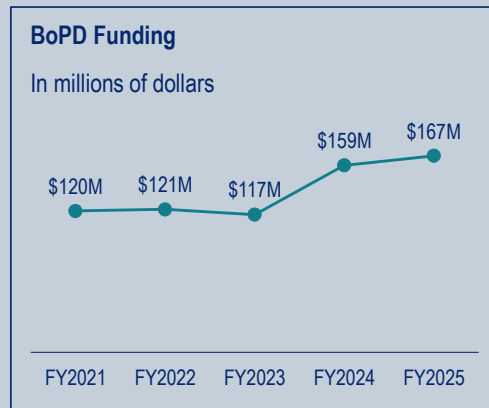
Chief Administrator

- Advise the Board of BoPD's financial condition and prepare its annual budget
- Enforce Board decisions

Finances and Staffing (pp. 11–13)

Fiscal Years 2021 to 2025:

- BoPD's funding and expenditures increased
- Staffing increased by 22 percent



Note: Amounts are adjusted to 2025 dollars.

Workload (p. 16–18)

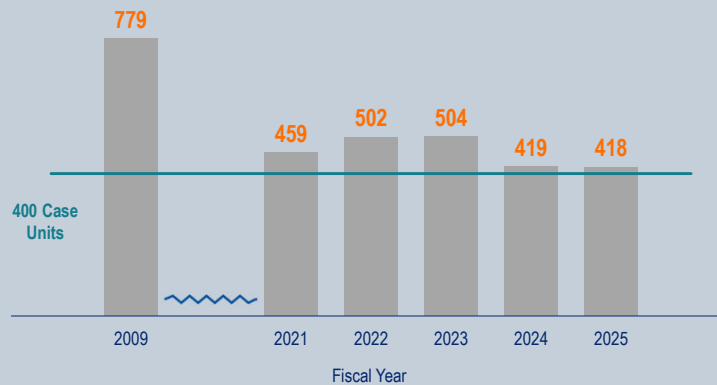
- Caseload standards are outdated and do not reflect public defender workloads.
- BoPD caseload standards: No more than 400 case units in a year.

BoPD's Caseload Standards

Target caseload of a full-time public defender per year is one of the following:

- 150 felonies
- 275 gross misdemeanors
- 400 misdemeanors
- 80 child protection cases
- 175 other juvenile cases
- 275 other cases

Public Defender Caseloads (p. 20)

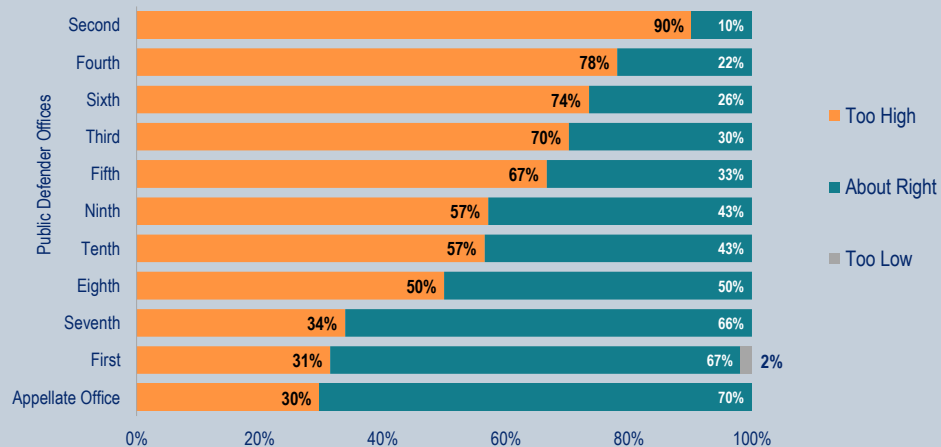


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Public Defenders' Opinions of Workloads (p. 22)

Survey Question: How would you rate your workload in 2025?



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Factors Contributing to High Workloads (p. 23)

- Increase in body camera video footage and forensic evidence
- Clients with mental health and chemical dependency issues
- Distances that public defenders need to travel in rural areas



Technology has greatly impacted the amount of time needed to effectively review and prepare for each case. The amount of body cam footage, city camera footage, personal cell phone video and photos, phone dump records, GPS data, and audio recordings associated with even the lowest-level offenses is over-whelming. There are literally not enough hours in the work week to review all of the audio/video related materials that we receive.

— Public Defender

Public Defenders' Opinions (p. 20)



Recommendation (p. 27)

BoPD should conduct a weighted caseload study and update its caseload standards.

Board Duties (p. 7)

- Primary oversight entity
- Approve BoPD's budget
- Establish procedures for distributing funding across the system

The Board (pp. 38–39)

The Board has not provided effective leadership:

- Taken limited action to address longstanding challenges facing the system
- Board's resource allocation procedures rely on outdated information
- Has not established performance measures

Recommendations (pp. 42 and 40)

The Board should:

- Update its resource allocation procedures.
- Use updated procedures to determine BoPD's staffing needs and allocate resources.
- Establish performance measures and regularly monitor BoPD's progress towards its goals.

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