

Wharton Matagorda Public Defender Office

Position Title: Chief Public Defender

Effective Date: Open until filled

Department: Wharton Matagorda Public Defender Office

Salary: \$160,000 - \$180,000 Annual

*** Depending on Qualifications**

Location: Wharton and Matagorda Counties

Job Type: Full-time

Deadline: Tuesday, January 13, 2026 by 5:00 pm

Primary Objectives

The Wharton Matagorda Public Defender Office will provide quality legal defense to persons who cannot afford counsel in felony and misdemeanor cases in Wharton and Matagorda Counties.

The Chief Public Defender will lead an office of approximately eight attorneys and four and a half staff. The office will represent approximately [number] persons in felony and misdemeanor cases each year. The Chief will be a full-time employee of Wharton Matagorda Public Defender Office. The Chief may handle a partial caseload. Outside legal work is prohibited.

This is an opportunity to help create a holistic, client-centered public defender office from the ground up.

Primary Duties and Responsibilities

1. The Chief Public Defender ensures that the office provides quality criminal defense representation that complies with federal and state constitutions, state statutes, ethical rules, and state and national best practices.
2. The Chief oversees and provides representation of defendants with felony and misdemeanor charges.
3. The Chief will ensure that all attorneys and staff are trained to comply with state and federal constitutions, state and federal laws, ethical rules, and best practices, including holistic, client-centered representation.
4. The Chief supervises professional and support personnel.
5. The Chief allocates resources for services, equipment, facilities, and finances planning and advocating for future services and budgetary needs of the office.
6. The Chief hires, evaluates, disciplines, and dismisses attorneys and staff.
7. The Chief supervises planning, development, preparation, and monitoring of annual budget, grant funding, and statistical reports.
8. The Chief directs staff on legal issues, case dispositions, and advocacy.

9. The Chief represents the public defense function in criminal justice coordinating meetings with clients, judges, prosecutors, commissioners, and others.
10. The Chief presents to social and civic groups, incarcerated persons, and other organizations to explain, publicize, and promote the public defender program and defendants' rights.
11. The Chief represents the Public Defender Office in appropriate public and professional meetings and conferences; in interactions with state, county, and municipal officials; county and state bar associations; and citizen groups.
12. The Chief reports regularly to the Wharton Matagorda Public Defender Office Oversight Board and Wharton and Matagorda Commissioners Courts.

The duties listed above are intended only as illustrations of the various types of work that may be performed. The omission of specific statements of duties does not exclude them from the position if the work is similar, related, or a logical assignment to the position.

Minimum Qualifications

- Juris Doctor
- Licensed to practice law in the State of Texas
- Valid Texas Driver's License

Experience

Candidates for Chief Public Defender should possess leadership, litigation, public defense, supervision, management, and budgeting skills:

- Has led a legal organization as chief, director, or deputy chief for at least 5 years.
- Has litigated criminal cases for at least 7 years. Has tried at least 15 cases to verdict.
- Has worked as a lawyer in a public defender office for at least 5 years.
- Has supervised at least 5 attorneys and staff. Has served as a supervisor for at least 4 years.
- Has managed daily operations for a legal organization for at least 4 years.
- Has helped create or oversee an organizational budget.

Priority will be given to candidates who meet or exceed the description above.

Skills

Advanced research, writing, and advocacy skills.

Leadership, supervision, management, budgeting, and organizational skills.

Advanced knowledge of the rules of evidence, case law, Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure.

Ability to motivate, train, supervise, and develop attorneys and support staff.

EOE: Wharton County is an Equal Opportunity Employer.