



Ohio Revised Code

Section 120.06 Duty to provide legal representation to indigent adults and juveniles.

Effective: September 30, 2025

Legislation: House Bill 96

(A)(1) The state public defender, when designated by the court or requested by a county public defender or joint county public defender, may provide legal representation in all courts throughout the state to indigent adults and juveniles who are charged with the commission of an offense or act for which the penalty or any possible adjudication includes the potential loss of liberty.

(2) The state public defender may provide legal representation to any indigent person who, while incarcerated in any state correctional institution, is charged with a felony offense, for which the penalty or any possible adjudication that may be imposed by a court upon conviction includes the potential loss of liberty.

(3) The state public defender may provide legal representation to any person incarcerated in any correctional institution of the state, in any matter in which the person asserts the person is unlawfully imprisoned or detained.

(4) The state public defender, in any case in which the state public defender has provided legal representation or is requested to do so by a county public defender or joint county public defender, may provide legal representation on appeal.

(5)(a) Except as provided in division (A)(5)(b) of this section, the state public defender, when designated by the court or requested by a county public defender, joint county public defender, or the director of rehabilitation and correction, shall provide legal representation in parole and probation revocation matters or matters relating to the revocation of community control or post-release control under a community control sanction or post-release control sanction, unless the state public defender finds that the alleged parole or probation violator or alleged violator of a community control sanction or post-release control sanction has the financial capacity to retain the alleged violator's own counsel.



(b) If the state public defender determines that the state public defender does not have the capacity to provide the legal representation described in division (A)(5)(a) of this section, the state public defender may contract with private legal counsel to provide the legal representation described in that division.

(6) If the state public defender contracts with a county public defender commission, a joint county public defender commission, or a board of county commissioners for the provision of services, under authority of division (C)(7) of section 120.04 of the Revised Code, the state public defender shall provide legal representation in accordance with the contract.

(B) The state public defender shall not be required to prosecute any appeal, postconviction remedy, or other proceeding pursuant to division (A)(3), (4), or (5) of this section, unless the state public defender first is satisfied that there is arguable merit to the proceeding.

(C) A court may appoint counsel or allow an indigent person to select the indigent's own personal counsel to assist the state public defender as co-counsel when the interests of justice so require. When co-counsel is appointed to assist the state public defender, the co-counsel shall receive any compensation that the court may approve, not to exceed the amounts provided for in section 2941.51 of the Revised Code.

(D)(1) When the state public defender is designated by the court or requested by a county public defender or joint county public defender to provide legal representation for an indigent person in any case, other than pursuant to a contract entered into under authority of division (C)(7) of section 120.04 of the Revised Code, the state public defender shall send to the county in which the case is filed a bill detailing the actual cost of the representation that separately itemizes legal fees and expenses. The county, upon receipt of an itemized bill from the state public defender pursuant to this division, shall pay the state public defender one hundred per cent of the amount identified as legal fees and expenses in the itemized bill.

(2) Upon payment of the itemized bill under division (D)(1) of this section, the county may submit the cost of the legal fees and expenses to the state public defender for reimbursement pursuant to section 120.33 of the Revised Code.



(3) When the state public defender provides investigation or mitigation services to private appointed counsel or to a county or joint county public defender as approved by the appointing court, other than pursuant to a contract entered into under authority of division (C)(7) of section 120.04 of the Revised Code, the state public defender shall send to the county in which the case is filed a bill itemizing the actual cost of the services provided. The county, upon receipt of an itemized bill from the state public defender pursuant to this division, shall pay one hundred per cent of the amount as set forth in the itemized bill. Upon payment of the itemized bill received pursuant to this division, the county may submit the cost of the investigation and mitigation services to the state public defender for reimbursement pursuant to section 120.33 of the Revised Code.

(4) There is hereby created in the state treasury the county representation fund for the deposit of moneys received from counties under this division. All moneys credited to the fund shall be used by the state public defender to provide legal representation for indigent persons when designated by the court or requested by a county or joint county public defender or to provide investigation or mitigation services, including investigation or mitigation services to private appointed counsel or a county or joint county public defender, as approved by the court.

(5) If the state public defender determines that the state public defender does not have the capacity to provide the legal representation described in division (A)(5)(a) of this section and the state public defender contracts with private legal counsel to provide the legal representation, the state public defender shall directly pay private legal counsel's fees and expenses from the indigent defense support fund pursuant to section 120.08 of the Revised Code.

(E)(1) Notwithstanding any contrary provision of sections 109.02, 109.07, 109.361 to 109.366, and 120.03 of the Revised Code that pertains to representation by the attorney general, an assistant attorney general, or special counsel of an officer or employee, as defined in section 109.36 of the Revised Code, or of an entity of state government, the state public defender may elect to contract with, and to have the state pay pursuant to division (E)(2) of this section for the services of, private legal counsel to represent the Ohio public defender commission, the state public defender, assistant state public defenders, other employees of the commission or the state public defender, and attorneys described in division (C) of section 120.41 of the Revised Code in a malpractice or other civil action or proceeding that arises from alleged actions or omissions related to responsibilities derived pursuant to this chapter, or in a civil action that is based upon alleged violations of the constitution or



statutes of the United States, including section 1983 of Title 42 of the United States Code, 93 Stat. 1284 (1979), 42 U.S.C.A. 1983, as amended, and that arises from alleged actions or omissions related to responsibilities derived pursuant to this chapter, if the state public defender determines, in good faith, that the defendant in the civil action or proceeding did not act manifestly outside the scope of the defendant's employment or official responsibilities, with malicious purpose, in bad faith, or in a wanton or reckless manner. If the state public defender elects not to contract pursuant to this division for private legal counsel in a civil action or proceeding, then, in accordance with sections 109.02, 109.07, 109.361 to 109.366, and 120.03 of the Revised Code, the attorney general shall represent or provide for the representation of the Ohio public defender commission, the state public defender, assistant state public defenders, other employees of the commission or the state public defender, or attorneys described in division (C) of section 120.41 of the Revised Code in the civil action or proceeding.

(2)(a) Subject to division (E)(2)(b) of this section, payment from the state treasury for the services of private legal counsel with whom the state public defender has contracted pursuant to division (E)(1) of this section shall be accomplished only through the following procedure:

(i) The private legal counsel shall file with the attorney general a copy of the contract; a request for an award of legal fees, court costs, and expenses earned or incurred in connection with the defense of the Ohio public defender commission, the state public defender, an assistant state public defender, an employee, or an attorney in a specified civil action or proceeding; a written itemization of those fees, costs, and expenses, including the signature of the state public defender and the state public defender's attestation that the fees, costs, and expenses were earned or incurred pursuant to division (E)(1) of this section to the best of the state public defender's knowledge and information; a written statement whether the fees, costs, and expenses are for all legal services to be rendered in connection with that defense, are only for legal services rendered to the date of the request and additional legal services likely will have to be provided in connection with that defense, or are for the final legal services rendered in connection with that defense; a written statement indicating whether the private legal counsel previously submitted a request for an award under division (E)(2) of this section in connection with that defense and, if so, the date and the amount of each award granted; and, if the fees, costs, and expenses are for all legal services to be rendered in connection with that defense or are for the final legal services rendered in connection with that defense, a certified copy of any judgment entry in the civil action or proceeding or a signed copy of any settlement agreement



entered into between the parties to the civil action or proceeding.

(ii) Upon receipt of a request for an award of legal fees, court costs, and expenses and the requisite supportive documentation described in division (E)(2)(a)(i) of this section, the attorney general shall review the request and documentation; determine whether any of the limitations specified in division (E)(2)(b) of this section apply to the request; and, if an award of legal fees, court costs, or expenses is permissible after applying the limitations, prepare a document awarding legal fees, court costs, or expenses to the private legal counsel. The document shall name the private legal counsel as the recipient of the award; specify the total amount of the award as determined by the attorney general; itemize the portions of the award that represent legal fees, court costs, and expenses; specify any limitation applied pursuant to division (E)(2)(b) of this section to reduce the amount of the award sought by the private legal counsel; state that the award is payable from the state treasury pursuant to division (E)(2)(a)(iii) of this section; and be approved by the inclusion of the signatures of the attorney general, the state public defender, and the private legal counsel.

(iii) The attorney general shall forward a copy of the document prepared pursuant to division (E)(2)(a)(ii) of this section to the director of budget and management. The award of legal fees, court costs, or expenses shall be paid out of the state public defender's appropriations, to the extent there is a sufficient available balance in those appropriations. If the state public defender does not have a sufficient available balance in the state public defender's appropriations to pay the entire award of legal fees, court costs, or expenses, the director shall make application for a transfer of appropriations out of the emergency purposes account or any other appropriation for emergencies or contingencies in an amount equal to the portion of the award that exceeds the sufficient available balance in the state public defender's appropriations. A transfer of appropriations out of the emergency purposes account or any other appropriation for emergencies or contingencies shall be authorized if there are sufficient moneys greater than the sum total of then pending emergency purposes account requests, or requests for releases from the other appropriation. If a transfer of appropriations out of the emergency purposes account or other appropriation for emergencies or contingencies is made to pay an amount equal to the portion of the award that exceeds the sufficient available balance in the state public defender's appropriations, the director shall cause the payment to be made to the private legal counsel. If sufficient moneys do not exist in the emergency purposes account or other appropriation for emergencies or contingencies to pay an amount equal to the portion of the award that exceeds the sufficient available balance in the state public defender's



appropriations, the private legal counsel shall request the general assembly to make an appropriation sufficient to pay an amount equal to the portion of the award that exceeds the sufficient available balance in the state public defender's appropriations, and no payment in that amount shall be made until the appropriation has been made. The private legal counsel shall make the request during the current biennium and during each succeeding biennium until a sufficient appropriation is made.

(b) An award of legal fees, court costs, and expenses pursuant to division (E) of this section is subject to the following limitations:

(i) The maximum award or maximum aggregate of a series of awards of legal fees, court costs, and expenses to the private legal counsel in connection with the defense of the Ohio public defender commission, the state public defender, an assistant state public defender, an employee, or an attorney in a specified civil action or proceeding shall not exceed fifty thousand dollars.

(ii) The private legal counsel shall not be awarded legal fees, court costs, or expenses to the extent the fees, costs, or expenses are covered by a policy of malpractice or other insurance.

(iii) The private legal counsel shall be awarded legal fees and expenses only to the extent that the fees and expenses are reasonable in light of the legal services rendered by the private legal counsel in connection with the defense of the Ohio public defender commission, the state public defender, an assistant state public defender, an employee, or an attorney in a specified civil action or proceeding.

(c) If, pursuant to division (E)(2)(a) of this section, the attorney general denies a request for an award of legal fees, court costs, or expenses to private legal counsel because of the application of a limitation specified in division (E)(2)(b) of this section, the attorney general shall notify the private legal counsel in writing of the denial and of the limitation applied.

(d) If, pursuant to division (E)(2)(c) of this section, a private legal counsel receives a denial of an award notification or if a private legal counsel refuses to approve a document under division (E)(2)(a)(ii) of this section because of the proposed application of a limitation specified in division (E)(2)(b) of this section, the private legal counsel may commence a civil action against the attorney general in the court of claims to prove the private legal counsel's entitlement to the award sought, to prove that division (E)(2)(b) of this section does not prohibit or otherwise limit the award sought,



and to recover a judgment for the amount of the award sought. A civil action under division (E)(2)(d) of this section shall be commenced no later than two years after receipt of a denial of award notification or, if the private legal counsel refused to approve a document under division (E)(2)(a)(ii) of this section because of the proposed application of a limitation specified in division (E)(2)(b) of this section, no later than two years after the refusal. Any judgment of the court of claims in favor of the private legal counsel shall be paid from the state treasury in accordance with division (E)(2)(a) of this section.

(F) If a court appoints the office of the state public defender to represent a petitioner in a postconviction relief proceeding under section 2953.21 of the Revised Code, the petitioner has received a sentence of death, and the proceeding relates to that sentence, all of the attorneys who represent the petitioner in the proceeding pursuant to the appointment, whether an assistant state public defender, the state public defender, or another attorney, shall be certified under Rule 20 of the Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio to represent indigent defendants charged with or convicted of an offense for which the death penalty can be or has been imposed.

(G)(1) The state public defender may conduct a legal assistance referral service for children committed to the department of youth services relative to conditions of confinement claims. If the legal assistance referral service receives a request for assistance from a child confined in a facility operated, or contracted for, by the department of youth services and the state public defender determines that the child has a conditions of confinement claim that has merit, the state public defender may refer the child to a private attorney. If no private attorney who the child has been referred to by the state public defender accepts the case within a reasonable time, the state public defender may prepare, as appropriate, pro se pleadings in the form of a complaint regarding the conditions of confinement at the facility where the child is confined with a motion for appointment of counsel and other applicable pleadings necessary for sufficient pro se representation.

(2) Division (G)(1) of this section does not authorize the state public defender to represent a child committed to the department of youth services in general civil matters arising solely out of state law.

(3) The state public defender shall not undertake the representation of a child in court based on a conditions of confinement claim arising under this division.



(H) A child's right to representation or services under this section is not affected by the child, or another person on behalf of the child, previously having paid for similar representation or services or having waived legal representation.

(I) The state public defender shall have reasonable access to any child committed to the department of youth services, department of youth services institution, and department of youth services record as needed to implement this section.

(J) As used in this section:

(1) "Community control sanction" has the same meaning as in section 2929.01 of the Revised Code.

(2) "Conditions of confinement" means any issue involving a constitutional right or other civil right related to a child's incarceration, including, but not limited to, actions cognizable under 42 U.S.C. 1983.

(3) "Post-release control sanction" has the same meaning as in section 2967.01 of the Revised Code.