

FEDERAL DEFENDER SERVICES OF EASTERN TENNESSEE, INCORPORATED

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Position Announcement – Assistant Federal Defender, Capital Habeas Unit (Two Positions)

Who We Are

Federal Defender Services of Eastern Tennessee, Inc. (FDSET) stands on the front lines every day to keep people out of prison and halt state executions. Guided by our core values of compassion, courage, competency, creativity, and collaboration, we provide client-centered representation to those who need it most. Our clients are indigent defendants charged with federal offenses ranging from drug crimes to complex white-collar conspiracies, as well as individuals sentenced to death. Through holistic lawyering, we safeguard our clients' constitutional rights while championing their dignity, humanity, and future at every stage of their case. We actively embrace diversity, cultivate inclusion, and foster a workplace grounded in fairness, flexibility, and shared purpose. We are united by a deep commitment to standing beside our clients in their most critical moments.

FDSET is a nonprofit community defender organization funded by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, with offices in Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Greeneville. Each location has a trial unit, and our Knoxville office is also home to our Capital Habeas Unit—where we handle some of the most complex and high-stakes litigation in the federal system.

The Place

Nestled in the heart of the South, East Tennessee is a place where breathtaking landscapes meet vibrant community life. Framed by the rolling foothills of the Smoky Mountains and laced with miles of rivers and lakes, the region offers postcard-worthy views in every direction. Here, even the largest cities maintain a warm, small-town charm—yet surprise visitors with a dynamic culinary and cultural scene. Savor farm-to-table fare, soulful Southern classics, slow-smoked barbecue, and authentic international cuisine, all perfectly paired with locally crafted beers. Stroll through lively farmers markets, celebrate at year-round festivals, and enjoy performances in venues such as the historic Bijou Theatre or Niswonger Performing Arts Center, which feature Broadway productions, concerts, opera, ballet, and more. Explore award-winning history, science, and children's museums or cheer on your favorite



team—from the Tennessee Volunteers to professional hockey, baseball, roller derby, and even the Bassmaster Elite Series.

With a mild climate that still showcases the beauty of all four seasons, East Tennessee invites outdoor adventure year-round. Spend the day at Dollywood, take in sweeping mountaintop views at Anakeesta, marvel at marine life at the Tennessee Aquarium, or experience beloved traditions like the Greene County Fair and the National Storytelling Festival. With more than 60 state and national parks, including the iconic Great Smoky Mountains National Park, adventure is always just minutes away. And if you're bringing a four-legged friend, you'll feel right at home. The area proudly embraces a pet-friendly spirit, with cozy cat cafés, playful goat yoga sessions, ample public water bowls, and wide-open spaces where your pup, horse, cows, and so on, can roam free. In East Tennessee, life moves at the perfect pace.

The Job

We are hiring two full-time assistant federal defenders in our Knoxville office, Capital Habeas Unit (CHU). The CHU represents clients in federal courts in Tennessee and clients in six states who have been sentenced to death by state or federal courts.

Duties

Assistant federal defenders work collaboratively with co-counsel, paralegals, and investigators under the supervision of the CHU supervisor. Assistant federal defenders manage a caseload that involves leading and working as a member of case teams; directing and conducting case-related investigations; writing briefs, motions, and other pleadings; reviewing voluminous trial and appellate records; developing claims and litigation strategy; advocating at evidentiary hearings and oral arguments; and meeting with clients, experts, witnesses, and client family members. CHU attorneys represent clients in federal district courts and circuit courts, the U.S. Supreme Court, clemency hearings, and in other types of proceedings as required by our office's appointment, including extensive execution-related end-stage litigation.

Requirements

Applicants must have admission and good standing before the federal bar, in combination with admission and good standing to a state bar. Five years of attorney experience or a federal clerkship is required. Preference will be given to applicants with capital post-conviction/capital habeas litigation experience.

An affinity for teamwork is essential. The ideal candidate will have experience in capital or other complex litigation, excellent client relationship skills, dogged determination and work ethic, and a strong research and writing background.

Overnight travel for client visits and investigative trips is required. Applicants must have a driver's license and appropriate motor vehicle insurance. Attorneys in this office may not engage in the private practice of law.

Salary & Benefits

Salary is commensurate with years of experience and qualifications in accordance with the Defender Organization Classification System and Salary Charts. The current starting salary range is \$76,748 to \$180,078 annually.

Starting Salary Chart				
Calendar Year 2026				
AD Level	Years of Professional Attorney Experience		Starting Salary Ranges	
	At Least	Less Than		
AD-21	0	- 3	\$ 76,748	- \$117,039
AD-23	3	- 5	\$ 82,459	- \$125,752
AD-25	5	- 6	\$ 88,602	- \$135,115
AD-26	6	- 7	\$ 95,197	- \$145,175
AD-27	7	- 8	\$ 102,287	- \$155,987
AD-28	8	- 9	\$ 109,903	- \$167,601
AD-29	9+		\$ 118,083	- \$180,078

FDSET offers a generous benefits package, which includes paid vacation and sick leave, 11+ paid annual holidays, medical, dental, vision, life/AD&D, long-term disability, and 401K retirement. FDSET provides medical (employee-only plans), dental, vision, basic life/AD&D, and long-term disability at no monthly premium cost to employees. A partial remote work week is available to employees after an initial probationary period.

How To Apply

Qualified individuals may apply by sending ALL the following documents in a *combined PDF file* to **Sharon_Buckingham@fd.org** by **Friday, August 7, 2026**.

- (1) Cover Letter
- (2) Resume
- (3) Three References
- (4) Writing Sample

An email confirming receipt of the application materials will be sent to all applicants. Only those selected for interviews will receive further communication.

FDSET VALUES A DIVERSE WORKFORCE AND IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER