

TEXAS RIOGRANDE LEGAL AID, INC.

Public Defender Division Seeking First Assistant

TRLA Service Area

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) seeks a First Assistant to assist in the management and administration of the Operation Lone Star Team. The First Assistant assists the Project Director and Deputy Project Director in planning, organizing, directing and coordinating the operation of the assigned office.

TRLA's Public Defender program serves indigent defendants in 10 rural Texas counties, all south of San Antonio, and indigent defendants charged under Operation Lone Star. Operation Lone Star is a state initiative that attempts to militarize the border, criminalize seeking asylum, and create a separate and unequal criminal justice system targeting migrants. Attorneys within the Operation Lone Star Project will work with the Operation Lone Star Team under the supervision of the Project Manager to provide clients with high-quality representation from intake to resolution, including advice on the immigration consequences of a criminal conviction.

TRLA Public Defenders are frontline advocates who have engaged in the movement to transform the criminal justice system and challenge the injustices faced by indigent defendants in rural south Texas for over a decade. TRLA Public Defenders provide complete, vertical representation from intake to resolution. Except for cases involving a conflict of interest or the death penalty, TRLA Public Defenders represent persons accused of crimes from initial arrest to final appeal.

TRLA delivers client-centered legal services to address the unique needs and limited resources available to clients residing in rural and border communities. Special initiatives within TRLA's Public Defender division include advice on the immigration consequences of a criminal conviction, trauma-informed and mental health advocacy, assistance with applying for government aid and/or housing, and assistance with substance abuse as alternative solutions to incarceration.

With caseload controls, staff investigators, mental health and substance abuse caseworkers, and a litigation budget, TRLA is deeply committed to zealous, high-quality representation in rural South Texas. Attorney benefits include law school loan repayment assistance, generous paid leave, healthcare insurance, retirement plan, and training & travel stipends. TRLA defenders train with the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, Gideon's Promise, the National Association for Public Defense, and other associations that are committed to the transformation of indigent defense and criminal justice reform.

TRLA, a poverty law firm, with a national reputation for effective advocacy, is one of the largest legal services programs in the nation, employing over 200 attorneys across a 68-county service area in Southwest Texas. TRLA is one of the few legal aid organizations with a public defender program.

- Receives direction from the Project Director, Deputy Project Director and the Public Defender Division Director.
- Assists in administering the programs and operations of Operation Lone Star and managing staff.

- Works in partnership with the Project Director to implement key strategies and initiatives to achieve Operation Lone Star goals and objectives
- Maintain a caseload that includes high level felonies, misdemeanors and juvenile cases;
- Manage cases from intake to final resolution, including pretrial, trial, appeals, and additional motion practice, as needed;
- Work with the Project Director to identify systemic issues within their service area
- Mentor and train newly licensed attorneys within Operation Lone Star, by assisting in case file reviews, developing trainings, attending court hearings with young attorneys, and serving as lead counsel or co-counsel on trials with new lawyers, as needed;
- Maintain a supportive and positive work environment for their team; and
- Contribute to the progress and development of the Public Defender Division as a whole.

Qualifications:

- Licensed to practice law in Texas or willing to take the next available Texas bar exam;
- At least five years of criminal litigation experience as a licensed attorney;
- At least 3 trials before a jury as lead counsel;
- Demonstrated management and leadership skills;
- Proficiency in Office365, legal research software, and other case management systems; and
- Professional fluency in Spanish (highly preferred).

Preferred applicants will demonstrate a commitment to indigent defense and criminal justice reform; have worked in a public defender office; have exceptional advocacy, management, and leadership skills; are solution oriented and creative in their ideas on how to solve systemic issues within the criminal justice system; are passionate about the development and training of the new generation of the indigent defense attorneys; and want to live and work in communities where TRLA clients have the greatest needs. TRLA is also looking for attorneys that aspire to become leaders both within the division and in the larger public defender community.

TRLA is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to an equitable workplace. This position requires, consistent with TRLA's policy and subject to applicable law, a candidate to provide proof of complete COVID-19 vaccination prior to commencing employment.