

TEXAS RIOGRANDE LEGAL AID, INC.

Public Defender Division Seeking First Assistant

Rio Grande City

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) seeks a First Assistant to assist in the management and administration of The Starr Regional Public Defender Office, serving the counties of Starr, Jim Hogg and Duvall. The First Assistant assists the Chief in planning, organizing, directing and coordinating the operation of the assigned office.

TRLA's Public Defender program serves 10 rural Texas counties, all south of San Antonio. Currently, TRLA has public defender offices in Beeville, Hallettsville, Victoria, Rio Grande City, and Harlingen. Each of these offices provides indigent defense for one or more of the counties near the office locations. TRLA PD offices are located near various natural and cultural attractions. They are also within reasonable driving distances from metro areas with international airports.

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 Chief Public Defender and the Public Defender Division Director.
- Assists in administering the programs and operations of the Starr County Regional Public Defender and managing staff.
- Works in partnership with the Chief Public Defender to implement keys strategies and initiatives to achieve Starr County RPD 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 Chief Public Defender to identify systemic issues within their service area
- Mentor and train newly licensed attorneys within the Starr RPD, 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.