

SB 6215: Establishing a collaborative process to alleviate the burden on local courts to determine indigency through proof of receipt of public assistance

We support efforts to improve the indigency screening process for those seeking public defense representation; however, we have concerns that this bill is unnecessary and will be costly to the state. Some of our concerns include:

- **The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) currently provides information to the court as outlined in this bill in 21 counties.** It will be costly for DSHS to reprogram their system just to accommodate the hesitancy of some courts to use the system as it requires obtaining the individual's Social Security Number.
- **This bill allows counties to “opt-out” of participating in the new system, but does not appear to allow cities to do so.** It doesn't seem fair to treat local governmental bodies differently when they are meeting the same statutory requirements.
- **In addition to the costs to DSHS and the Health Care Authority to reprogram their systems, State OPD will need to hire additional staff to implement their new duties under the bill.** This money is better spent improving public defense services than creating an unnecessary new system.
- **Even with access to this information, it does not remove the obligation to screen individuals in an in-depth manner.** Receiving public assistance is only one factor to take into consideration when screening individuals to see if they qualify for public defense services.

For more information, contact:

Neil Beaver: 509-979-9550 or neil.beaver@gmail.com; or

Christie Hedman: 206-623-4321 or hedman@defense.net