

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA  
FORT WAYNE DIVISION**

|                                       |   |          |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------|
| CALVIN WILSON,                        | ) |          |
| individually and behalf of all others | ) |          |
| similarly situated,                   | ) |          |
|                                       | ) |          |
| Plaintiff,                            | ) |          |
|                                       | ) |          |
| v.                                    | ) | CASE NO. |
|                                       | ) |          |
| ALLEN COUNTY, ALLEN COUNTY            | ) |          |
| COUNCIL, ALLEN COUNTY BOARD           | ) |          |
| OF COMMISSIONERS, and ALLEN           | ) |          |
| COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER BOARD,         | ) |          |
|                                       | ) |          |
| Defendants.                           | ) |          |

**COMPLAINT**

Plaintiff, Calvin Wilson, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, allege as follows against Defendants Allen County, Allen County Council, Allen County Board of Commissioners, and Allen County Public Defender Board:

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and Section 13(a) of Article 1 of the Indiana State Constitution guarantee indigent defendants charged with crimes the right to effective assistance of counsel. The right is fundamental and essential to a fair trial. *See Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963); *Argersinger v. Hamlin*, 407 U.S. 25 (1972); *Winn v. State*, 232 Ind. 70, 111 N.E.2d 653 (Ind. 1953).
2. The right of an indigent defendant to effective assistance of counsel has been long recognized in the State of Indiana. *See Webb v. Baird*, 6 Ind. 13, 18 (Ind. 1854).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “It is not to be thought of in a civilized community . . . that any citizen put in jeopardy of life or liberty should be debarred of counsel because he is too poor to employ such aid. No court could be expected to respect itself to sit

3. Defendants, who operate the public defense system of Allen County, Indiana, have a duty to ensure individuals charged with crimes, including misdemeanor crimes, are provided effective assistance of counsel.
4. However, Defendants for years in Allen County have operated a constitutionally and structurally deficient public defender system for indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes. Systemic failures are numerous and include in particular excessive attorney caseloads. These failures have led to the denial of effective assistance of counsel.
5. Despite knowing of the deficiencies of their public defense system, including excessive attorney caseloads, Defendants have failed to take reasonable steps to protect the constitutional rights of those affected.
6. As a result, indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes in Allen County have suffered and continue to suffer harm as a result of Defendants' violations of their constitutional rights.
7. Therefore, Plaintiff brings this class action lawsuit for injunctive and declaratory relief to prevent further constitutional violations and to protect the constitutional rights of all indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes in the courts of Allen County.

## **II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

8. This suit is brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 to redress the deprivation of rights secured by the United States Constitution and the Indiana State Constitution.
9. This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1343(a).
10. This Court has the authority to enter declaratory judgment and to provide preliminary and

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and hear such a trial.”

permanent injunctive relief pursuant to Rules 57 and 65 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202.

11. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391(b). Defendants have offices within the district and the events and omissions that have given rise to and continue to give rise to Plaintiff's injuries occurred and continue to occur within this district.

### **III. THE PARTIES**

12. Class Plaintiff Calvin Wilson is an Allen County, Indiana resident and an indigent individual charged with a misdemeanor crime in Allen County. Plaintiff Wilson has been assigned an attorney from the Allen County Public Defender's Office. Plaintiff Wilson faces the loss of liberty through incarceration or other detention and the loss of thousands of dollars should he be convicted of or plead guilty to his charge. In his case,<sup>2</sup> Plaintiff Wilson's assigned attorney:

- a. Has a caseload consisting of hundreds of additional misdemeanor cases;
- b. Has not meaningfully conducted any legal research into Plaintiff Wilson's case;
- c. Has not meaningfully investigated Plaintiff Wilson's charges;
- d. Has not filed any substantive motions in Plaintiff Wilson's case;
- e. Has not held one (1) confidential meeting with Plaintiff Wilson outside a courthouse; and
- f. Has devoted less than one (1) hour in whole to the defense of Plaintiff Wilson's charge.

13. Defendant Allen County is a constitutional body of the State of Indiana wherein the rights

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<sup>2</sup> *State of Indiana v. Calvin L Wilson*, Case No. 02D05-1507-CM-002566 (Allen Co., Ind. Super. Ct. filed July 6, 2015).

of the accused must be secured. The Allen County Public Defender's Office is an agency of Defendant Allen County.

14. Defendant Allen County Council is the elected body of Allen County that sets budgets, appropriates funds, and makes final financial decisions for Allen County and its agencies. These agencies include the Allen County Public Defender's Office. Defendant Allen County Council, along with Allen County Board of Commissioners, is responsible for approving staffing levels at the Allen County Public Defender's Office.
15. Defendant Allen County Board of Commissioners is the elected body of Allen County that serves as the county's executive and legislative branches, makes and passes laws, sets employee policies, and signs service contracts for county agencies. These agencies include the Allen County Public Defender's Office.
16. Defendant Allen County Public Defender Board is the appointed body of Allen County that supervises and manages the county's public defense system, primarily through the Allen County Public Defender's Office.

#### **IV. CLASS ACTION ALLEGATIONS**

17. Class Plaintiff Wilson ("Class Plaintiff") brings this action pursuant to Federal Civil Rule of procedure 23(a) and (b)(2) on behalf of himself and all others similarly situated (collectively, "Class Members") as members of the following proposed Class:

All individuals who have or will have misdemeanor criminal cases pending in the courts of Allen County, Indiana, who have or will have an attorney assigned to them due to indigency and have not been convicted or entered into a plea agreement.

18. The Class is so numerous that joinder of all Class Members is impracticable. At any point in time, thousands of individuals have misdemeanor criminal cases pending

in Allen County courts, at least hundreds of which are indigent and rely on an appointed attorney due to indigency.

19. There are questions of law and fact common to the Class. The questions of law and fact common to all Class Members include but are not limited to:
  - a. Whether Defendants have a duty to provide indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes in Allen County effective assistance of counsel; and
  - b. Whether Defendants have breached their duties.
20. Class Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the Class.
21. Class Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Class. There are no conflicts between the Class Plaintiffs and other Class Members. Class Plaintiff will vigorously prosecute this action on behalf of the Class. Class Plaintiff is represented by competent counsel, Christopher C. Myers & Associates, who will vigorously prosecute the case on behalf of the Class.
22. Defendants have acted or refused to act on grounds that are generally applicable to the entire Class.
23. The claims asserted in this complaint are capable of repetition while evading review.
24. There is continuing and substantial public interest in these matters.

## **V. FACTS**

### **A. Defendants' Have a Duty to Provide Effective Assistance of Counsel for Indigent Individuals Charged with Misdemeanor Crimes in Allen County**

25. The Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and Section 13(a) of Article 1 of the Indiana State Constitution guarantee indigent individuals charged with crimes, including misdemeanor crimes, the right to effective assistance of counsel.

26. Defendants have a constitutional duty to provide indigent individuals charged with misdemeanors crimes in Allen County effective assistance of counsel.
27. To ensure effective assistance of counsel for indigent individuals in Indiana, state statute provides that counties generally must establish systems for the provision of public defense at the trial court level. Ind. Code Ann. §§ 33-40-7-1 *et seq.*
28. Defendant Allen County has chosen to provide for indigent criminal representation primarily through the Allen County Public Defender's Office. This office is supervised and managed by Defendant Allen County Public Defender Board. *Id.*; Allen County, Ind. Code § 1-17-1 *et seq.*
29. By statute, the Allen County Public Defender's Office must have staff necessary to operate the services of a public defender. Ind. Code Ann. § 33-40-7-7(2). Staffing levels are to be recommended by Defendant Allen County Public Defender Board and approved by Defendants Allen County Council and Allen County Board of Commissioners. *Id.*
30. Defendant Allen County Board of Commissioners established Defendant Allen County Public Defender Board by ordinance in 2003 to provide for the legal representation as required by law of indigent individuals charged with crimes in the county. Allen County, Ind. Code § 1-17-1. The duties of the Allen County Public Defender Board include preparing a comprehensive plan for indigent defense services, establishing policy and procedures for the provision of such services, monitoring the expenditures of the Allen County Public Defender's Office, and recommending an annual operating budget to Defendant Allen County Council. *Id.* at 1-17-3, 4.
31. By state statute and county ordinance, Defendant Allen County Public Defender Board

adopted Allen County's Comprehensive Plan for Indigent Defense Services in 2003 to establish how the county would operate its public defense system. The Comprehensive Plan is attached and incorporated into this complaint as Exhibit A.

32. The county's Comprehensive Plan for Indigent Defense Services provides that:

- a. The Allen County Public Defender's Office will be the "primary method of providing criminal defense services in Allen County." *Id.* at 1.
- b. The Allen County Public Defender's Office will comply with legal representation standards established by the state. *Id.* These standards, known as the Indiana Public Defender Commissions Standards for Indigent Defense Services, are attached and incorporated into this complaint as Exhibit B.
- c. Attorneys for the Allen County Public Defender's Office will not carry excessive caseloads that "interfere with the rendering of quality representation or lead to the breach of professional obligations." Exhibit A at 6.
- d. Attorneys for the Allen County Public Defender's Office handling misdemeanor cases on a part-time basis will generally not carry more than 150 cases within a twelve-month period. *Id.* This caseload limit mirrors state standards. Ex. B at 14-16.
- e. Attorneys for the Allen County Public Defender's Office will notify the managing attorney of their office, the County Public Defender, if their caseloads become excessive. Ex. A at 6.
- f. The County Public Defender will notify county judges "and refuse to accept the appointment of additional cases" when attorney caseloads become excessive. *Id.*

at 6-7.<sup>3</sup>

**B. Defendants' are Systemically Failing to Provide Effective Assistance of Counsel for Indigent Individuals Charged with Misdemeanor Crimes in Allen County**

33. Defendants under the U.S. and Indiana constitutions, Indiana statute, local ordinance, state standards, and their own comprehensive plan of operation are systemically failing to provide effective assistance of counsel to indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes in Allen County.

i. Defendants fail to properly staff and fund misdemeanor cases

34. Approximately 5,800 criminal misdemeanor cases are filed in Allen County courts annually, according to Indiana Division of State Court Administration. Of those, about one-third to one-quarter are assigned to attorneys with the Allen County Public Defender's Office. *See Exhibit C.*<sup>4</sup>

35. Defendants, however, fail to properly staff and fund public defense for misdemeanor clients. Among other things:

- a. The Public Defender's Office employs no full-time attorneys to represent indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes. *Id.*
- b. The Public Defender's Office devotes a very small amount of its expenditures to

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<sup>3</sup> The limitation on caseload sizes is critical to the operation of an effective county public defender office. According to the Indiana Public Defender Commission, "Not even the most able and industrious lawyers can provide quality representation when their workloads are unmanageable. Excessive caseloads, moreover, lead to attorney frustration, disillusionment by clients, and undermine the integrity of the adversary system of criminal justice." Ex. B at 17.

<sup>4</sup> This exhibit collects Allen County's 2010 to 2014 end-of-the-year reports to the Indiana Public Defender Commission, which include indigent defense expenditures and caseloads. The purpose of these reports is to request reimbursement from the state for legal expenses. Indiana counties cannot currently request state reimbursement for misdemeanor cases. In each and every one of these reports, Allen County acknowledges that its misdemeanor attorneys are carrying excessive caseloads. In none of these reports does Allen County propose to redress excessive caseloads or request any state assistance, financial or otherwise, for excessive caseloads.



counsel for misdemeanor criminal clients. The amount expended on salaries for misdemeanor attorneys ranges from between 1 and 3 percent of the office's total spending. *Id.*

- c. The Public Defender's Office contracts with only three part-time attorneys, and at times a fourth, for the more than 1,500 misdemeanor criminal cases it is assigned every year. *Id.*
- d. Part-time misdemeanor public defense attorneys earn between \$8,000 and \$24,000 annually, despite each handling hundreds of public defense cases and hundreds of other cases in their private practices. *Id.*

ii. Defendants' misdemeanor attorney caseloads are grossly excessive

36. Attorneys with the Allen County Public Defender's Office assigned to misdemeanor cases carry caseloads that are so excessive as to render effective assistance of counsel impossible.

Among other things:

- a. Part-time misdemeanor attorneys carry caseloads that are double, triple, or even quadruple the maximum 150 cases allowed by the standards of the Indiana Public Defender Commission and Defendants' own Comprehensive Plan for Indigent Defenses Services. *See* Ex. A, B, and C.
- b. In 2014, the average part-time misdemeanor attorney's caseload ranged between 343 and 560 cases, which is representative of the years surveyed from 2010 to 2014. Ex. C. In 2010 and again 2011, at least one attorney for the given year represented over 600 indigent misdemeanor criminal cases. *Id.*
- c. Additionally, each of Defendants' part-time misdemeanor attorneys maintain active

private law practices, greatly expanding the number of clients they represent overall.

- d. To be sure, between January 1, 2013 and August 1, 2015, Defendants' four active part-time misdemeanor attorneys appeared on more than 6,250 cases between their public defense work and private practice clients. One attorney alone appeared on more than 1,950 cases. All attorneys each appeared at least 1,100 cases. A spreadsheet of these cases is attached as Exhibit D and incorporated into this complaint.

iii. Defendants fail to provide indigent misdemeanor clients with adequate counsel and staff services

37. Defendants' lack of investment in the public defense of misdemeanor clients is reflected in the few legal services offered them. Among other things:

- a. Attorneys generally do not devote sufficient time to prepare and legally advise clients;
- b. Attorneys generally do not devote sufficient time to analyze the facts or law pertinent to clients' charges;
- c. Attorneys rarely invest more than one (1) hour of time in each of their cases;
- d. Attorneys rarely file motions in cases, except to request continuances of time;
- e. Attorneys rarely meet with clients except briefly and immediately prior to hearings;
- f. Attorneys rarely meet with clients in a confidential setting outside a courthouse;
- g. Attorneys rarely meet with clients while clients are in custody;
- h. Attorneys rarely succeed, or even seek, to have all charges dismissed in a case;
- i. Attorneys very rarely take cases to trial;

- j. Attorneys rarely, if ever, sufficiently investigate charges made against their clients;  
and
- k. The bulk of attorneys' representation generally consists of a brief attorney-client meeting inside a courthouse to recommend that the client accept the plea agreement offered by a prosecutor.

38. Further:

- a. Attorneys have never, even though required by the county's Comprehensive Plan for Indigent Services, notified the County Public Defender that their caseloads have become excessive; and
- b. The County Public Defender, though having actual knowledge of excessive caseloads, has never notified county judges of excessive caseloads nor refused to accept the appointment of additional cases based upon excessive caseloads as required by the county's Comprehensive Plan for Indigent Services.

39. Additionally, Defendants maintain few support personnel to assist with legal services for clients charged with misdemeanor crimes. Among other things:

- a. Defendants' Public Defender's Office self-identifies as an office with "inadequate support staff," *see* Ex. C;
- b. Defendants' employ zero paralegals in the Public Defender's Office for all of its more than thirty attorneys, including misdemeanor attorneys;
- c. Defendants' employ one (1) secretary in the Public Defender's Office for all of its more than thirty attorneys, including misdemeanor attorneys; and
- d. Though Defendants' employ seven (7) investigators in the Public Defender's

Office, they generally devote no to little time to investigating the charges against misdemeanor clients.

**C. Defendants' Know They are Systemically Failing to Provide Effective Assistance of Counsel to Indigent Misdemeanor Clients but have not Taken Corrective Action**

40. Defendants know they have provided and continue to provide indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes ineffective assistance of counsel.

41. However, Defendants have not sought to increase funding for misdemeanor public defense or sought to meaningfully supervise or correct the system despite their duties to do so.

Among other things:

- a. Defendant Allen County Council has not allocated necessary funds to provide effective assistance of counsel to indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes;
  - b. Defendant Allen County Board of Commissioners has not passed laws to ensure that the county provides constitutionally effective assistance of counsel to indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes; and
  - c. Defendant Allen County Public Defender Board has not adequately supervised the Allen County Defender's Office and recommended annual budgets as to provide effective assistance of counsel to misdemeanor clients.
42. Defendants, as a whole, have taken little or no action to properly fund, regulate, or manage public defense in Allen County is such a way to provide effective assistance of counsel to indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes, even though they are regularly notified of systematic failures, including excessive attorney caseloads.

**D. Defendants' Systemic Failure to Provide Effective Assistance of Counsel is**

**Harming Class Members**

43. Defendants have breached their constitutional duties to provide adequate public defense to Class Members. This has deprived Class Members of, among other things:

- a. Adequate advise, consultation, and communication with attorneys;
- b. The ability to make informed decisions about their legal rights;
- c. Meaningful opportunity to present defenses against charges;
- d. Proper attorney assistance prior to waiving of rights; and
- e. Proper, prompt, and accurate information regarding plea alternatives, jail alternatives, and consequences of plea agreements and criminal sentences.

**E. Defendants' Systemic Failure to Provide Effective Assistance of Counsel is Harming Class Plaintiff**

44. Because Defendants have breached their constitutional duties by establishing and perpetuating a public defense system that deprives indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes of the effective assistance of counsel, Class Plaintiff is suffering harm.

45. Class Plaintiff Wilson is suffering harm and his constitutional rights are being violated do to the acts and omissions of Defendants. Among other things:

- a. On July 6, 2015, Plaintiff Wilson was charged with one count of Class A Misdemeanor Battery, a crime carrying a sentence of up to one (1) year imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine;
- b. On the same day, Plaintiff Wilson was assigned an attorney from the Allen County Public Defender's Office;
- c. On July 21, 2015, Plaintiff Wilson had a court hearing on the charge, but:

- i. Plaintiff Wilson's attorney had no contact with him prior to the hearing;
  - ii. Plaintiff Wilson's attorney had no contact with him during the hearing;
  - iii. Plaintiff Wilson's attorney contacted him only after the hearing when, because Plaintiff Wilson's attorney had not contacted or spoken for him, the court nearly issued a warrant for his arrest for failure to appear at the hearing; and
  - iv. When Plaintiff Wilson at their next brief meeting on July 28, 2015, he requested a copy of the probable cause affidavit in his case to be informed of the charge against him, Plaintiff Wilson's attorney refused to provide him a copy and told him that, if he chose, he could obtain such a copy from the court.
- d. Plaintiff Wilson's attorney to date has filed no motions in his case other than requests for continuance;
  - e. Plaintiff Wilson's attorney has never met with Plaintiff Wilson aside from brief encounters inside a courthouse; and
  - f. Despite Plaintiff Wilson's requests, his attorney has failed to meaningfully investigate the charge against him, advise him on his rights, and provide him adequate counsel.

**F. Plaintiff Faces a Continuing Risk his Constitutional Rights Will be Violated**

46. As a result of Defendants' acts and omissions, individually named and class member Plaintiff has suffered or is at imminent and serious risk of suffering harm because:
- a. Defendants have persisted in a wrongful course of conduct over many years;

- b. Defendants have persisted in a wrongful course of conduct even though they had actual knowledge indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes were being deprived of their constitutional rights; and
  - c. Defendants have failed to take proper, if any, action to correct the systematic failures of their public defense system.
47. As a result of Defendants' acts and omissions, including the policies, practices, and procedures for indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes in Allen County courts, individually named and class member Plaintiff has suffered or is in imminent and serious risk of suffering harm.

**VI. CAUSES OF ACTION – COUNT ONE**

***Violation of the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments  
to the United States Constitution (42 U.S.C. § 1983)***

48. Acting under color of law, Defendants have violated and caused violations of Plaintiff's rights to the assistance of counsel pursuant to the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.
49. Unless enjoined by the Court, Defendants will continue to violate and cause the violation of the constitutional rights of the Class Plaintiff and the Class Members.

**VII. CAUSES OF ACTION – COUNT TWO**

***Violation of Section 13(a) of Article 1 of the Indiana State Constitution***

50. Acting under color of law, Defendants have violated and caused violations of Plaintiff's rights as accused parties pursuant to Section 13(a) of Article 1 of the Indiana State Constitution.
51. Unless enjoined by the Court, Defendants will continue to violate and cause the violation

of the constitutional rights of the Class Plaintiff and the Class Members.

### **VIII. PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

Wherefore, Plaintiff respectfully requests the Court:

- A. Certify the class as defined above;
- B. Declare that Defendants are depriving Class Plaintiff and Class Members of their rights to assistance of counsel pursuant to the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and Section 13(a) of Article 1 of the Indiana State Constitution;
- C. Issue a preliminary and permanent injunction restraining Defendants from violating the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and Section 13(a) of Article 1 of the Indiana State Constitution in the provision of public defense services to indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes;
- D. Issue a preliminary and permanent injunction enjoining Defendants from making expenditures of funds on indigent defense services likely to result in violations of the constitutional rights of indigent individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes;
- E. Award Plaintiff's costs and attorneys' fees; and
- F. Grant all other just and proper relief.



**JURY DEMAND**

Plaintiff demands a jury trial pursuant to Rule 38(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

Respectfully,

**CHRISTOPHER C. MYERS & ASSOCIATES**

/s/ David W. Frank

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