



CONTEMPLATING CAREERS

Public Defenders

Do you like variation in your day-to-day routine? Is it important to you to help the underdog? Do you enjoy lots of client contact? Do you believe you would excel in a courtroom environment? Can you handle the ugliness that sometimes comes from poverty, homelessness, substance addiction, and violence?

If you answered yes to these questions, a public defender's career is one you should consider. Work as a public defender is neither as glamorous nor as unethical as many people believe. Not everyone has the fortitude to deal with clients who may be guilty, angry, or illiterate, but many lawyers find the experience challenging and rewarding. Public defenders are representing indigent defendants, not putting criminals back on the streets. Public defenders find themselves in the courtroom almost daily, and job opportunities are available at the local, state, and federal levels. New law school graduates often see defense work as a great opportunity and a chance to experience a wide range of cases, including specialization in juvenile, death penalty, or appellate litigation.

A law degree is necessary to work as a public defender. Public defenders have strong interpersonal skills and are characterized as bright, courageous, tenacious, persuasive, argumentative, tough, articulate, and empathetic. Entry-level salaries vary among states but generally range from \$40,000 to \$50,000. While this type of work is not for everyone, many law school graduates find public service work exciting and rewarding.

For additional information on becoming a public defender, see the following:

www.uscourts.gov/Careers/CareerProfiles/AssistantFederalPublicDefender.aspx

www.lawcrossing.com/article/95/Public-Defenders-Law-in-Action/#



Career Video:

A public defender discusses her experience and current issues in the field.