

# DAY IN THE LIFE

CURATED BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

## Public Defender Escapes Daily Grind With Variety of Cases

BY MARC PICKER, ESQ.

There are no two days alike in my work as Washoe County Alternate Public Defender, and I believe the same goes for almost every attorney involved in indigent defense.

After being in private practice for 25 years, I have been with the Alternate Public Defenders Office (APD) for about seven years, and I have headed the office for the past two. I left private practice (the opposite of most of my fellow attorneys) and went to work as a public defender in part because I was tired of the daily grind of meeting with potential clients to convince them to hire and pay me, daily collections efforts, and trying to be both an effective attorney and the owner of a small business with employees and overhead. After five years of getting to be “just a lawyer,” I somehow put myself right back into the role of administrator by becoming the APD.

My days include meeting with and working for a variety of clients; they also include meetings with the office support staff, along with meetings with court administration, county administration and anyone else who needs “just a minute.” As I write this article, I am looking at this week’s calendar, which includes meetings regarding remote CLE opportunities for the office, a budget meeting with the county for next year, a meeting of the Washoe County Substance Abuse Task Force, a meeting regarding replacing the program we use to receive and store discovery from the Washoe County District Attorney and a training session for indigent defense attorneys regarding recent changes to the specialty court programs in Washoe County.



The APD is a small office, with only 11 attorneys. Two of those attorneys handle more than 800 specialty court clients in 13 courts. One attorney is dedicated to juvenile clients, while three represent parents whose children have been removed under NRS 432B. The other four handle criminal matters of all levels – misdemeanor to major felony – and I carry a caseload of Cat A felonies, including eight murder cases.

My “day in the life” involves covering court for attorneys who are on vacation or ill, as well as my own limited caseload. In addition, as we all know, communication with our clients is of utmost importance. Fortunately, we have a video visit system, so we don’t have to waste an hour going to the Washoe County jail, going through security, waiting for our clients to be moved to the visiting room and then travelling back to the office. This week, I have four video visits and two in-person visits scheduled with clients, along with six scheduled court hearings and one specialty court.

I am also involved in the Bruce R. Thompson Inns of Court as a master,

and our group presents in a week, so that is occupying after-hours time. As well, I am involved with the Nevada Center for Civic Engagement, which runs the “We the People” constitutional law education program throughout Nevada, and that involves some daytime visits to teach constitutional history and law to students in the fifth and seventh grades, and high school levels.

While all this can sound overwhelming – certainly writing it all down is making me exhausted as I do so – it is also exhilarating. I spend every day working with a fantastic team of attorneys, investigators and support staff that are all dedicated to providing the best representation possible to our clients. At the same time, I am dedicated to assist those who are interested in what we do and those who want to provide services to those in need of help.

My days are not what I contemplated when I left private practice to “just” be an attorney, but there is not a day when I don’t feel the rewards of why I became a lawyer in the first place.

**MARC PICKER** was appointed Washoe County Alternate Public Defender beginning January 2018. In that role, he supervises 11 attorneys providing representation to indigent clients in the criminal justice, juvenile justice, family (child removal) and specialty courts. He also carries a caseload of serious felony cases, mostly first-degree murder. Prior to joining the APD, he spent 25 years in private practice concentrating on criminal defense, civil litigation, contracts law, civil rights actions and personal injury. He is a 1988 graduate of the UC Davis King Hall School of Law. Prior to attending law school, he was an award-winning newspaper reporter and editor.