

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2023 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2404

By Delegate Steele

[Introduced January 11, 2023; Referred to the
Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §29-21-16 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating
2 to repayment of legal services when payment is made by the state for public defender
3 services.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 21. PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES.

§29-21-16. Determination of maximum income levels; eligibility guidelines; use of form affidavit; inquiry by court; denial of services; repayment; limitation on remedies against affiant.

1 (a) The agency shall establish and periodically review and update financial guidelines for
2 determining eligibility for legal representation made available under the provisions of this article.
3 The agency shall adopt a financial affidavit form for use by persons seeking legal representation
4 made available under the provisions of this article.

5 (b) All persons seeking legal representation made available under the provisions of this
6 article shall complete the agency's financial affidavit form, which shall be considered as an
7 application for the provision of publicly funded legal representation.

8 (c) Any juvenile shall have the right to be effectively represented by counsel at all stages of
9 proceedings brought under the provisions of §49-4-701 through §49-4-725 of this code. If the
10 juvenile advises the court of his or her inability to pay for counsel, the court shall require the
11 juvenile's parent or custodian to execute a financial affidavit. If the financial affidavit demonstrates
12 that neither of the juvenile's parents, or, if applicable, the juvenile's custodian, has sufficient assets
13 to pay for counsel, the court shall appoint counsel for the juvenile. If the financial affidavit
14 demonstrates that either of the juvenile's parents, or, if applicable, the juvenile's custodian, does
15 have sufficient assets to pay for counsel, the court shall order the parent, or, if applicable, the
16 custodian, to provide, by paying for, legal representation for the juvenile in the proceedings.

17 The court may disregard the assets of the juvenile's parents or custodian and appoint
18 counsel for the juvenile, as provided in this section, if the court concludes, as a matter of law, that

19 the juvenile and the parent or custodian have a conflict of interest that would adversely affect the
20 juvenile's right to effective representation of counsel, or concludes, as a matter of law, that
21 requiring the juvenile's parent or custodian to provide legal representation for the juvenile would
22 otherwise jeopardize the best interests of the juvenile.

23 (d) In any circuit in which there exists a trial court administrator, the office of the
24 administrator shall make determinations of indigency. In circuits in which a public defender office is
25 in operation and a trial court administrator does not exist, all determinations of indigency shall be
26 made by a public defender office employee designated by the executive director. In circuits in
27 which no trial court administrator or public defender office is in operation, circuit judges shall make
28 all determinations of eligibility. The determinations shall be made after a careful review of the
29 financial affidavit submitted by the person seeking representation. The review of the affidavit shall
30 be conducted in accord with the financial eligibility guidelines established by the agency pursuant
31 to subsection (a) of this section. In addition to the financial eligibility guidelines, the person
32 determining eligibility shall consider other relevant factors, including, but not limited to, those set
33 forth in subdivisions (1) through (9), subsection (e) of this section. If there is substantial reason to
34 doubt the accuracy of information in the financial affidavit, the person determining eligibility may
35 make any inquiries necessary to determine whether the affiant has truthfully and completely
36 disclosed the required financial information.

37 After reviewing all pertinent matters, the person determining eligibility may find the affiant
38 eligible to have the total cost of legal representation provided by the state, or may find that the total
39 cost of providing representation shall be apportioned between the state and the eligible person. A
40 person whose annual income exceeds the maximum annual income level allowed for eligibility
41 may receive all or part of the necessary legal representation, or a person whose income falls
42 below the maximum annual income level for eligibility may be denied all or part of the necessary
43 legal representation if the person determining eligibility finds the person's particular circumstances
44 require that eligibility be allowed or disallowed, as the case may be, on the basis of one or more of

45 the nine factors set forth in subsection (e) of this section. If legal representation is made available
46 to a person whose income exceeds the maximum annual income level for eligibility, or if legal
47 representation is denied to a person whose income falls below the maximum annual income level
48 for eligibility, the person determining eligibility shall make a written statement of the reasons for the
49 action and shall specifically relate those reasons to one or more of the factors set forth in
50 subsection (e) of this section.

51 (e) The following factors shall be considered in determining eligibility for legal
52 representation made available under the provisions of this article:

53 (1) Current income prospects, taking into account seasonal variations in income;

54 (2) Liquid assets, assets which may provide collateral to obtain funds to employ private
55 counsel, and other assets which may be liquidated to provide funds to employ private counsel;

56 (3) Fixed debts and obligations, including federal, state, and local taxes, and medical
57 expenses;

58 (4) Child care, transportation, and other expenses necessary for employment;

59 (5) Age or physical infirmity of resident family members;

60 (6) Whether the person seeking publicly funded legal representation has made reasonable
61 and diligent efforts to obtain private legal representation, and the results of those efforts;

62 (7) The cost of obtaining private legal representation with respect to the particular matter in
63 which assistance is sought;

64 (8) Whether the person seeking publicly funded legal representation has posted a cash
65 bond for bail or has obtained release on bond for bail through the services of a professional
66 bondsman for compensation and the amount and source of the money provided for the bond;

67 (9) The consequences for the individual if legal assistance is denied.

68 (f) Legal representation requested by the affiant may not be denied, in whole or part,
69 unless the affiant can obtain legal representation without undue financial hardship. A person
70 determined to be ineligible by public defender personnel may have the initial determination

71 reviewed by a local circuit judge who may amend, modify, or rewrite the initial determination. At
72 any stage of the proceedings a circuit court may determine a prior finding of eligibility was incorrect
73 or has become incorrect as the result of the affiant's changed financial circumstances, and may
74 revoke any prior order providing legal representation. In that event, any attorney previously
75 appointed shall be entitled to compensation under the provisions of law applicable to the
76 appointment for services already rendered.

77 (g) In the circumstances and manner set forth below, circuit judges may order repayment to
78 the state, through the office of the clerk of the circuit court having jurisdiction over the proceedings,
79 of the costs of representation provided under this article:

80 (1) In every case in which services are provided to an indigent person and an adverse
81 judgment has been rendered against such person, the court may require that person, and in
82 juvenile cases, may require the juvenile's parents or custodian, to pay as costs the compensation
83 of appointed counsel, the expenses of the defense, and any other fees and costs authorized by
84 statute;

85 (2) The court shall not order a person to pay costs unless the person is able to pay without
86 undue hardship. In determining the amount and method of repayment of costs, the court shall take
87 account of the financial resources of the person, the person's ability to pay, and the nature of the
88 burden that payment of costs will impose. The fact that the court initially determines, at the time of
89 a case's conclusion, that it is not proper to order the repayment of costs does not preclude the
90 court from subsequently ordering repayment if the person's financial circumstances change;

91 (3) When a person is ordered to repay costs, the court may order payment to be made
92 immediately or within a specified period of time or in specified installments. If a person is
93 sentenced to a term of imprisonment, an order for repayment of costs is not enforceable during the
94 period of imprisonment unless the court expressly finds, at the time of sentencing, that the person
95 has sufficient assets to pay the amounts ordered to be paid or finds there is a reasonable likelihood
96 the person will acquire the necessary assets in the foreseeable future;

97 (4) A person who has been ordered to repay costs, and who is not in contumacious default
98 in the payment thereof, may at any time petition the sentencing court for modification of the
99 repayment order. If it appears to the satisfaction of the court that continued payment of the amount
100 ordered will impose undue hardship on the person or the person's dependents, the court may
101 modify the method or amount of payment;

102 (5) When a person ordered to pay costs is also placed on probation or imposition or
103 execution of sentence is suspended, the court may make the repayment of costs a condition of
104 probation or suspension of sentence.

105 (h) Circuit clerks shall keep a record of repaid counsel fees and defense expenses
106 collected pursuant to this section and shall, quarterly, pay the moneys to the State Auditor who
107 shall deposit the funds in the General Revenue Fund of the state.

108 (i) The making of an affidavit subject to inquiry under this section does not in any event give
109 rise to criminal remedies against the affiant nor occasion any civil action against the affiant except
110 for the recovery of costs as in any other case where costs may be recovered and the recovery of
111 the value of services, if any, provided pursuant to this article. A person who has made an affidavit
112 knowing the contents of the affidavit to be false may be prosecuted for false swearing as provided
113 by law.

114 (j) In all matters in which court-appointed counsel fees have been requested to be paid by
115 the state pursuant to this article, the circuit court shall enter an order of judgment in the amount of
116 fees and costs contained in the voucher for payment of services to court appointed counsel
117 against the defendant. Public Defender Services shall docket the judgment in the office of the clerk
118 of the County Commission of the County in which the services were performed. Public Defenders
119 Services shall then cause to be sent to the Tax Division a true copy of the docketed judgment. The
120 Tax Division shall garnish any tax refund due up to an amount of 25 percent of the tax refund in any
121 given year, until such time as the amount collected shall be paid. The Tax Division may waive the
122 garnishment in any given year upon a showing of undue hardship by the affected party in the

- 123 commissioner's discretion. Public Defender Services and the Tax Division may promulgate rules
124 to carry out the purposes of this provision.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to permit the court to file a judgment lien for unpaid amounts from public defenders.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law, and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.