

The Public Defense Services Commission's Guidelines For Participation of Public Defense Attorneys in Early Disposition Programs

In order to insure that Early Disposition Programs (EDPs) involving court-appointed attorneys compensated by the Public Defense Services Commission (PDSC) meet constitutional, statutory and ethical requirements, PDSC concludes that EDPs should comply with the following guidelines. These guidelines are intended to insure that clients of court-appointed attorneys who participate in EDPs are able to make knowing, intelligent, voluntary and attorney-assisted decisions whether to enter pleas of guilty and that court-appointed attorneys are able to provide meaningful counsel and assistance to those clients.

1. An EDP should insure that the program's operations and rules permit the establishment and maintenance of attorney/client relationships.

Commentary

Although EDPs offer defendants the opportunity for favorable dispositions of their pending criminal charges and the State of Oregon potential savings for its justice system, Oregon's Rules of Professional Conduct require defense attorneys who participate in EDPs to establish and maintain meaningful attorney/client relationships.

Oregon Rule of Professional Conduct 1.1, requires that "A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation.

Rule 1.3 requires that "A lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client and not neglect a legal matter entrusted to the lawyer."

2. An EDP should provide the opportunity for necessary pre-trial discovery, including adequate opportunity to review discovery material and investigate the facts of the case and the background and special conditions or circumstances of the defendant, such as residency status and mental conditions. Defendants participating in an EDP should be notified on the record that their attorney has not been afforded the time to conduct the type of investigation and legal research that attorneys normally conduct in preparation for trial.

Commentary

Article I, Section 11 of the Oregon Constitution provides, "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall have the right to be heard by himself and counsel...." This constitutional right to counsel would be meaningless without an adequate opportunity for counsel to inform himself or herself about the nature of the charges against the defendant, the factual and legal circumstance of the case and the background of the defendant.

The following Oregon Principles and Performance Standards for Counsel in Criminal Cases (the “Oregon Standards”) require defense attorneys to carefully review charging instruments, police reports, relevant background information with defendants. These Oregon Standards also require counsel to conduct necessary independent investigation or consultation with experts in appropriate circumstances before advising their clients concerning participation.

STANDARD 1.1 – Prerequisites for Representation

Counsel shall only accept an appointment or retainer if counsel is able to provide quality representation and diligent advocacy for the client.

STANDARD 1.2 – General Duties and Responsibilities of Counsel to Clients

Upon being retained or appointed by the court, counsel should contact the client as soon as practicable AND maintain regular contact thereafter. Counsel should endeavor to establish a relationship of trust and open communication with the client and should diligently advocate the client’s position within the bounds of the law and the Rules of Professional Responsibility.

STANDARD 1.3 – Role of Counsel

Counsel should seek the lawful objectives of the client and should not substitute counsel’s judgment for that of the client in those case decisions that are the responsibility of the client.

STANDARD 1.4 – Initial Client Interview

Counsel should conduct a client interview as soon as practicable after being retained or appointed by the court, in order to obtain information necessary to provide quality representation at the early stages of the case and to provide the client with information concerning counsel’s representation and the case proceedings.

STANDARD 2.5 – Initial Court Appearances

Counsel should preserve all of the client’s constitutional and statutory rights at initial court appearances.

STANDARD 2.6 – Independent Investigation

Counsel should promptly conduct an independent review and investigation of the case, including obtaining information, research and discovery necessary to prepare the case for trial or hearing.

3. An EDP should provide for adequate physical space to ensure necessary privacy and adequate time to conduct confidential consultations between clients and their attorneys.

4. An EDP should provide adequate time for defendants to make knowing, intelligent, voluntary and attorney-assisted decisions whether to enter pleas of guilty or whether to agree to civil compromises or diversion. Clients should be allowed a reasonable continuance to make their decisions in the event there is incomplete information or other compelling reasons to postpone entry of a plea, civil compromise or diversion agreement. Clients should be allowed to withdraw

their pleas, petitions or agreements in an EDP within a reasonable period of time in extraordinary circumstances.

Commentary

The following Oregon Standards require that defense counsel with clients in Early Disposition Programs have adequate time and privacy to meet with their clients and carefully review the clients' rights, obligations and options. These standards, as well as applicable rules of law, require that defendants be given adequate time to consider their options, to knowingly and intelligently waive their rights and to withdraw guilty pleas or agreements to enter programs in appropriate circumstances.

STANDARD 2.7 – Pretrial Motions; Hearings Regarding Ability to Aid and Assist Counsel should research, prepare, file and argue appropriate pretrial motions whenever there is reason to believe the client is entitled to relief. Counsel should be prepared to provide quality representation and advocacy for the client at any hearings regarding the client's ability to aid and assist...

STANDARD 2.8 – Pretrial Negotiations and Admission Agreements

Counsel should:

1. with the consent of the client explore diversion and other informal and formal admission or disposition agreements with regard to the allegations;
2. fully explain to the client the rights that would be waived by a decision to enter into any admission or disposition agreement;
3. keep the client fully informed of the progress of the negotiations;
4. convey to the client any offers made by the prosecution and the advantages and disadvantages of accepting the offers;
5. continue to preserve the client's rights and prepare the defense notwithstanding ongoing negotiations; and
6. not enter into any admission or disposition agreement on behalf of the client without the client's authorization.

ORS 135.943 provides that every EDP must provide (i) written criteria for eligibility, (ii) victim notification and appearance, and (iii) a process to ensure representation and discovery.

5. An EDP should insure that attorney caseloads are sufficiently limited to provide for full and adequate legal representation of each client.

Commentary

Oregon Rule of Professional Conduct 1.1, requires that "A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation.

6. An EDP should provide for alternative representation for a client eligible for an EDP where such representation would constitute a conflict of interest for the client's original attorney.

Commentary

The following Oregon Rules of Professional Conduct forbid attorneys from representing clients when that representation involves a conflict of interest.

RULE 1.16 DECLINING OR TERMINATION REPRESENTATION

(a) Except as stated in paragraph (c), a lawyer shall not represent a client or, where representation has commenced, shall withdraw from the representation of a client if:

(1) the representation will result in violation of the rules of professional conduct or other law

RULE 1.7 CONFLICT OF INTEREST: CURRENT CLIENTS

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b), a lawyer shall not represent a client if the representation involves a concurrent conflict of interest. A concurrent conflict of interest exists if:

(1) the representation of one client will be directly adverse to another client;

(2) there is a significant risk that the representation of one or more clients will be materially limited by the lawyer's responsibilities to another client, a former client or a third person or by a personal interest of the lawyer; or

(3) the lawyer is related to another lawyer, as parent, child, sibling, spouse or domestic partner, in a matter adverse to a person whom the lawyer knows is represented by the other lawyer in the same matter.

(b) Notwithstanding the existence of a concurrent conflict of interest under paragraph (a), a lawyer may represent a client if:

(1) the lawyer reasonably believes that the lawyer will be able to provide competent and diligent representation to each affected client;

(2) the representation is not prohibited by law;

(3) the representation does not obligate the lawyer to contend for something on behalf of one client that the lawyer has a duty to oppose on behalf of another client; and

(4) each affected client gives informed consent, confirmed in writing.

RULE 2.1 ADVISOR

In representing a client, a lawyer shall exercise independent professional judgment and render candid advice. In rendering advice, a lawyer may refer not only to law but to other considerations such as moral, economic, social and political.

7. An EDP should not penalize clients or sanction their attorneys for acting in conformity with any of the foregoing standards.

NOTE: These guidelines will be accompanied by descriptions of at least two EDPs currently operating in the state that conform with these guidelines – one from a large, more populous judicial district and one from a small, less populous judicial district.