



Job Posting

Deadline: August 7, 2026

State Appellate Defender Office
3031 W. Grand Blvd., Ste. 450, Detroit, MI 48202
www.sado.org
@sadamich

Assistant Defender – Juvenile Lifer Unit

Detroit or Lansing (Hybrid)
Temporary Work Project

Job Summary

Join SADO's Juvenile Lifer Unit as an Assistant Defender and participate in the rewarding mission of representing people serving unconstitutional life without parole sentences. The position begins as soon as possible and the salary for this position ranges from \$79,511 - \$153,676, depending on experience.

This is a full-time temporary position with funding guaranteed through September 30, 2027. Continuation of this position after September 30th depends on state budget allocation and staffing needs.

SADO's Juvenile Lifer Unit seeks motivated and qualified applicants who can start immediately to begin working with incarcerated clients who are newly eligible for resentencing hearings under the Michigan Supreme Court's April 2025 [landmark ruling in *People v Czarnecki* and *People v Taylor*](#). Approximately 580 people in Michigan's prisons who were once sentenced to mandatory life imprisonment without the possibility of parole for homicide offenses that occurred when they were 19 or 20 years old now have an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for change and readiness to reenter society.

About Us

The Michigan State Appellate Defender Office is Michigan's public defense appellate office. SADO is committed to the highest level of appellate advocacy and to client-centered representation. SADO's Juvenile Lifer Unit represents clients in resentencing proceedings who were sentenced to life without parole as young people. Read about some of our colleagues and clients [here](#). Visit [our website](#) for more information regarding SADO's history, initiatives, and successes.

The Assistant Defender position may work in SADO's Detroit or Lansing offices. Both locations offer a variety of amenities and life experiences, ranging from the vibrant music and food scenes in Detroit, to Big Ten sports and ready access to miles of river trail in Lansing. SADO offers a hybrid work environment that mixes in-office and remote work to offer flexibility and support to staff.

Job Responsibilities

In 2012, the United States Supreme Court ruled mandatory sentences of life without parole for juveniles committing homicide offenses are unconstitutional. Michigan had one of the highest populations of “juvenile lifers” in the country, and the Assistant Defender works collaboratively in teams to investigate, mitigate, and litigate the contested resentencings of these clients. In 2022, the Michigan Supreme Court extended that protection to those 18 at the time of the homicide offense, leading to eligibility for resentencing for almost 300 additional people. In 2025, this resentencing relief was extended to those 19 and 20. Approximately 580 people are now eligible for relief from their unconstitutional mandatory life sentences.

For this type of litigation, the successful applicant must be able to:

- Develop meaningful relationships of trust with clients, family members, and others.
- Frequently visit with clients housed in prison facilities throughout the state.
- Develop mitigation evidence and social histories through record retrieval and review, and interviews with clients and others. Attorneys will work with other members of a team, which could include second chair counsel, an investigator, and a mitigation specialist or social worker.
- Review trial transcripts and appellate decisions of each client’s case.
- Identify and litigate through motion practice novel issues of law.
- Select and manage expert witnesses and consultants as needed.
- Engage in persistent negotiations with prosecutors on a case-by-case basis.
- Conduct hearings in trial courts throughout Michigan.
- In conjunction with SADO’s Project Reentry, develop reentry plans for clients.

Qualifications

- Must be admitted to the Michigan Bar or eligible for immediate transfer.
- Must demonstrate commitment to indigent defense, public service, and racial equity.
- Must have excellent legal research and writing skills.
- Litigation experience in death penalty phase or juvenile lifer resentencing hearings preferred.
- Experience in both trial and appellate courts preferred.
- Experience negotiating with prosecutors, preparing mitigation for clients, working with expert witnesses, and preparing experts for testimony preferred.
- Must have the desire and ability to investigate and litigate novel areas of law.
- Must have the ability to work with individuals who have been incarcerated since childhood.
- Must demonstrate an understanding of the need to acquire and practice cultural competency and humility.
- Attorneys with significant criminal trial experience are encouraged to apply.
- Candidates must be a current resident of or relocate to Michigan by hire date.

Benefits

- Medical, dental, vision, and life insurance
- 401k plan with up to a 9% employer contribution (partial vesting begins at 2 years)
- 13 paid holidays
- 3 weeks of paid vacation in year one
- Paid sick time and, for eligible employees, paid parental leave
- Long-term disability insurance
- Flexible work hours
- Hybrid work environment (remote/office)
- Casual dress as appropriate
- Paid training opportunities
- Annual pay increases up to the maximum of the pay range with satisfactory performance

SADO employees are members of the UAW Local 412.

To Apply

Submit a cover letter stating your interest in the position. Include your resume and a redacted writing sample.

Writing Sample Special Instructions: As part of its commitment to diversity in the workplace and its goal to prevent hiring bias, we ask that applicants submit redacted writing samples, which will be reviewed without access to applicant information and scored based on objective criteria. Your name, address, work affiliation, and other identifiers should be redacted from your writing sample. Files should be named generically, and your name should not be a part of the filename. For example, you can name the file WS1.pdf or WritingSample.pdf.

Applications should be emailed by August 7, 2026, to jobs@sado.org and include “Assistant Defender 2026-07” in the subject line.

SADO is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A felony conviction does not prohibit employment at SADO.

If you have questions about this application or are unable to send application materials electronically, please contact Human Resources at 313-420-2942 for assistance.

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