

CHAPTER 11  
ATTORNEY FEE CONTRACTS

Chapter rescission date pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.7: 9/24/30

**493—11.1(13B) Scope.** This chapter sets forth the rules for private attorneys entering into contracts for indigent defense legal services with the state public defender. Definitions of terms used in this chapter can be found in 493—Chapter 7.

[ARC 9508C, IAB 8/20/25, effective 9/24/25]

**493—11.2(13B) Contracts.** An attorney may enter into a contract with the state public defender for the provision of legal services to indigent persons.

**11.2(1) Eligibility.** To be eligible to contract with the state public defender, an attorney must be licensed to practice law in the state of Iowa and must meet the minimum qualification requirements for contracting as set forth in rule 493—11.3(13B) for the types of cases for which the attorney is contracting.

**11.2(2) Contract copy.** A copy of an original contract is available from the Office of the State Public Defender, 6200 Park Avenue, Suite 100, Des Moines, Iowa 50321; by telephoning 515.218.2445; or online at [spd.iowa.gov](http://spd.iowa.gov).

**11.2(3) Notice of contract opportunities.** The state public defender will give notice to attorneys of the availability of contracts for indigent defense legal services in a manner reasonably calculated to make attorneys aware of the availability of the contracts.

**11.2(4) Contract types.** Unless the attorney and state public defender agree in writing to a contract covering a different type of case, the contract shall cover one or more of the following categories of case types:

- a. Juvenile cases, including juvenile petitions on appeal;
- b. Appellate cases, including direct appeals of criminal cases, appeals from postconviction relief proceedings, and any other case for which counsel is statutorily authorized to be paid from the indigent defense fund at the trial level;
- c. Postconviction relief cases at the trial level;
- d. Class A and B felony cases at the trial level;
- e. Class C and D felony cases at the trial level, and Class A felony cases in which another attorney who meets the minimum requirements for such cases is also appointed as the lead counsel;
- f. Misdemeanor cases, probation and parole revocation cases, contempt proceedings, and any other adult criminal or civil cases for which counsel is statutorily authorized to be paid from the indigent defense fund at the trial level.

**11.2(5) Written approval required.** A contract can only be in force and effect when a contract acceptance form is signed by the contracting attorney and approved by the state public defender. The approved contract is only effective for those types of cases and those counties requested by the attorney and approved by the state public defender in writing on the acceptance and approval form, renewal form, or a subsequent written amendment. Nevertheless, a contract covering appellate cases is effective for all 99 counties.

**11.2(6) Independent contractor.** The contracting attorney shall be an independent contractor and shall not be an agent or employee of the state of Iowa. The attorney shall exercise the attorney's best independent professional judgment on behalf of clients to whom the attorney is assigned.

**11.2(7) Notification to clerks.** On a monthly basis, the state public defender shall notify the clerks of court in each county of those attorneys who have an approved contract for each type of case in each respective county.

**11.2(8) Contract terms.** A contract between the state public defender and an attorney shall cover but is not limited to the following subjects:

- a. The types of cases in which the attorney is to provide services;
- b. The counties in which the attorney is to provide services;

- c. The term of the contract and the responsibility of the attorney for provision of services in cases undertaken pursuant to the contract;
- d. Identification of the attorney who will perform legal representation under the contract;
- e. A prohibition against assignment of the obligations undertaken pursuant to the contract and a description of the manner in which temporary substitute counsel may be utilized;
- f. The qualifications of the contracting attorney to undertake legal representation pursuant to the contract;
- g. A description of the compensation to be paid and the manner of payment;
- h. A description of any expenses that may be provided under the contract;
- i. A description of the recordkeeping and reporting requirements under the contract;
- j. A description of the manner in which the contract may be terminated;
- k. A description of the manner of disposition of ongoing obligations following termination of the contract.

**11.2(9) Compensation.** Unless the contract provides for a different rate or manner of payment, the attorney shall be compensated pursuant to Iowa Code section 815.7.

**11.2(10) Contract form.** Unless the attorney and state public defender agree in writing to vary the terms of the contract between them, the terms contained in the Indigent Defense Legal Services Contract No. 493-14 shall constitute the agreement between the parties for the provision of legal services.

**11.2(11) No guarantee of appointments.** An attorney under contract with the state public defender is not guaranteed any minimum number of court appointments. The process by which attorneys under contract with the state public defender are appointed to specific cases is governed by Iowa Code chapters 814 and 815. The state public defender shall retain sole authority to determine the length of each contract or contract renewal.

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**493—11.3(13B) Attorney minimum qualifications.** To be eligible to contract with the state public defender for a type of case, the attorney must meet the minimum qualification requirements established by this rule for the particular type of case. Prior to contracting with the state public defender, an attorney shall certify the attorney's compliance with these requirements and, prior to renewal of the contract, shall certify compliance with any ongoing requirements. Satisfying these minimum requirements does not guarantee an attorney a contract with the state public defender. The state public defender retains the discretion to deny or terminate contracts if the state public defender determines that such action is in the best interests of the state.

**11.3(1) Juvenile cases.** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in juvenile cases, including juvenile petitions on appeal, an attorney must be in compliance with Rule 8.36 of the Iowa Rules of Juvenile Procedure, regardless of whether the attorney seeks to represent parents or children or serve as guardian ad litem in juvenile court. An attorney contracting to represent indigent persons in juvenile cases must:

- a. Participate in three hours of continuing legal education related to juvenile court proceedings prior to contracting with the state public defender; and
- b. Continue to participate in three hours of continuing legal education related to juvenile court proceedings each year.

The state public defender shall review juvenile contract renewals and may apply juvenile-related continuing legal education hours in the same manner as criminal-related continuing legal education hours.

**11.3(2) Appellate cases.** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in appellate cases, including direct appeals of criminal cases, appeals from postconviction relief proceedings, and appeals from any other case for which counsel is statutorily authorized to be paid from the indigent defense fund at the trial level except in cases where the attorney is statutorily appointed for purposes of the appeal, an attorney must:

- a. Participate in the basic criminal appeals training sponsored by the state public defender within one year of entering into the contract unless the attorney has already handled a criminal appeal in Iowa state court; and

b. Participate in three hours of continuing legal education related to criminal law each calendar year in which the attorney has an active indigent defense contract.

**11.3(3) *Postconviction relief cases.*** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in postconviction relief cases at the trial level, an attorney must:

a. Have practiced criminal law or served as a judicial law clerk for two years or more in any state or federal court;

b. Participate in five hours of continuing legal education related to criminal law each calendar year in which the attorney has an active indigent defense contract and in the year prior to entering into the contract;

c. Participate in a postconviction relief basic training sponsored by the state public defender prior to entering into the contract unless the attorney has previously handled at least three postconviction relief proceedings to completion; and

d. Provide the names of at least three judges or magistrates who can discuss the qualifications and effectiveness of the attorney to represent indigent persons in postconviction relief cases. An attorney who has not met all the requirements may provide the state public defender additional detail regarding the attorney's experience and qualifications and the circumstances preventing the attorney from meeting all the requirements, and may be approved for contracting by the state public defender at the state public defender's sole discretion.

**11.3(4) *Class A felonies.*** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in Class A felony cases at the trial level, an attorney must:

a. Have practiced criminal law for four years or more in any state or federal court;

b. Have tried at least five criminal jury trials involving indictable offenses to completion either as lead counsel or as a pro bono second attorney in a criminal jury trial if the service as pro bono second attorney is approved in advance for credit under this rule by the state public defender;

c. Participate in five hours of continuing legal education related to criminal law each calendar year in which the attorney has an active indigent defense contract and in the year prior to entering into the contract; and

d. Provide the names of at least three judges or magistrates who can discuss the qualifications and effectiveness of the attorney to represent indigent persons in Class A felony cases.

If an attorney satisfies the requirements for Class B felonies or Class C and Class D felonies, the attorney may contract to serve as the second attorney representing an indigent person in a Class A felony in a case where the first appointed attorney meets these requirements. An attorney who does not meet all the requirements may provide the state public defender additional detail regarding the attorney's experience and qualifications and the circumstances preventing the attorney from meeting all the requirements and may be approved for contracting by the state public defender at the state public defender's sole discretion.

**11.3(5) *Class B felonies.*** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in Class B felony cases at the trial level, an attorney must:

a. Have practiced criminal law for three years or more in any state or federal court;

b. Have tried at least three criminal jury trials involving indictable offenses to completion either as lead counsel or as a pro bono second attorney in a criminal jury trial if the service as pro bono second attorney is approved in advance for credit under this rule by the state public defender;

c. Participate in five hours of continuing legal education related to criminal law each calendar year in which the attorney has an active indigent defense contract and in the year prior to entering into the contract; and

d. Provide the names of at least three judges or magistrates who can discuss the qualifications and effectiveness of the attorney to represent indigent persons in Class B felony cases.

An attorney who has not met all requirements may provide the state public defender additional detail regarding the attorney's experience and qualifications and the circumstances preventing the attorney from meeting all the requirements and may be approved for contracting by the state public defender at the state public defender's sole discretion.

**11.3(6) *Class C and D felonies.*** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in Class C and Class D felony cases at the trial level, an attorney must:

a. Have practiced criminal law for two years or more in any state or federal court;

*b.* Have tried at least one criminal jury trial to completion either as lead counsel or as a pro bono second attorney in a criminal jury trial if the service as pro bono second attorney is approved in advance for credit under this rule by the state public defender;

*c.* Participate in five hours of continuing legal education related to criminal law each calendar year in which the attorney has an active indigent defense contract and in the year prior to entering into the contract; and

*d.* Provide the names of at least three judges or magistrates who can discuss the qualifications and effectiveness of the attorney to represent indigent persons in Class C and Class D felony cases.

An attorney who has not met all requirements may provide the state public defender additional detail regarding the attorney's experience and qualifications and the circumstances preventing the attorney from meeting all the requirements and may be approved for contracting by the state public defender at the state public defender's sole discretion.

**11.3(7) *Misdemeanor and other cases.*** To be eligible to contract to represent indigent persons in misdemeanor cases, probation and parole revocation cases, contempt proceedings, and any other adult criminal or civil cases for which counsel is statutorily authorized to be paid from the indigent defense fund at the trial level, an attorney must:

*a.* Participate in the basic criminal defense training sponsored by the state public defender within one year of entering into the contract unless the attorney already has an active indigent defense contract or has practiced criminal law for more than two years; and

*b.* Participate in three hours of continuing legal education related to criminal law each calendar year in which the attorney has an active indigent defense contract.

However, an attorney who has a contract to handle any felony offense may accept appointments in misdemeanor cases, probation and parole revocation cases, and contempt cases for which counsel is statutorily authorized to be paid from the indigent defense fund at the trial level, but the attorney with the contract to handle the felony offense will not be added to the list disseminated to the clerks of court to handle misdemeanor cases, probation and parole cases, or contempt cases unless the attorney has secured an amendment to the attorney's contract to handle those types of cases.

**11.3(8) *Amended charges.*** An attorney who is appointed to a case that is initially within the scope of the attorney's contract but is subsequently amended to contain more serious charges that are outside the scope of the attorney's contract shall request that the court authorize the attorney's withdrawal from the case and appoint an attorney with a contract that covers the amended charges in the county in which the action was pending unless the court determines that no such attorney with an applicable contract is available or the state public defender consents to the continued representation by the original attorney.

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#### **493—11.4(13B) Contract approval or denial.**

**11.4(1)** The state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender may confer with judges, attorneys and others with knowledge of a potential contracting attorney's competence, effectiveness, trustworthiness, compliance with the minimum qualification requirements set forth in rule 493—11.3(13B), and ability to provide services to eligible individuals and may conduct such additional investigation as deemed warranted in the sole discretion of the state public defender. The information received may be taken into consideration in determining whether it would be in the best interests of the state to enter into an initial or renewal contract with the potential contracting attorney.

**11.4(2)** The state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender may hold discussions with, or otherwise obtain information from, a potential contracting attorney to determine the attorney's qualifications and ability to perform the conditions of an initial or renewal contract.

**11.4(3)** The state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender may hold discussions with, or otherwise obtain information from, a potential contracting attorney to establish under an initial or renewal contract the types of cases the contracting attorney will handle and the geographic area in which the cases will be handled.

**11.4(4)** The state public defender may decline to award an initial or renewal contract to a proposed contracting attorney if the state public defender determines that the contract would not be in the best interests of the state as described in rule 493—11.7(13B). The state public defender may limit the contract

to specific types of cases, a specified geographic area, or both. The state public defender shall give written notice of this action to the attorney. The attorney may seek reconsideration of this decision in the manner prescribed in rule 493—11.8(13B).

**11.4(5)** Nothing contained in this rule shall obligate the state public defender to enter into an initial or renewal contract if the state public defender determines that it is not in the best interests of the state to enter into such contract.

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**493—11.5(13B) Contract renewal.** Prior to renewal of any contract, the state public defender may contact judges, attorneys, court personnel, and others to determine if any existing contract is being properly fulfilled and may conduct such additional investigation as is described in rule 493—11.4(13B). If the state public defender has determined that a contract renewal is in the best interests of the state, the state public defender may offer a new contract to the contracting attorney. The contracting attorney may accept the new contract by signing the contract renewal and returning it to the state public defender prior to the date that the existing contract expires. If the contracting attorney does not sign and return the contract renewal, the contract shall terminate on its expiration date without regard to whether the contracting attorney receives any further notice. If a contracting attorney is not offered a contract renewal, the state public defender shall give the contracting attorney written notice of this action. The attorney may seek reconsideration of this decision in the manner prescribed in rule 493—11.8(13B).

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**493—11.6(13B) Termination.**

**11.6(1)** Termination at will. Either the state public defender or the contracting attorney may terminate a contract upon 30 days' advance written notice to the other party for any reason or no reason. Such termination may affect the entire contract or may relate solely to a particular county or geographical area or to a particular type of case.

**11.6(2)** Termination for cause.

*a. License suspension or revocation.* A contract for indigent defense shall automatically terminate without notice upon the suspension or revocation of the attorney's license to practice law in the state of Iowa.

*b. Default.* The state public defender may issue a notice of default based on any of the grounds described in rule 493—11.7(13B). A notice of default shall state the grounds of default and, if feasible, request that the contracting attorney remedy the default within ten days of the date of the notice. If the events triggering the notice of default continue to be evidenced more than ten days beyond the date of written notice, the state public defender may immediately terminate the contract without further notice by issuing a notice of termination. An attorney may seek reconsideration of the state public defender's decision to terminate a contract based on the attorney's default in the manner described in rule 493—11.8(13B).

*c. Improper billing practices.* The state public defender may notify the attorney that the state public defender is considering the exercise of the state public defender's contract right to terminate the contract for improper billing practices. The notification shall explain the basis for the state public defender's concern and provide the attorney at least 14 days to provide a response. After consideration of the response, the state public defender may terminate the contract for improper billing practices if the state public defender determines that the attorney has engaged in a pattern of willful, intentional, reckless, or negligent submission of false, abusive, or unreasonably excessive fee claims. An attorney may seek reconsideration of the state public defender's decision to terminate a contract for improper billing practices in the manner described in rule 493—11.8(13B).

**11.6(3)** Termination by mutual consent. Upon the mutual consent, confirmed in writing, of the state public defender and the contracting attorney, the contract may be terminated on less than 30 days' notice. Such termination may affect the entire contract or may relate solely to a particular county or geographical area or to a particular type of case.

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**493—11.7(13B) Grounds to deny or terminate a contract.** In determining whether the award, renewal, or termination of a contract is in the best interests of the state, the state public defender may take into consideration factors such as but not limited to the following:

1. The attorney's eligibility for contracting pursuant to rule 493—11.2(13B) for the type of case in which the attorney is to provide services or the attorney's failure to comply with such requirements;
2. The attorney's compliance with the terms of an existing or prior contract to represent indigent persons;
3. Any form of dishonesty or deception directed to judicial officials, the state public defender, indigent persons, other clients, or any other person in the practice of law;
4. Unprofessional or unethical conduct, or other act or omission that is or may be detrimental or harmful to indigent representation;
5. An attorney's failure to attend, or untimely attendance at, hearings, depositions, or other case-related proceedings;
6. An attorney's failure to abide by a court order, applicable statutes or administrative rules governing indigent representation, or local or state rules of procedure applicable to the cases in which the attorney has been appointed;
7. Repetitive, willful, deceptive, unexplained or uncorrected errors in claims for fees;
8. Disciplinary action against a legal or other professional license or conviction of a crime in any jurisdiction when the disciplinary action or conviction implicates an attorney's honesty, trustworthiness, or competence to practice law, or is otherwise related to the practice of indigent defense;
9. Use of alcohol or controlled substances during court proceedings or in a manner impairing competent performance;
10. Judicial orders or rulings finding that an attorney engaged in untruthful, incompetent, unprofessional, or unethical behavior in the practice of indigent defense, submission of fee claims, or otherwise in the practice of law; or
11. Any other behavior implicating an attorney's competence, effectiveness, or trustworthiness in the practice of indigent defense.

[ARC 9508C, IAB 8/20/25, effective 9/24/25]

**493—11.8(13B,17A) Reconsideration.**

**11.8(1) *Written notice.*** A request for reconsideration is perfected by giving written notice of the request for reconsideration to the state public defender within ten business days of the date of mailing of the notice of denial of an initial or renewal contract or the notice of termination. A request for reconsideration must be in writing and must specify the factual or legal errors the attorney contends were made by the state public defender. The attorney may provide such additional information, explanation or documentation as the attorney believes would be relevant to the reconsideration decision. The request for reconsideration is deemed made on the date of the United States Postal Service nonmetered postmark or the date of personal service on the state public defender.

**11.8(2) *Exhaustion of administrative remedies.*** A request for reconsideration of the state public defender's decision to deny or terminate a contract is an administrative prerequisite to seeking any form of judicial review pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 17A.

**11.8(3) *Informal conference.*** Upon receipt of a request for reconsideration, the state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender may schedule an informal conference with the attorney if in the state public defender's judgment such a conference may foster resolution of the dispute. To the extent that the participation of the state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender in an informal conference could be considered personal investigation as that term is used in Iowa Code section 17A.17, an attorney agreeing to participate in an informal conference waives the right to seek to disqualify the state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender from acting as presiding officer or advising the presiding officer in a subsequent contested case proceeding based solely on the ground of personal investigation during an informal conference. The attorney does not waive the right to raise any other type of disqualification.

**11.8(4) *Reconsideration decision.*** The state public defender shall issue a written reconsideration decision that may uphold, reverse, or modify the initial decision to deny or terminate a contract. The

reconsideration decision is final agency action unless an attorney timely requests a contested case hearing pursuant to rule 493—11.10(13B,17A).

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#### **493—11.9(13B,17A) Contested case hearing.**

**11.9(1)** Written request for contested case hearing. An attorney who is aggrieved by a reconsideration decision and who desires to contest the factual basis for the reconsideration decision shall request a contested case hearing within ten days of the date the reconsideration decision is mailed. The request for contested case hearing shall identify the factual issues in dispute and any other claimed error and shall state the manner in which the state public defender is alleged to have relied upon erroneous facts.

**11.9(2)** Procedures. The request for contested case hearing is deemed made on the date of the United States Postal Service nonmetered postmark or the date of personal service on the state public defender. A contested case hearing shall be conducted pursuant to the procedures set forth in 481—Chapter 10.

**11.9(3)** A timely request for contested case hearing is an administrative prerequisite to seeking any form of judicial review pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 17A.

**11.9(4)** Presiding officer. The state public defender or a person designated by the state public defender may preside over the contested case hearing and issue a final decision, or the state public defender may request that the hearing be conducted by an administrative law judge from the department of inspections, appeals, and licensing who shall issue a proposed decision subject to review by or appeal to the state public defender. If the notice of hearing does not identify an administrative law judge as the presiding officer, an attorney may file a written request that an administrative law judge serve as the presiding officer at hearing. Such request must be filed within 20 days after service of the notice of hearing by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the attorney's last-known address. The state public defender may deny the request only upon a finding that one or more of the following apply:

- a. There is a compelling need to expedite issuance of a final decision.
- b. The case involves significant policy issues of first impression that are inextricably intertwined with the factual issues presented.
- c. Funds are unavailable to pay the costs of an administrative law judge and possible resulting interagency appeal.
- d. The request was not timely made.
- e. The demeanor of the witnesses is likely to be dispositive in resolving the disputed factual issues.

[ARC 9508C, IAB 8/20/25, effective 9/24/25]

#### **493—11.10(13B,17A) Judicial review.**

**11.10(1)** The final decision by the state public defender to deny an attorney's request to enter into an initial or renewal contract for indigent representation, to terminate such a contract for cause following issuance of a notice of default, or to terminate such contract for improper billing practices is reviewable pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 17A.

**11.10(2)** Nothing in this rule shall prevent the informal resolution of a decision to deny or terminate an initial or renewal contract through mutually agreeable settlement at any stage of the proceeding.

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