Handout: State Responses to the Issues

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In 2012, the Washington Supreme Court approved new rules for indigent defense. The new rules include requirements about a public defender’s experience in a particular area of law, proof of continuing legal education, and sworn statements that attorneys are complying with caseload limits.

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After Hurricane Katrina when the New Orleans public defender system was in crisis, more than 300 law students spent their winter break helping with unglamorous but essential work. The students interviewed defendants, found police reports, and created files. After three weeks, though, the law students went back to school.

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In 2003, Georgia created a centralized, statewide public defense system. The state funded the system by adding a filing fee of $15 to every civil case filed in the state courts. After a few years, however, the state started diverting money from this fund in to the state’s general budget.

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Several states have reclassified low-level non-violent crimes from felonies to misdemeanors. This means that people charged with those crimes will not face jail time. Some states have developed programs like probation, counseling, and education for first-time offenders. Defendants who take part do not go to trial.