

Board Training Spotlight: 'Till We Meet Again ...

By Jennifer Shircliff, Staff Attorney

Public defender boards in Indiana play an integral role administering and overseeing the delivery of public defense services for their respective counties. In counties that participate in the Commission's 40% reimbursement program, the ultimate responsibility lies with the board to ensure its county is in compliance with the Commission's standards. To ensure active administration and oversight, at least in part, Indiana law imposes a variety of statutory obligations on its public defender boards. Conducting public defender board meetings is among those obligations.

Specifically, Indiana Code § 33-40-7-3(e) requires public defender boards to hold meetings on a quarterly basis, at minimum. The statute further states that boards can choose to hold meetings more frequently than quarterly if called by either the chairperson or the other two board members. It is important to emphasize that the plain language contained in § 33-40-7-3(e) makes quarterly meetings mandatory, not discretionary. Board meetings more frequent than quarterly, however, are discretionary.

Why it is important for public defender boards to meet at least quarterly, you ask? As previously mentioned, public defender boards bear the responsibility to administer and oversee their county's public defense services. Holding the requisite meetings places boards in a position to maintain a working knowledge of and to actively discuss their county's public defense system. Meetings in accordance with the statute help boards communicate with the public defenders they supervise, address public defense-related issues with other county stakeholders, and stay on top of financial matters. In a nutshell, meetings foster board involvement that is imperative to providing consistent, quality public defense services to indigent people.

If you or your board members have questions about public defender board meetings, please reach out to Commission staff. We are happy to provide guidance regarding public defender board meetings in your county.