



FY 2025 Biennial Report

to the Governor, Supreme Court, and Legislature

Mission

Providing the most compassionate and expert defense of clients and the Constitution.

Vision

Creating expert teams of advocates for justice, bringing respect and dignity to our clients to achieve holistic and equitable outcomes.

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About this Report

The Office of State Public Defender's (OPD's) FY 2025 Biennial Report is prepared and provided pursuant to Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1).

Notices

Report Raw Data Download

Please find the raw data for each reporting requirement here: [FY 2024-2025 Biennial Report Raw Data](#)

Contact Information

This report was prepared by the Office of the Director, Brett D. Schandelson. Any questions, comments, or concerns regarding this report should be sent to opdoperations@mt.gov with a subject of "Biennial Report Inquiry" to ensure proper routing.

ADA Compliance

The Office of State Public Defender is committed to providing equal access to information to individuals with disabilities. If you require this report in an alternative format, please contact opdoperations@mt.gov with a subject of "Biennial Report Inquiry" to ensure proper routing.

Use of Generative AI

This report was drafted with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to enhance efficiency, clarity, and effectiveness in content creation. All content generated by AI has been reviewed and edited by human contributors to ensure accuracy, relevance, and compliance with State of Montana standards.

Director's Note

The FY 2024-2025 biennium represents a watershed moment for Montana's public defense system. Over these two transformative years, OPD achieved unprecedented stability, establishing the strongest constitutional foundation for indigent defense in our state's history.

As Montana's constitutional guardian, OPD ensures that every individual, regardless of economic circumstances, receives zealous and competent legal representation. Our vision of "creating expert teams of advocates for justice, bringing respect and dignity to our clients to achieve holistic and equitable outcomes" has guided every strategic decision during this critical period.

During these two years, our agency was appointed in approximately 70,000 new matters, serving about 20,000 clients annually across Montana's diverse communities. Despite significant workload fluctuations—a 10% increase from FY 2023 to FY 2024, followed by a 3% decrease in FY 2025—OPD effectively managed its caseload while maintaining unwavering commitment to constitutional representation.

Most significantly, FY 2025 marks the first year that both average and median attorney workloads achieved our Ethical Case Management (ECM) target range of 100-120%. This milestone ensures our attorneys maintain ethically reasonable caseloads, providing the capacity necessary for competent, effective representation. The effects of ethical and sustainable workloads reverberate throughout the agency in myriad ways, impacting our agency culture and improving our ability to recruit and retain public defenders.

As a result, our workforce development initiatives have also shown remarkable results. The Recruitment Class 2025 brought twenty-one new public defenders to our ranks through OPD's strategic early-career recruitment approach. Combined with stabilized turnover metrics, these efforts have built a strong foundation for sustained excellence.

Technology innovation paralleled these workforce advances. We have deployed best-in-class data analytics, expanded the functionality of our electronic case management system with enhanced automations, implemented in-house AI tools, and partnered with JusticeText to bring specialized AI capabilities to our attorneys.

Montana's public defense system has never been stronger. Through the extraordinary dedication of OPD's exceptional staff, continued support from the Governor's Office and Legislature, and strategic investments in innovative practices, we have established a foundation for continued excellence that strengthens the constitutional

promise of competent, effective legal representation for everyone regardless of economic circumstances.

This foundation ensures Montana's public defense system will continue serving as a national model while maintaining our commitment to constitutional excellence and accessible justice for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brett D. Schandelson", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Brett D. Schandelson
Director
Office of State Public Defender

FY 2025 Biennial Report

Policies and Procedures

This section of the report covers Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1)(b)(i).

All policies and procedures in effect as of the last day of the FY 2025 Biennium have been compiled and may be found here: [Archived Policies and Standards](#)

Practice Standards

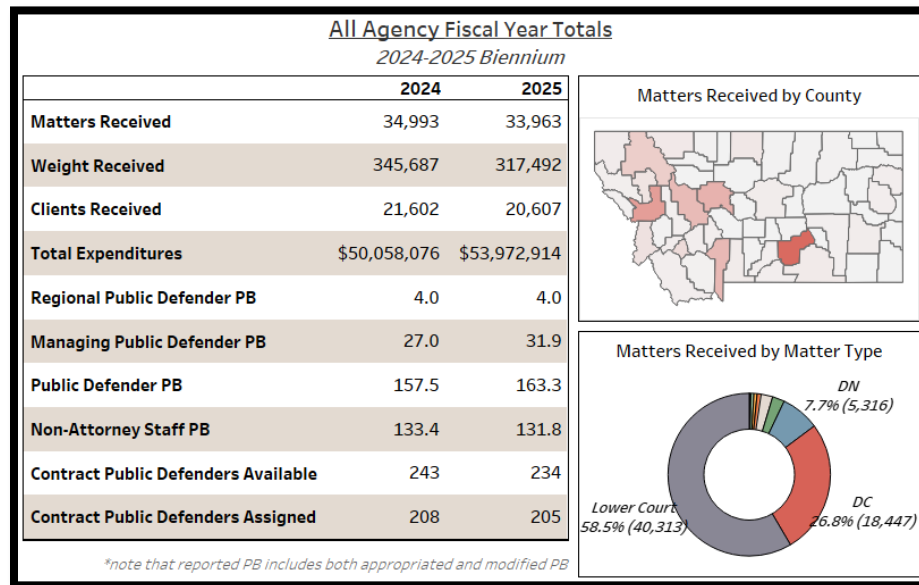
This section of the report covers Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1)(b)(ii).

All practice standards in effect as of the last day of the FY 2025 Biennium have been compiled and may be found here: [Archived Policies and Standards](#)

Staffing, Contracting, New Cases, and Clients Represented

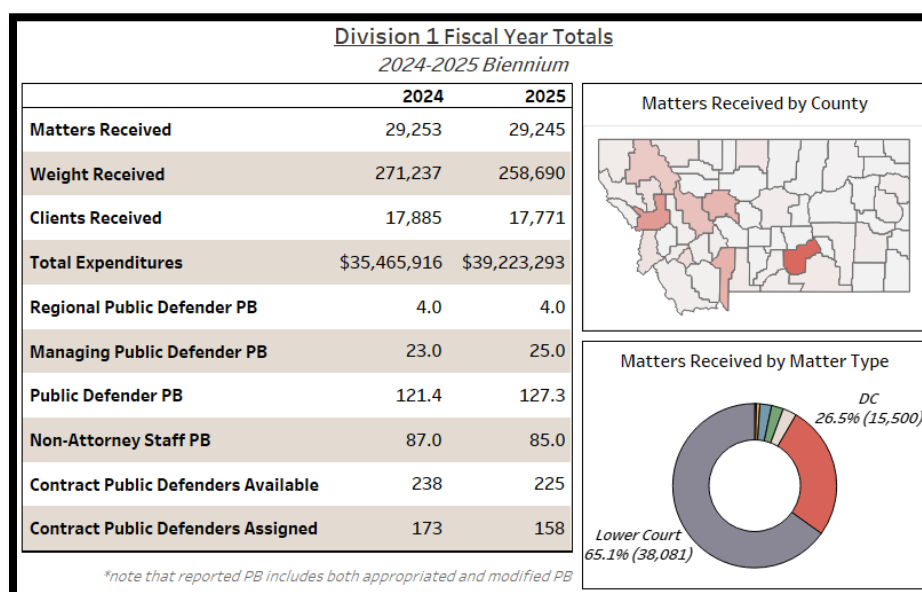
This section of the report covers Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1)(b)(iii) through (vii) and includes information regarding OPD employees and contractors.

OPD has four divisions, three of which provide direct public defender services to OPD clients.



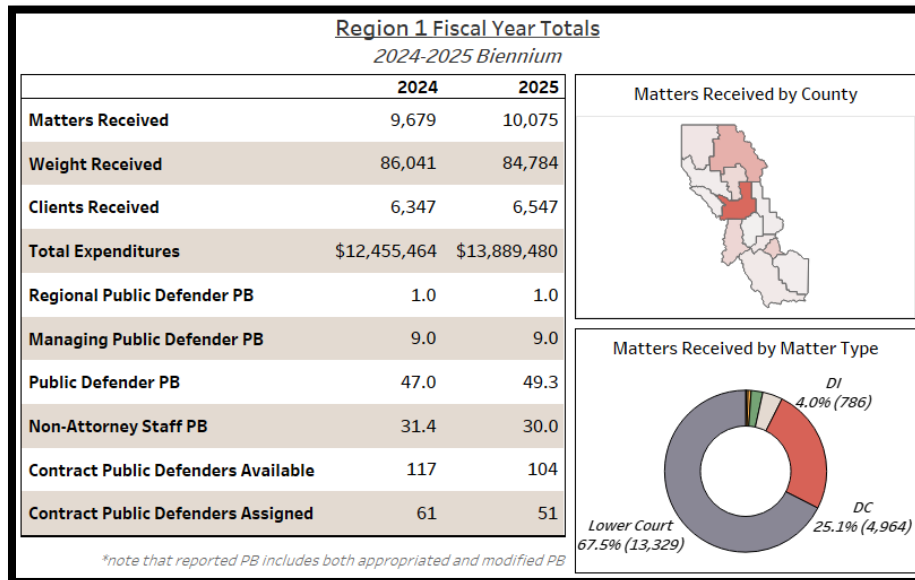
Division 1 - Public Defender Division

Division 1, the Public Defender Division, has four Regions, each with a Regional Public Defender.



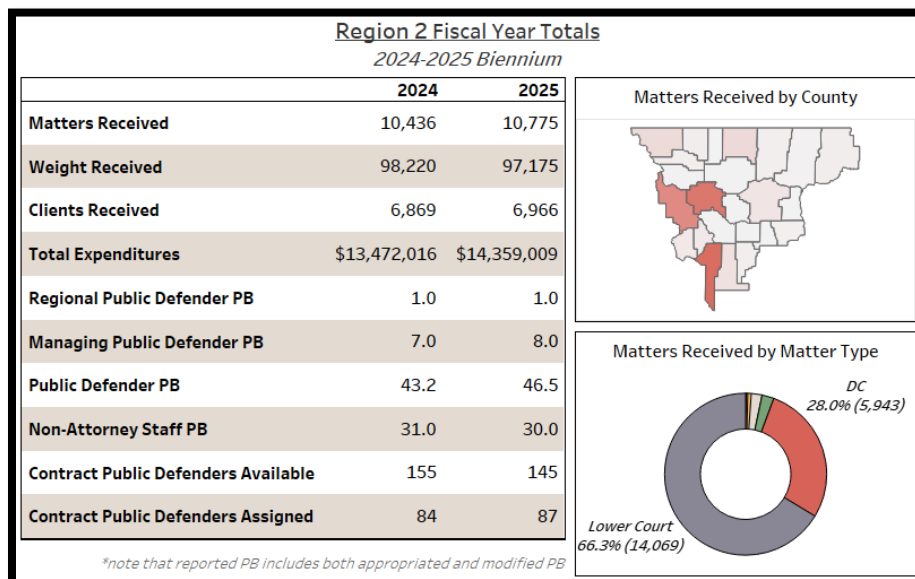
Region 1

Region 1 includes the western third of the State and has regional offices in Kalispell, Polson, Missoula, Hamilton, Anaconda, and Butte.



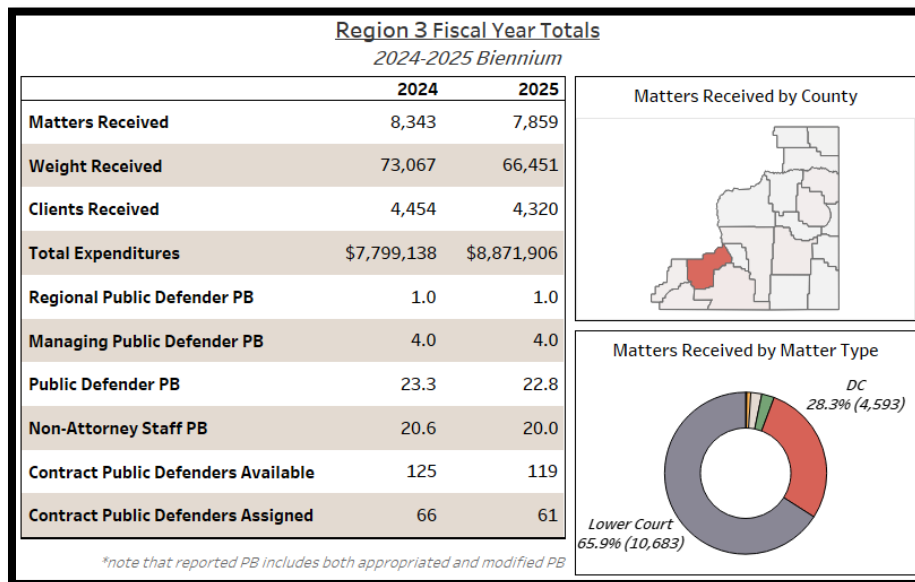
Region 2

Region 2 includes middle third of the state and has regional offices in Glasgow, Havre, Lewistown, Great Falls, Helena, and Bozeman.



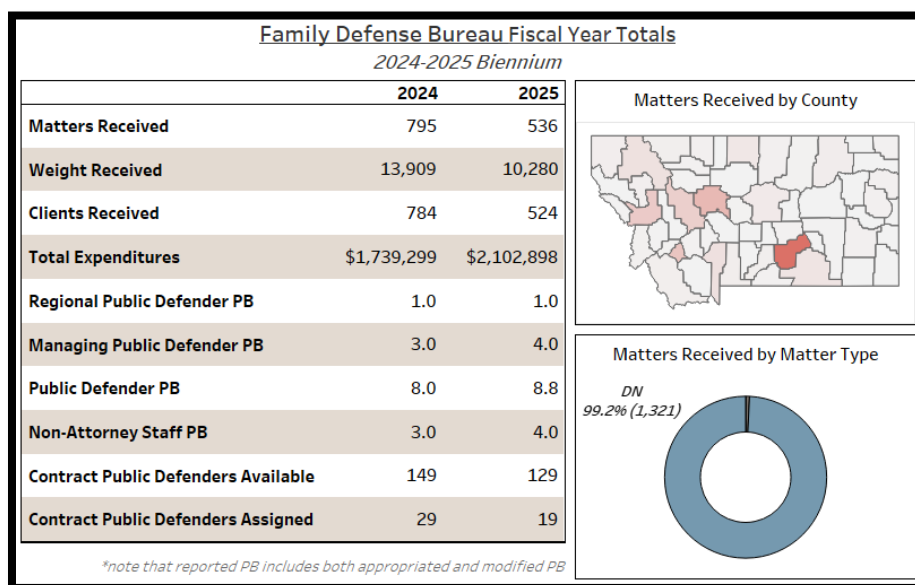
Region 3

Region 3 includes the eastern third of the state and has regional offices in Billings, Miles City, and Glendive.



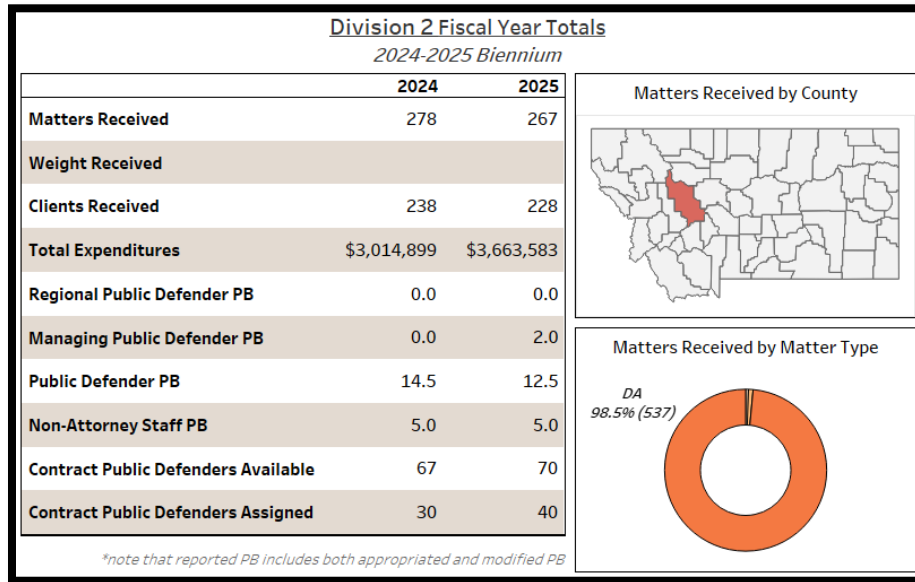
Family Defense Bureau

The Family Defense Bureau is a statewide region that is limited to providing representation in Abuse & Neglect (DN) matters and its employees are spread throughout the state, typically embedded in other OPD Offices.



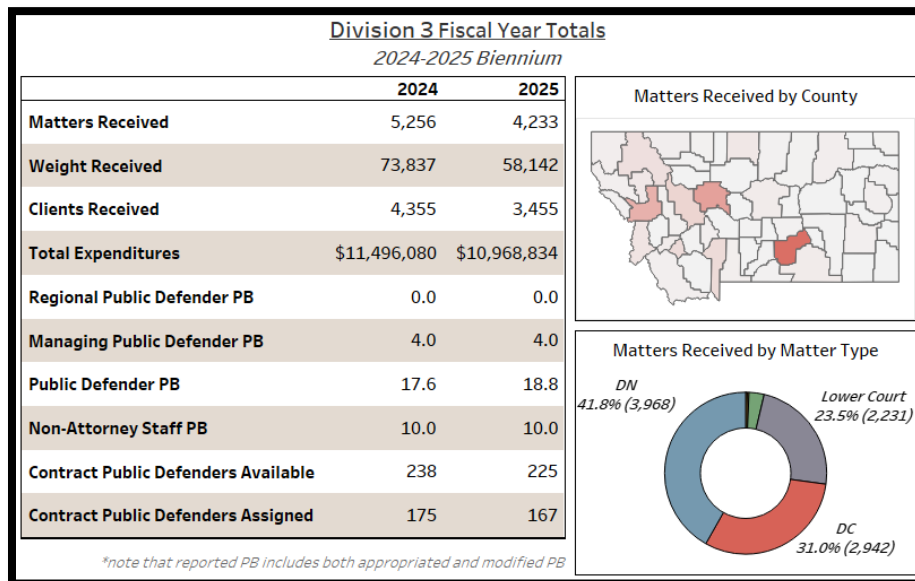
Division 2 - Appellate Defender Division

Division 2, the Appellate Defender Division, practices nearly exclusively in the Montana Supreme Court. Division 2 does not have any regional offices but does have division offices in Helena, Missoula, and Bozeman.



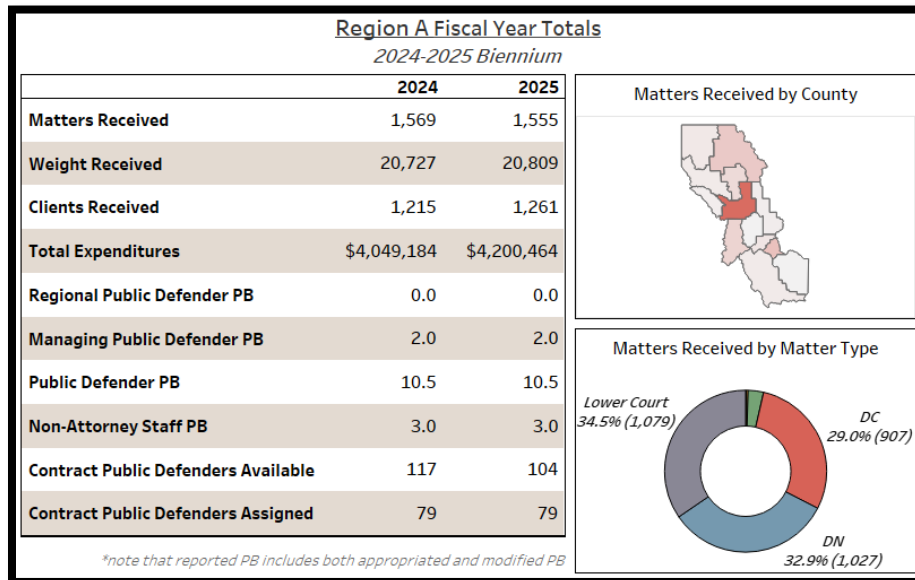
Division 3 - Conflict Defender Division

Division 3, the Conflict Defender Division, handles conflict and overflow cases, has three regions, but does not currently have any Regional Public Defenders. The Conflict Regions are directly supervised by the Conflict Defender Division Administrator.



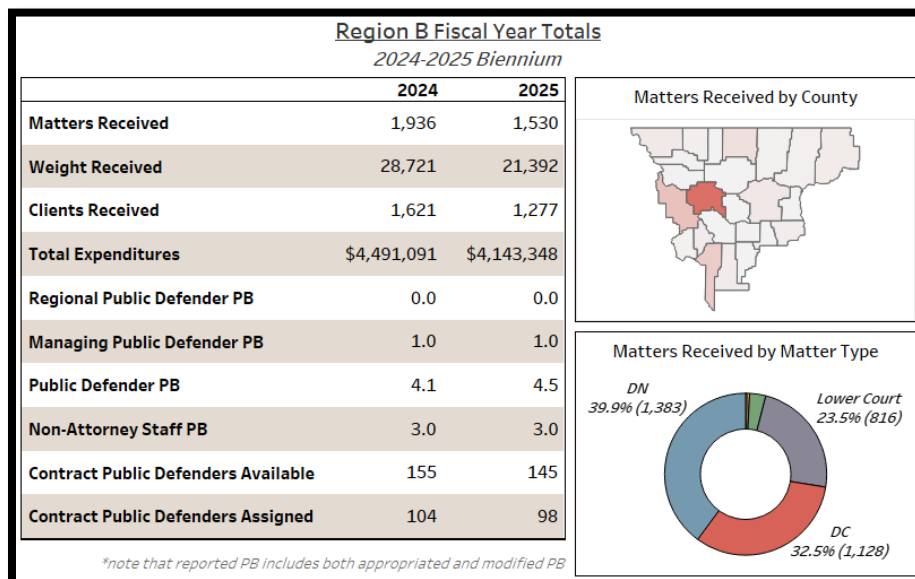
Region A

Region A handles conflict and overflow cases in the western third of the State and has regional offices in Missoula and Butte.



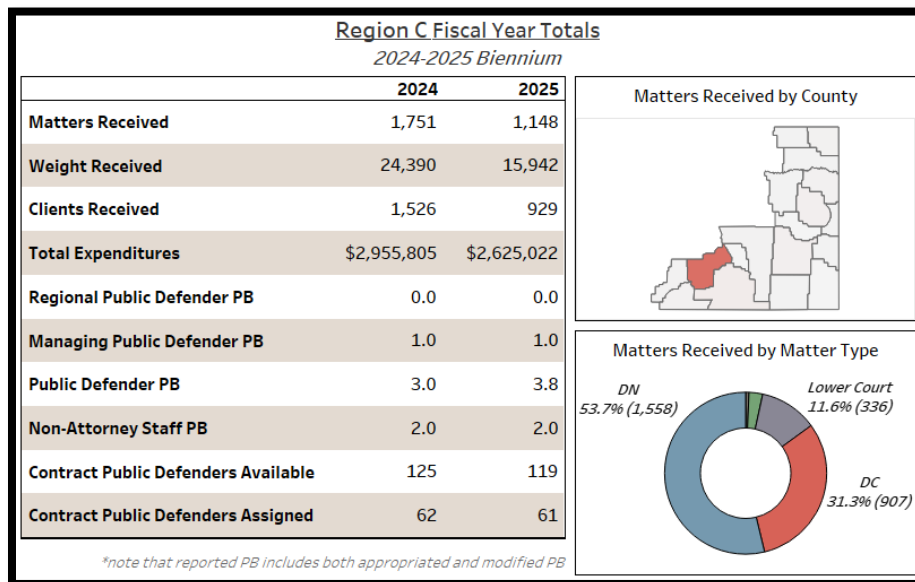
Region B

Region B handles conflict and overflow cases in the middle third of the state and has regional offices in Great Falls, Helena, and Bozeman.



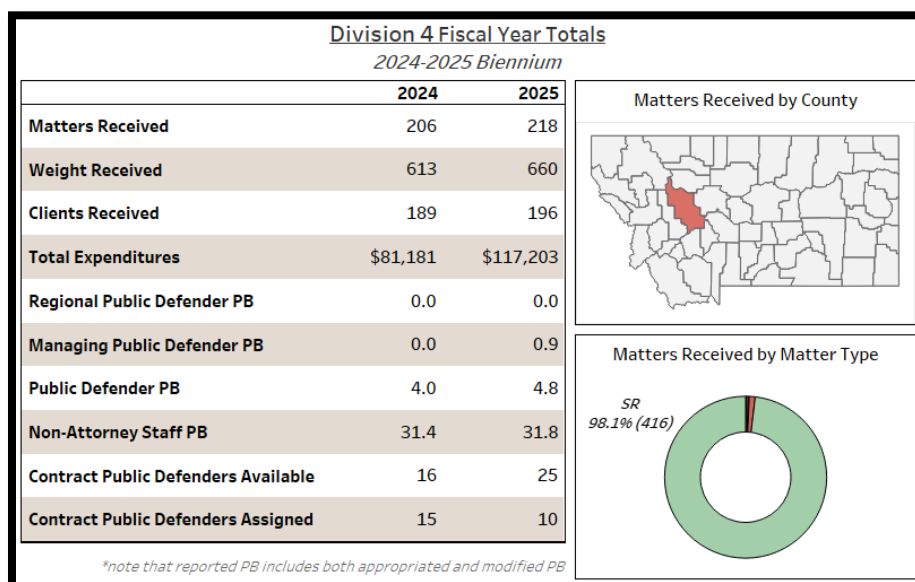
Region C

Region C handles conflict and overflow cases in the eastern third of the state and has a regional office in Billings.



Division 4 - Central Services Division

Division 4, the Central Services Division, headquartered in Butte, does not have any regions or Regional Public Defenders, but does have program managers and employees throughout the state.



FTE Public Defender Assignments

This section of the report covers Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1)(b)(viii) and contains information regarding OPD FTE Public Defender's annual caseload and workload during the FY 2025 biennium.

An interactive dashboard of FTE Public Defender Assignments may be found here: [FTE Assignments Dashboard](#).

Agency Trainings

This section of the report covers Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1)(b)(ix) and (x) and contains information regarding legal and other trainings provided or coordinated by the Center for Defense Excellence (CODE) Bureau.

The list of trainings provided or coordinated during the biennium can be found as a sheet in the [FY 2024-2025 Biennial Report Raw Data](#) book.

Detailed Expenditures

This section of the report covers Montana Code Annotated § 47-1-125(1)(b)(xi) and contains information regarding detailed expenditure data by court and case type during the FY 2025 Biennium.

An interactive dashboard of detailed expenditures by court and case type may be found here: [Interactive Data Discovery Dashboard](#).