

# **Division of Public Defender Services**

## **Office of Chief Public Defender**

### *At a Glance*

**Christine Perra Rapillo, Chief Public Defender**

**John R. Day Deputy Chief Public Defender**

**Established: 1975**

**Statutory Authority C.G.S Sec. 51-296 et seq.**

**Central Office: 30 Trinity Street, Hartford, CT 06106**

**Number of Employees: 386**

**Recurring Operating Expenses: \$ 66,772,729**

### **Mission**

Striving to ensure justice and a fair and unbiased system, the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services (DPDS) zealously promotes and protects the rights, liberty and dignity of all clients entrusted to us. We are committed to holistic representation that recognizes clients as individuals, fosters trust, and prevents unnecessary and wrongful conviction.

### **Statutory Responsibilities**

The Division of Public Defender Services, upon appointment by the Court, provides representation, to indigent individuals in the following matters:

- Defense of indigent accused children and adults in criminal cases;
- Post-Conviction Representation including:
  - Direct appeals after trial;
  - Habeas Corpus matters;
  - Clients acquitted by reason of insanity before the Psychiatric Security Review Board pursuant to Sec.17a-596(d), C.G.S.;
  - Post-conviction petitions for DNA testing in accordance with Sec. 54-102kk(e), C.G.S. claims through the Connecticut Innocence Project in which new evidence (both DNA and non-DNA evidence) might reasonably exonerate inmates who are innocent and who have been wrongfully convicted;
- Representation for children and indigent adults in child welfare cases;
- Representation of indigent contemnors and respondents in paternity matters in family magistrate court;
- Appointment of Guardian-ad Litem and attorneys for children in Family Matters where the family qualifies for state-rates; and,

DPDS also provides representation of non-indigent persons when appointed by the court in the “Interests of Justice” in Juvenile Matters.

Services are provided in 38 combined field offices, 6 specialty units and the administrative Office of Chief Public Defender.

### **Public Service**

In FY 2018-19, we updated our procedures for taking eligibility applications to make the process faster and more transparent. This included better standardization of factors for eligibility across offices and

clear notice to clients about how to appeal a denial of services. Our website has also been updated to provide more links to resources for clients and the public. DPDS has a formal process for handling inquiries and concerns about staff and contractors from clients and the public. All communication is directed to the Deputy Chief Public Defender, who conducts an inquiry with the appropriate staff and responds. Inquiries and responses are electronically logged for future reference.

## **Achievements/Improvements for Fiscal Year 2017-18**

### **Implementation of Strategic Plan**

After a change in the agency's executive leadership during the Fall of 2018, the Division embarked on a strategic planning process. This process included managers, line staff, lawyers, and supportive staff. The process resulted in a new Mission Statement and a renewed focus on high quality representation of clients. Goals included addressing caseload issues by refilling positions left open by layoffs and attrition, rebuilding our social workers program, addressing inadequate diversity among our staff and creating a plan to address racial justice issues in the court system and in our agency.

#### Racial Justice Initiative

- Created a racial justice committee to make recommendations on agency climate and systemic reform. First report expected in September 2019.
- Expanded efforts to improve diversity in applicant pool by creating social work internship/clinic program, outreach of affinity groups, targeted opportunities for training and management experience within current workforce and creating of a feeder program to allow new law school graduates with a proven commitment to public defense to work part time prior to Bar Admission

#### Mentoring

- Reactivated attorney mentoring program and expanded it to investigators and social workers. Plans to include administrative support staff in program in coming fiscal year.
- Appellate Mentoring Program addressed concerns about consistent quality in appellate representation by creating a peer mentoring program that included over 30 participants

#### Attorney Supervision Standards

- Implemented supervision standards for managers, which included expectations for both new and existing staff

### **In House Cost Saving Project**

Our innovative "In House Assigned Counsel" project continued in FY 19. Under this project, we reduce the cost of outsourcing by having Division lawyers and staff provide representation on conflict cases from other jurisdictions. This program not only reduces the cost of outsourcing, but also provides opportunities for our attorneys to work on and expend their skills in the areas of trials, hearings under P.A. 15-84, appeals and habeas cases.