

# **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: 391**

**Recurring Operating Expenses: \$ 66,101,358**

### **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, including habeas appeals;
  - Clients acquitted by reason of insanity before the Psychiatric Security Review Board pursuant to Sec.17a-596(d), C.G.S.;
  - Post-conviction motions, including petitions for DNA testing in accordance with C.G.S Sec. 54-102kk(e), 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 of individuals in Parole Revocation proceedings pursuant to P.A. 19-59.
- Representation for children and indigent adults in child welfare cases;
- Representation of indigent contemnors and respondents in paternity matters in family magistrate court;
- Assignment of Guardian-ad Litem and attorneys for children in Family Matters where the family qualifies for state-rates.

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 2020-21, we continued to deal with the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on our clients. Court operations were curtailed but never stopped. Our staff gradually returned to a hybrid model of operations. Staff worked in the office 2-3 days a week to limit capacity and worked remotely for the balance. This was very challenging, since court dockets have remained busy and unpredictable. Fulltime in office operations resumed at the end of the fiscal year.

DPDS continued to work with the Judicial Branch and the Division of Criminal Justice to review files for individuals held on bond and work to safely resolve many cases. This lessened the impact of the pandemic on those individuals, their families and the state corrections and criminal justice systems. As court operations normalized, our staff conducted outdoor events to allow people with pending cases to reconnect to the court system and to make application for public defender services. A call center was developed to field questions, look up court dates and refer applicants to the correct offices. There was also considerable outreach to community partners to make sure the public knew that administrative continuances were ending and that they need to reconnect with the courts.

## **Achievements/Improvements for Fiscal Year 2019-20**

### **Creation of a Racial Justice Education Program**

DPDS continues to work on developing our next generation of leaders. Our staff is on the frontlines of the criminal legal system and it is important for them to know the history of discrimination and how past policy decisions still drive bias and create disadvantage for people of color. Our Training Department developed the *Dialogues for Change* curriculum. This is a six session program that consisted of self-study, plenary sessions and small group work. Over 40 staff self-selected to enter the program. All completed it. We plan to offer the program to voluntary participants one more time then, create a shorter, mandatory program where past participants assist with the implementation.

### **Improvements in Technology**

The Coronavirus pandemic continues to drive improvements in our technology. The following are some of the projects completed by the agency:

- Increased the number of cellphones and tablets in the field offices to improve client's ability to communicate remotely with our staff.
- Began the process to transition our email program to Microsoft 365. This will make it more compatible with the rest of state government and allow access to Microsoft Teams.
- Trained staff and contractors on the effective use of remote technology to conduct court hearings.
- Acquired additional VPN keys and licenses to allow effective remote work from more staff.
- Increased the use of our case management system to electronically store documents and files.
- Deployed Broadband equipped lap top computers and VPN keys to attorney staff who are working in alternate locations due to ongoing court closures.