

Division of Public Defender Services

Office of Chief Public Defender

At a Glance

TaShun Bowden-Lewis, Chief Public Defender

John R. Day Deputy Chief Public Defender

Established: 1975

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

Central Office: 55 Farmington Ave 8th Floor Hartford CT 06105

Number of Employees: 392

Recurring Operating Expenses: \$ 70,239,899

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 2021-22, 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 regular court schedule. While there continues to be some remote work, our field offices are fully functioning with daily court operations.

Achievements/Improvements for Fiscal Year 2021-22

Continued Critical Racial Justice Training and Restructuring of New Hire Training

DPDS extended its progress during the last fiscal year of not only providing additional training to develop the next generation of its leaders, but also providing additional racial justice training. Over 20 staff elected to attend the second implementation of the *Dialogues for Change* curriculum, which was provided the prior fiscal year and addressed the history of discrimination and how past policy decisions still drive bias and create disadvantages for people of color.

Over a third of the Division's attorneys have joined within the past three years, the orientation and onboarding training programs for new attorneys have been completely overhauled. Now, in addition to their field training, new attorneys are provided a full day of training every month for their first year, as well as a week-long intensive trial skills program. These trainings provide a thorough foundation in the broad range of knowledge and legal skills that are necessary to maintain the Division's standard of excellence in providing legal representation for its clients. Furthermore, DPDS has integrated its internal trainings with those provided to the many assigned counsel that are contracted to supplement the legal representation it provides, so that all attorneys serving indigent clients in adult criminal courts have access to the same resources. DPDS has done all of this while simultaneously navigating the logistically tricky return to regularly holding trainings in-person as the social distancing requirements have waned.

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.
- Completed the transition of our email program to Microsoft 365. This will make it more compatible with the rest of state government and allow access to Microsoft Teams.
- Provided additional VPN keys and licenses to allow effective remote work from more staff when necessary.
- Increased the use of our case management system to electronically store documents and files.