



Connecticut Public Defenders

equality | justice | community

Division of Public Defender Services Office of Chief Public Defender FY 2022-2023

At a Glance

TaShun Bowden-Lewis, *Chief Public Defender*

John R. Day, *Deputy Chief Public Defender*

Established: 1975

Statutory Authority: Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 51-296 et seq.

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

Number of Employees: 430

Recurring Operating Expenses: \$73,043,130

Organizational Structure: The Division is composed of a Commission, the administrative Office of Chief Public Defender, 6 specialty units, and 39 combined field offices.

Mission

Striving to ensure justice and a fair and unbiased system, the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services 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, 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 Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 17a-596(d);
 - Post-conviction motions, including petitions for DNA testing in accordance with Conn. Gen. Statutes 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; and
 - 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; and

- Assignment of Guardians ad Litem and attorneys for children in Family Matters where the family qualifies for state-rates.

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

Public Service

The Division maintains high ethical standards while zealously promoting and protecting the rights, liberty and dignity of its clients. The Division 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. Additionally, the Division has sought feedback from clients and the community through client surveys and engagement with community organizations.

Effective May 1, 2023, the Division raised its income eligibility levels by adopting a 200% of the federal poverty guidelines standard. By expanding eligibility for its services, the Division is now able to assist more members of the public who need legal services but cannot afford representation.

Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2022-23

Assigned Counsel

Assigned counsel attorneys protect clients’ liberty interests and parental rights, and they represent abused and neglected children in the bulk of the Division’s child welfare matters. Many years without a significant rate increase means that their rate of pay is much lower than those being paid in CT federally, by other CT state agencies, and in surrounding states. As a result, assigned counsel are consistently leaving their contracts due to inadequate compensation.

The FY 2024-2025 Biennial State Budget made possible a much needed 35% pay rate increase for the agency’s assigned counsel attorneys. This increase will allow the Division to recruit and retain assigned counsel more effectively.

Recruitment

To support recruitment from among a diverse pool of applicants, the Division formed partnerships with and hosted interns from the Lawyers Collaboration for Diversity, the Black Public Defenders Association, the Champion Initiative, and Hartford Promise. Engagements with local Boys & Girls Clubs and Junior Achievement broadened these efforts to include younger students as well.

Training

A large proportion of the Division’s attorneys have joined within the past four years. 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. The agency’s Training Unit spent early 2023 preparing to

return to a residential model for DefenderLab, this week-long program that includes both internal and assigned counsel attorneys. Together, 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.

The Division continued to expand its racial justice training through the *Changing Lanes* curriculum and the development of the subsequent *Level Up* program. These programs explore the history of discrimination, how past policy decisions still drive bias and create disadvantages for people of color, and how staff can address these issues.

Improvements in Technology

The following are some of the projects completed by the agency:

- Implemented enhancements to cyber security and infrastructure;
- Continued to provide VPN licenses to allow effective remote work from more staff when necessary;
- Refreshed outdated end-user devices to provide for a more efficient working experience;
- Began efforts to upgrade the Division's website and social media presence to assist clients, strengthen recruitment, and increase ease of access to information; and
- Increased the use of the Division's case management system to store documents and files electronically.