



# Department of Justice

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## **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES NEARLY \$2 MILLION IN GRANTS TO STRENGTHEN LEGAL SERVICES FOR THE POOR**

### ***Grants Announced at Event Marking the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gideon v. Wainwright***

WASHINGTON – Attorney General Eric Holder announced today \$1.8 million in new resources to improve access to criminal legal services and strengthen indigent defense across the nation. In remarks during the “50 Years Later: The Legacy of Gideon v. Wainwright” event hosted by the Department of Justice, the Attorney General emphasized the department’s commitment to ensuring that all those accused of a crime, regardless of their wealth, education or class, have adequate legal representation and counsel. March 18<sup>th</sup> marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, where the court unanimously ruled that even those unable to afford counsel are entitled to counsel by court appointment. At today’s event, Attorney General Holder led a discussion on keeping and continuing the promise of *Gideon*, which included U.S. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan and former Vice President Walter Mondale, who, as Minnesota Attorney General in 1963, organized the submission of the amicus curiae brief to the U.S. Supreme Court with 21 state attorneys general in support of Clarence Gideon.

“Despite half a century of progress, far too many Americans still struggle to gain access to the legal assistance they need, and far too many children and adults enter our justice systems with little understanding of their rights,” said Attorney General Holder. “This is unacceptable and unworthy of a legal system that stands as an example for the world. I’m proud to say that today’s Justice Department is rising to the challenge to confront the obstacles facing indigent defense providers.”

Acting Associate Attorney General Tony West also delivered remarks about reclaiming Gideon’s petition at today’s ceremony.

“The constitutional right to counsel is a cornerstone of our criminal justice system,” said Acting Associate Attorney General Tony West. “It’s a principle that resides at the core of our concept of equal justice under the law, to which the Department of Justice remains deeply committed. Gideon reminds us that justice is as much a journey as it is a destination -- as much a process as it is an outcome -- and that we must give equal attention to both.”

At the event, Attorney General Holder discussed the importance of the Department’s Access to Justice Initiative, which he launched in 2010, to address the access to justice crisis in the criminal and civil justice system and help ensure that the justice system delivers outcomes that

are fair to everyone, regardless of wealth and status. Strengthening the indigent defense system is among the Initiative's priorities.

"Fair treatment and justice are the right of everyone, no matter what their income," said Deborah Leff, Acting Senior Counselor of the Access to Justice Initiative. "Clarence Earl Gideon won a victory in the U.S. Supreme Court for all Americans. It is now our responsibility to make sure that *Gideon's* promise is fulfilled."

The following Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) initiatives were a part of today's announcement:

- \$720,000 toward the upcoming grant solicitation, *Answering Gideon's Call: National Assistance to Improve the Effectiveness of Right to Counsel Services*, which will enable an organization to work directly with states and counties to improve their ability to provide quality representation to indigent defendants and implement innovative strategies.
- \$540,000 for two new jurisdictions, chosen by BJA, from last year's *Answering Gideon's Call* solicitation that will improve public defender and other indigent defense systems. The two new jurisdictions will join four jurisdictions, selected last year, to receive assistance with improving the capacity of indigent defense systems and increase the knowledge base about those systems.
- \$140,000 toward opportunities through BJA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) that will provide technical assistance to help jurisdictions meet their constitutional obligation and provide adequate representation to indigent defendants. Additionally, these funds will support an initiative that will collect data to help determine ineffective components of criminal justice systems, and enable stakeholders, including district attorneys and judges, to join public defenders in the call for more manageable caseloads and to ensure adequate time is devoted to their clients.

The following Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) solicitation was also part of today's announcement:

- \$400,000 for the Office of Justice Programs' Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency

Prevention competitive solicitation, *Juvenile Indigent Defense National Clearinghouse*. This award will support the improvement of juvenile indigent defense by providing a broad range of activities and services to improve the overall level of systemic advocacy, improving the quality of juvenile indigent defense representation and ensuring professional and ongoing technical support to the juvenile indigent defense bar.

For more information on the DOJ's Access to Justice Initiative, which works to strengthen and improve legal services for disadvantaged groups, please visit: [www.usdoj.gov/atj](http://www.usdoj.gov/atj) and <http://www.justice.gov/atj/gideon/>.

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