

Department of Justice

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Attorney General Holder Announces \$6.7 Million to Improve Legal Defense Services for the Poor

Attorney General Eric Holder today announced a total of \$6.7 million in grants to state and local criminal and civil legal services organizations across the country that provide legal defense services for the poor. These grants from the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) are part of the Justice Department's continuing efforts to improve indigent defense, which is often underfunded and understaffed, and to support training, mentoring, technical assistance, leadership development and research to enhance the effectiveness of adult, juvenile and tribal indigent defense practices.

"Everyone accused of a serious crime has the right to legal representation – even if she or he cannot afford it," said Attorney General Holder. "In recent years, the Department of Justice has made a commitment to improving the delivery, quality and availability of legal services for everyone in our country, including the very poor. Today's significant grant awards will help ensure America's criminal justice system is fair for every defendant, regardless of wealth."

"These awards, in conjunction with other efforts we're making to strengthen indigent defense, will fortify our public defender system and help us to meet our constitutional and moral obligation to administer a justice system that matches its demands for accountability with a commitment to fair, due process for poor defendants," said Associate Attorney General Tony West.

The FY 2013 grants, which promote cost-effective innovations to improve indigent defense, are administered by OJP's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

In FY 2013, BJA awarded a total of \$5.4 million. Of this amount, \$1 million was awarded to Gideon's Promise, a nonprofit organization that partners with public defender offices to build a community of attorneys committed to indigent defense reform. The funds will provide 25 new attorneys, including criminal defense lawyers working on tribal lands; establish training and leadership development for public defender trainers and supervisors and a semi-annual leadership summit for chief defenders; and create an advisory council to test measures and indicators showing the outcomes of providing effective counsel for all individuals.

Another \$90,000 was awarded to the states of Mississippi, Tennessee and Utah through BJA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC). Through NTTAC, BJA assists

jurisdictions with meeting their constitutional obligation to provide adequate representation to indigent defendants. Services include assessing the effectiveness of indigent defense systems, developing recommendations to ensure adequate and appropriate services are provided consistently throughout the state and determining appropriate measures for evaluating a defender services program.

The Measures for Justice (MFJ) initiative, which will provide a framework for using indicator metrics to evaluate local criminal justice systems against a national standard of excellence, received \$50,000. MFJ is conducting a pilot study in Milwaukee to examine the capacity and availability of resources at the local level and to determine where additional resources are needed within the criminal justice system.

Answering Gideon's Call, a national assistance program to improve the effectiveness of right to counsel services, received \$1.8 million of the \$5.4 million awarded by BJA. Of the \$1.8 million, Seattle University received \$450,000 to, in partnership with the Sixth Amendment Center (6AC), provide training and technical assistance to educate policymakers and aid the unfunded, legislatively established Office of the Public Defender in Mississippi and work with the Utah Judicial Council to develop standards assessing indigent defense services to help state legislatures meet their constitutional obligations. Another \$891,854 was awarded to the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL) to train public defenders and assigned counsel by regions to meet specific jurisdictional needs, such as helping them to better manage workloads. The remaining \$450,000 went to American University in partnership with the National Legal Aid and Defender Association to conduct a nationwide self-assessment evaluating whether state and local indigent defense providers comply with standards incorporated into the American Bar Association's Ten Principles, producing the first national empirical assessment of quality of indigent defense services.

Through its Encouraging Innovation: Field Initiated Programs, BJA awarded a total of \$619,700 to the San Francisco Public Defender's Office (\$395,231) to create the first local and nationally applicable checklist system to better guide attorneys through key moments in cases, ensuring competent representation and avoiding costly errors, and to NACDL (\$224,469) to develop pretrial release manuals for the defense bar and to provide onsite training and distance learning to give attorneys the necessary tools to engage in effective bail advocacy.

The remaining \$1.9 million of BJA's awarded \$5.4 million was provided through the Tribal Civil and Criminal Legal Assistance Initiative, designed to improve access to tribal justice systems and strengthen representation of indigent defendants in civil causes of action and in criminal cases under Indian tribes' jurisdiction. Of the \$1.9 million, the Tulalip Foundation received \$262,943 to provide regional, direct legal services to tribal members and \$121,779 to create a Criminal Conflict Counsel Program to train defense counsel and provide services to resolve cases. The Native American Rights Fund received \$715,944 to continue its partnership with the National

American Indian Legal Association and its 25 Indian Legal Services organizations providing civil legal representation to tribes and tribal members, and a second award of \$515,940 to provide indigent defense services to tribes and tribal members. The William Mitchell College of Law received \$283,394 to provide direct criminal defense services and legal assistance to up to seven tribes.

OJJDP made two FY 2013 awards, totaling more than \$1 million, to the National Juvenile Defender Center in the District of Columbia in order to improve juvenile indigent defense across the nation. The first award, in the amount of \$400,000, will provide juvenile defense counsel with customized technical assistance, training, and resources for policy development and reform. The second award, in the amount of \$695,000, will support the Juvenile Indigent Defense Special Initiative to reduce the overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system and to improve access to counsel and quality of representation for youth with unique needs, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth and those with disabilities, substance abuse behaviors and language access needs.

In FY 2013, NIJ awarded \$334,000 to the RAND Corp. in Pittsburgh, Pa., for an empirical evaluation of the holistic approach to individual defense, which includes the defense attorney as one member of an interdisciplinary team providing comprehensive services to address defendants' legal and social needs. The study will examine the effect of holistic defense on case outcomes such as plea status, verdict and sentence and disposition length and estimate the effectiveness of the holistic approach for subgroups of offenses or defendants.

More information about the Justice Department's Access to Justice Initiative, which works to strengthen and improve legal services for disadvantaged groups, is available at www.usdoj.gov/atj.

OJP, headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at www.ojp.gov.