



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2012
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV

ASG
(202) 514-2007
TTY (866) 544-5309

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT AWARDS NEARLY \$3 MILLION TO IMPROVE DEFENDER SERVICES FOR THE POOR

WASHINGTON – Acting Associate Attorney General Tony West today announced nearly \$3 million in grants to improve access to criminal legal aid services. In remarks during the “Access to Criminal Legal Aid Event” sponsored by the United Nations’ Permanent Mission of the Republic of South Africa, with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Legal Foundation, Associate Attorney General West also emphasized the United States’ support of the UN Guidelines and Principles on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems. The adoption of international guidelines and principles on access to criminal legal aid is an important milestone in the global development of fair and just systems of criminal justice.

“In addition to studying and funding successful public defender offices, we also know that standards can be instrumental in raising the level of representation for defenders across the country,” said Acting Associate Attorney General Tony West. “It is for this reason that the United States strongly supports the UN Guidelines and Principles on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems. The United States believes that these comprehensive guidelines and principles can be effective tools in strengthening and growing existing criminal legal aid systems throughout the world.”

In his remarks, West spoke about challenges that exist for indigent defendants around the globe in obtaining qualified counsel. Too often, when legal representation is available to the poor, it’s rendered less effective by insufficient resources, overwhelming caseloads, and inadequate oversight. The announcement of grants from the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) represent part of the Justice Department’s continuing efforts to ensure that all criminal defendants, regardless of ability to pay for an attorney, can be guaranteed their rights. The grants are administered by OJP’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

The following NIJ research grants were part of today’s announcement:

- \$628,000 to the National Center for State Courts, Va. and the American Bar Association, Washington, D.C. to undertake a comprehensive, empirical evaluation of the holistic approach to individual defense, in which the defense attorney is one member of an interdisciplinary team providing comprehensive services to address the defendant’s legal

and social needs. The study seeks to determine whether holistic defense leads to better legal outcomes and long-term improvements in the rates of recidivism and incarceration.

- \$510,953, to Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. and the University of Massachusetts Medical School, for researchers to examine multiple factors that influence the decision for juveniles in Massachusetts and Virginia, to waive their right to counsel, including but not limited to how a child's age affects his or her understanding of the role of counsel, and how the parent's knowledge and opinions of the legal system may affect their decision making.
- \$485,625 to the Vera Institute of Justice, N.Y. and Policy Research Associates, N.Y. to look at the resource constraints, practical challenges and ethical dilemmas faced by attorneys who represent indigent defendants with mental health disorders.

In addition, the grants from BJA will contribute to indigent defense knowledge and practice by testing approaches to providing quality indigent defense services using the *Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System* developed by the American Bar Association in 2002. These grants are:

- \$349,360 to Harris County Public Defender's Office, Texas to implement the "Future Appointed Counsel Training Program," which will establish a training, mentoring, and supervision program for new private lawyers based on national principles, state guidelines, and best practices from around the country.
- \$236,232 to Delaware's Criminal Justice Counsel to enhance its ability to provide quality representation to indigent defendants in cases where the state's public defender office is conflicted from representing an individual.
- \$346,963 to the Massachusetts Committee for Public Counsel Services and the Center for Court Innovation to implement a program to study and improve the way that data are collected and used to drive decision making.
- \$346,963 to the Michigan State Appellate Defender Office to support a project to help individuals who are convicted of offenses that may be eligible for community-based or non-prison sentences. A multiyear effort, the goal of the project is to improve the quality of indigent defense at sentencing, while reducing recidivism.

For more information about OJP and its bureaus please visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov.

For more information about DOJ's Access to Justice Initiative, which works to strengthen and improve legal services for disadvantaged groups, please visit www.usdoj.gov/atj.