IN FOCUS

Liz Ryan, Administrator

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Improving Youth Defense

Youth defenders play a critical role in ensuring fairness and equity for young people and their families, and in preserving public confidence in the juvenile justice system. However, factors such as excessive caseloads, inadequate compensation, and a lack of juvenile-specific training for lawyers may prevent youth from receiving effective legal counsel.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is addressing these challenges by funding efforts that improve the quality and availability of youth defense services. The funding helps to ensure that all youth involved with the juvenile justice system have equal access to specialized, well-resourced, youth defense counsel. OJJDP also supports specialized training for members of the youth defense bar, including public defenders and court-appointed counsel.

Program

Enhancing Youth Defense

This program helps grant recipients improve the quality and availability of legal services, respond to gaps in practice, and ensure that youth have access to resources that address the collateral consequences of justice system involvement.

Grant recipients may also use funds to train court personnel, improve juvenile courts' data collection efforts, analyze a jurisdiction's juvenile defense delivery system, and identify and implement successful strategies that are likely to prove replicable or scalable across jurisdictions.

Training and Technical Assistance

The Gault Center

Through training, technical assistance, advocacy, networking, and collaboration, **The Gault Center** helps build the capacity of juvenile defender offices and improve the quality of representation for justice-involved youth through specialized training, tools, resources, and intensive technical assistance. The center maintains a **clearinghouse of information** on juvenile defense and children's constitutional rights.

For More Information

Learn more about how OJJDP helps to ensure that all justice-involved youth receive the guarantees of due process and equal protection at **ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/juvenile-indigent-defense**.

Funding

Between fiscal years 2019 and 2021, OJJDP awarded nearly $6 million to improve the quality of youth defense nationwide.

- **Fiscal Year 2021—$2.2 million**
- **Fiscal Year 2020—$1.8 million**
- **Fiscal Year 2019—$1.8 million**

From the Field

Supported by an **OJJDP grant**, North Carolina's Administrative Office of the Courts, Office of Indigent Defense Services, and Office of the Juvenile Defender have partnered to implement a Juvenile Defense Equal Access Project in 28 counties across the state.

The program aims to increase the number of attorneys in rural areas who specialize in representing youth; increase defense attorneys' knowledge and skills so they can provide youth with consistent, high-quality legal representation; and support a multidisciplinary approach to address changes in court processes and procedures as a result of **Raise the Age** legislation.

Certified youth training immersion program trainers, public youth defenders, and other licensed professionals deliver live and online trainings with the goal of reducing recidivism, enhancing public safety, and increasing the likelihood of positive youth outcomes.

OJJDP

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

ojjdp.ojp.gov

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