



HUSL Defenders

The Howard University School of Law (“HUSL”) recognizes the critical need for well-equipped public defenders to serve under-resourced communities, uphold the principles of justice, and pursue equal justice. HUSL Defenders supports HUSL students who want to be public defenders and aims to increase the number of HUSL students seeking and obtaining public defender employment.

HUSL Defenders provides a cohort of HUSL students with programming, mentorship, resources, and professional development opportunities to support their pursuit of public defense employment. The program educates the cohort about the public defense profession, strengthens criminal litigation skills, and enhances the cohort’s competitiveness for public defense positions.

By fostering a culture of social responsibility, legal excellence, and client-centered advocacy, HUSL Defenders cultivates a new generation of public defenders committed to zealous representation for indigent clients and to promoting fairness and equity within the criminal system.

Goals

The goals of HUSL Defenders are to:

- 1) increase interest in public defense among HUSL students;
- 2) identify and support HUSL students who are strong candidates for public defense positions;
- 3) expand resources for HUSL students seeking public defense employment;
- 4) provide individualized support and professional development opportunities to HUSL students pursuing public defense careers;
- 5) build a community of HUSL students passionate about public defense; and
- 6) increase the number of HUSL students securing post-graduation public defense employment.

Key Components

The key components of HUSL Defenders are explained in this section.

1) *Timeline*

The HUSL Defenders program operates from September through April. The application and selection process occurs in early September, and programming begins in mid/late September.



2) *Programming*

HUSL Defenders hosts a series of educational and professional development programs and events that provide the cohort and other HUSL students with public defense-related information, guidance, training, and support. Programming topics include: public defense as a career; applying and interviewing for public defense positions; public defense as racial justice/civil rights work; client-centered lawyering; and various criminal defense litigation skills.

3) *Mentorship*

Each cohort member is paired with a mentor who is either a practicing public defender or an attorney who practiced as a public defender within the previous three years. Whenever possible, cohort members are matched with HUSL alumni. The mentors provide individualized guidance on pursuing public defender positions and practicing as a public defender.

4) *Mock Interviews*

Cohort members participate in mock interviews conducted by public defenders with experience hiring attorneys for public defender offices. The cohort receives feedback designed to strengthen their interviewing skills and competitiveness for employment opportunities.

5) *Networking*

To provide opportunities for building professional relationships, HUSL Defenders holds networking events that connect cohort members with current and former public defenders.

6) *Resume Review*

Current and former public defenders review cohort members' resumes and provide individualized feedback. HUSL Defenders also hosts a resume-review event open to all HUSL students interested in public defense as a career.

7) *Judicial Engagement*

HUSL Defenders hosts events featuring federal and state judges who discuss the role of public defenders and the importance of public defense within the criminal justice system.

8) *Externships/Internships/Summer Employment*

HUSL Defenders assists cohort members with securing externships, internships, summer employment, and post-graduation employment with public defender offices.



9) *Community Building*

HUSL Defenders convenes community-building meetings where cohort members share their experiences as public defense interns/externs/summer law clerks; share challenges and successes while pursuing public defense employment; and discuss other issues related to public defense. These meetings are cohort-lead and open to all HUSL students interested in public defense.

10) *Academic Advising*

HUSL Defenders advises cohort members on course selection and other academic opportunities that that will strengthen their ability to serve as public defenders.

Cohort Selection Process

Cohort membership is limited. Cohort members are selected through an application process that occurs early in the fall semester.

Selection criteria:

- 1) enrolled HUSL student in good standing with the school;
- 2) demonstrated passion for public defense;
- 3) professional, internship, externship, volunteering, or other relevant experience consistent with public defense;
- 4) a willingness to commit to HUSL Defenders programming and activities.

Contact

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