



As we celebrate Public Defense Day, we at NACDL want to take a moment to express our deepest appreciation for you and the work you do on behalf of your clients every day. Your unwavering commitment to ensuring that every person, regardless of income or circumstance, has access to a zealous advocate represents the best of our nation's principles.

**“The right of one charged with crime to counsel may not be deemed fundamental and essential to fair trials in some countries, but it is in ours.” – *Gideon v. Wainwright***

Today marks the anniversary of the landmark [Gideon v. Wainwright](#) decision, in which the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed that the right to counsel is a constitutional foundation to our adversarial system, recognizing

**“Lawyers in criminal courts are necessities, not luxuries.”**

While many of our federal, state, local, and tribal public defense systems continue to struggle to receive the funding, support, and independence needed to fulfill our mission, there is much to celebrate.

- Many states have increased compensation for assigned counsel and public defenders.
- Numerous new public defender offices have opened, and many others have been able to expand offerings for holistic representation.
- Innovations and commitment have helped grow access to counsel in rural communities.

And, of course, there are the myriad of victories each of you win every day -- when you stand up for those our society tries to marginalize and demonize, when you walk beside your clients in their toughest days so they are not left to navigate the legal system alone, when you speak up to advocate for a more just and humane legal system – not to mention those not guilty verdicts!

**“Of all the rights that an accused person has, the right to be represented by counsel is by far the most pervasive, for it affects his ability to assert any other rights he may have.” *U.S. v. Cronin*, 466 U.S. 648 (1984).**

Your tireless dedication and hard work in the face of those who question your commitment is a true testament to your role as a guardian of democracy, guaranteeing that justice is not reserved for only those who can afford it.

Your compassion and resilience are a beacon of humanity in an inhumane system.

Your creativity and skill shine in your innovative legal arguments, impactful storytelling, and resourcefulness to leverage community resources to support client needs.

**“[The assistance of counsel] is one of the safeguards of the Sixth Amendment deemed necessary to insure fundamental human rights of life and liberty.”** -- *Johnson v. Zerbst*, 304 U. S. 458, 462 (1938)

Public defenders and private defense attorneys alike stand on the frontlines every day, changing hearts, minds, and lives. For so many defendants and their families you are a ray of light in the darkest of times.

### **Standing with You in the Fight**

While the challenges in public defense remain substantial, NACDL is committed to supporting both institutional public defenders and court-appointed attorneys on a variety of fronts. Through [litigation](#), [legislative advocacy](#), and [public education](#), we continue to push for systemic reforms – calling for increased public defense funding, meaningful assigned counsel rates, reasonable workload standards, and protecting public defense independence. And by providing support through our [public defense scholarship program](#), our [amicus efforts](#), our [Fourth Amendment Center](#), and our training and resources, NACDL remains committed to ensuring that you are never alone in this critical fight.

The long hours, heavy caseloads, and often limited resources can be daunting. Yet, you continue to persevere, driven by a profound sense of duty and a passion for justice. Your resilience in the face of these obstacles is nothing short of inspiring.

Today we want to say thank you for your unwavering support and for the sacrifices you make. Your work is invaluable, and your dedication does not go unnoticed. Please know that your efforts are deeply appreciated and that you are making a difference in the lives of so many.

Yours in solidarity,

*Travis Finck*  
*Melanie Foote*  
*Eugene Oliver*  
Co-Chairs, NACDL Public Defense Committee

***P.S. Want to do more to support public defense? [Get involved](#), [Spread the word](#), and [Donate today!](#)***