2025 ANNUAL REPORT

MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

JUSTICE, FAIRNESS, AND DIGINITY *for all*























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Mission

We are the statewide advocates for securing justice, protecting civil rights, and preserving liberty. We have been amplifying the voices of communities across Maryland since 1972. Our work spans criminal, juvenile, parental defense, and involuntary commitment proceedings.

Letter from the Public Defender



Greetings,
As I reflect on this transformative year, I am moved by the profound progress we have made at the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD) in our unwavering pursuit of justice and equity.

The release of the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) report marks a watershed moment, not just for MOPD, but for everyone who believes our legal system must serve all people fairly. This groundbreaking analysis exposes, with unprecedented clarity, how race and economic status continue to determine outcomes in our courts. These findings are not merely statistics but represent real people, real families, and real communities who have been failed by inequitable systems. This data now drives everything we do, from how we allocate resources to how we train our staff to how we advocate for policy reform.

Our mission has always encompassed three fundamental imperatives: we advocate zealously for our clients, we legislate for systemic change, and we educate our communities about justice. This year, we lived that mission through landmark achievements that will reverberate for generations.

We fought for and won Maryland's Second Look law, opening doors for individuals serving lengthy sentences to have their cases reconsidered. This is not just a procedural change but important recognition that people can grow, transform, and deserve a second chance at redemption.

We expanded our reach into communities through our social media Defense Desk and "In Defense of Us" events, creating spaces where residents, advocates, and legal professionals engage in honest dialogue about public defense and reform. These conversations matter by breaking down barriers and building trust. They remind us that justice is everyone's concern.

Perhaps most significantly, we launched the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic (IPC) at Maryland Carey Law, a historic expansion that doubles our state's capacity to investigate wrongful convictions. For those who have exhausted every appeal but still proclaim their innocence, we are now a beacon of hope. We are saying clearly: we believe in getting it right, no matter how long it takes.

None of this would be possible without the extraordinary people of MOPD. Our attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and core staff carry this mission forward every single day. You carry heavy workloads. You stand beside people in their darkest hours. You transform despair into dignity. Your dedication does not just defend individuals. It defends the promise of equal justice itself.

As we move forward, our commitment deepens. We will continue our zealous advocacy for every client while simultaneously dismantling the systemic barriers that deny justice to far too many. We will build a system not as it is, but as it must be. We will create a system that is more just, more equitable, and truly worthy of public trust. The work continues. The stakes remain high and we will not rest.

Regards,

Natasha M. Dartigue, Esq.
Maryland Public Defender

Leadership

Administration

Public Defender
Natasha M. Dartigue

Deputy Public Defender
Keith Lotridge

Chief of Staff
Hannibal Kemerer

Chief Financial Officer
Thaddaeus Hubbard

Chief Human Resources Officer
Cynthia Knight

Chief Information Officer
Mark Six

Director of General Administration
Tammy Jarnagin

General Counsel
Matthew Fraling

Divisions

APPELLATE
Chief, Brian Zavin
Deputy, Amy Brennan

DECARCERATION INITIATIVE
Director, Brian Saccenti

FORENSICS
Chief, Jeffrey Gilleran

FORENSICS MENTAL HEALTH
Director, Kimberlee Watts

IMMIGRATION
Director, Stephanie Wolf

JUVENILE PROTECTION
Chief, Deborah St. Jean

MAJOR CRIMES & COMPLEX LITIGATION
Chief, Katy O'Donnell

MENTAL HEALTH
Chief, Carroll McCabe

PARENTAL DEFENSE
Chief, Nena Villamar
Deputy, Hayley Lichterman

POST CONVICTION
Chief, Initia Lettau
Deputy, Nayda Kuachusri

SOCIAL WORK
Director, Terri Collins-Green

Leadership

Districts

DISTRICT 1 - BALTIMORE CITY
District Public Defender,
Marguerite Lanaux
Deputy, Alycia Capozello

DISTRICT 2 – DORCHESTER, SOMERSET, WICOMICO, WORCESTER
District Public Defender,
Chasity Simpson
Deputy, Wesley Moore

DISTRICT 3 — CAROLINE, CECIL, KENT, QUEEN ANNE'S, TALBOT
District Public Defender,
Tamara Stofa
Deputy, Nicole Pallia

DISTRICT 4 – CALVERT, CHARLES, ST. MARY'S
District Public Defender,
Michele Harewood
Deputy, Amber Wetzel

DISTRICT 5 – PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
Acting District Public Defender,
Rhonda Hudson Fowler

DISTRICT 6 – MONTGOMERY COUNTY
District Public Defender,
Sean Mukherjee
Deputy, Elizabeth Zoulias

DISTRICT 7 – ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY
District Public Defender,
Elizabeth Palan
Deputy, Ellen Goodman Duffy

DISTRICT 8 – BALTIMORE COUNTY
District Public Defender,
James Dills
Deputy, Gayle Robinson

DISTRICT 9 – HARFORD COUNTY
District Public Defender,
John Janowich
Deputy, Andrew Geraghty

DISTRICT 10 – CARROLL, HOWARD
District Public Defender,
Joshua Speert
Deputy, Laura Kozlowski

DISTRICT 11 – FREDERICK, WASHINGTON
District Public Defender,
Angela Oetting
Deputy, Thomas Robins

DISTRICT 12 – ALLEGANY, GARRETT
District Public Defender,
Jessica Colwell
Deputy, David Schram

Connecting Communities & Changing Narratives

Outreach Events
🤝 20 Events Hosted

- *Panels on justice policy in 6 counties + Baltimore City*
- *Expungement clinics & resource fairs*
- *Community volunteer activities*

🌟 Participated in 12+ Partner Events

Media & Appearances

📢 19 Speaking Engagements

📰 30+ Articles quoting MOPD

🎙️ 5 Radio shows / podcasts

✍️ 3 Op-Eds published

Digital Reach (Instagram + Facebook)

***6K** Content Interactions*
***136.1K** Reach*



Community education is the first line of defense against injustice.

Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative

In an unprecedented partnership, the Public Defender and Attorney General joined forces to create the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC), addressing the systemic issues driving Maryland's elevated incarceration rates and racial disparities in the criminal legal system. The collaborative brings together more than 40 stakeholders, including community leaders, government officials, private sector representatives, and academic experts.

MEJC released 18 recommendations in December 2024, which were compiled into a comprehensive report published in March 2025. Through this report and subsequent advocacy efforts, MEJC members played a crucial role in advancing Second Look legislation and achieving reforms to geriatric and medical parole policies. These legislative victories represent a significant step toward a more equitable justice system, offering pathways to release for individuals who have demonstrated rehabilitation and those whose continued incarceration no longer serves public safety.

In Defense of Us

In April, the Public Defender launched In Defense of Us, a groundbreaking community event series that creates space for meaningful dialogue on critical issues affecting Maryland residents. Each month, MOPD convenes stakeholders for in-depth briefings that examine pressing and emerging challenges within the legal system—exploring how these issues ripple through the lives of individuals, families, and communities across Maryland. By bridging the gap between the justice system and the public it serves, In Defense of Us empowers residents with knowledge and fosters collective action toward systemic change.

Accessibility and community engagement are at the heart of the series. Briefings take place directly in the neighborhoods most affected by these issues and are livestreamed to ensure broad participation. Each session features a diverse panel of subject matter experts and local leaders who provide essential context and facilitate dynamic discussions that center community voices and lived experiences.

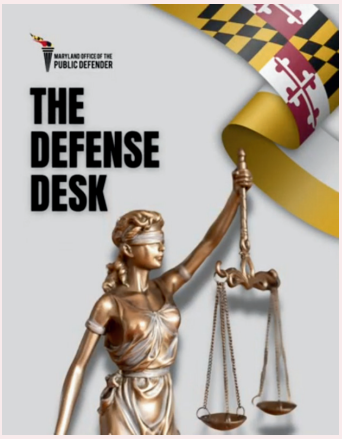
The inaugural event tackled reentry barriers facing women and included a resource fair connecting attendees with vital services. Subsequent briefings have examined the community's essential role in crime reduction and analyzed the real-world implications of criminal justice reforms enacted during the 2025 legislative session. This evolving series continues to address the most urgent justice issues facing Marylanders today.



Watch 2025 Legislative Briefings http://bit.ly/4muicyT

The Defense Desk

In July 2025, MOPD launched the Defense Desk, a digital platform that extends the reach of the *In Defense of Us* series through accessible, bite-sized content. These online video shorts demystify the multifaceted work of public defense while delivering essential know-your-rights information and quick facts on critical topics including youth justice, family preservation, policing and mental health advocacy. By meeting people where they are in the digital space, the Defense Desk breaks down complex legal concepts into actionable knowledge that empowers Maryland residents to navigate and understand the systems affecting their lives.



Client-Centered: Peer Support Unit

People with lived experience in the legal system enhance our multidisciplinary approach and strengthen the legal team. Since 2020, MOPD has engaged Certified Peer Recovery Specialists to work with clients through the life of their case – helping to develop and implement service plans, ensuring a continuum of community-based services, providing crisis intervention and support, and serving as living proof that positive change is possible. This emerging field recognizes the unique mentorship and credibility that someone who has "been there" can provide.

In Fiscal Year 2025, MOPD's peer specialists served more than 1,100 clients, connecting them to treatment programs, social service resources, and financial assistance; and providing ongoing support, advocacy and education on harm reduction and recovery pathways. Clients working with our peer support unit have a lower recidivism rate, better legal outcomes, and report better wellbeing after peer involvement. The reduced incarceration and legal involvement in turn minimizes the negative effects of the opioid abuse crisis for the individuals and families from impoverished communities who are most impacted by system involvement.

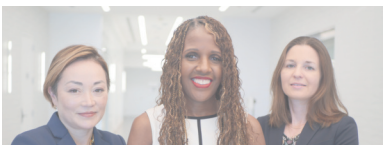
Expanding Our Reach: MOPD Innocence Project Clinic

Wrongful convictions represent one of the justice system's most devastating failures, often compounded by police or prosecutorial misconduct. These miscarriages of justice, condemn innocent people to decades behind bars. MOPD fights relentlessly to secure exoneration and relief for those imprisoned for crimes they did not commit. Since 2008, MOPD has partnered with the University of Baltimore Law School to operate the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic (IPC), which has successfully obtained sentence reductions or exonerations for 20 individuals who steadfastly maintained their innocence.

Building on this proven track record, MOPD has set a transformative expansion of exoneration work across Maryland by extending this critical partnership to include the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. The launch of the new MOPD IPC at Maryland Carey Law in August 2025, effectively doubles the state's capacity to investigate and remedy wrongful convictions.

Beyond freeing the innocent, these clinics are cultivating the next generation of justice-minded attorneys. Law students gain hands-on experience in rigorous advocacy while confronting the systemic disparities that enable wrongful convictions. They leave equipped with technical skills, a deep understanding of how injustice takes place, and the determination to uproot it throughout their legal careers. Through these partnerships, MOPD is simultaneously expanding immediate client services and investing in long-term systemic change.






Leading with Equity: Pauli Murray Fellowship Program

MOPD is dismantling barriers to the legal profession by cultivating attorneys from groups traditionally underrepresented in law. Through the Pauli Murray Diversity Leadership Initiative, established in partnership with the Association for the Public Defender of Maryland, MOPD is driving change across three strategic areas: paid summer fellowships that provide law students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds with hands-on public defense experience; community engagement and cultural competency programming that strengthens attorneys' ability to serve diverse clients; and enhanced recruitment efforts to ensure MOPD's workforce mirrors the communities it serves. Through this multifaceted approach, the Initiative is strengthening both the profession and the quality of justice delivered across Maryland.

The Pauli Murray Diversity Leadership Fellowship is a highly selective program that immerses law students in the realities of public defense. Fellows become integral members of MOPD's collaborative teams, working alongside seasoned public defenders to deliver zealous, client-centered representation. This immersive experience goes beyond traditional legal internships—fellows contribute to active cases, witness the impact of systemic inequities firsthand, and develop the skills and conviction needed for careers in public service. MOPD has drawn exceptional talent from George Washington Law School, Howard University School of Law, University of Baltimore School of Law, and University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, creating a network of future advocates committed to transforming the justice system.

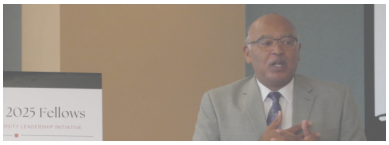
United in our Mission: Forensic Mental Health Division

Superior representation demands specialized expertise. MOPD's Forensic Mental Health Division ensures that clients with complex mental health needs receive defense strategies tailored to their unique circumstances. These attorneys bring specialized training in mental illness and intellectual disabilities, combining clinical knowledge with legal acumen and an unwavering commitment to ensuring the legal system does the least amount of harm to their clients. By recognizing that justice cannot be one-size-fits-all, MOPD advocates for interventions that address underlying conditions rather than simply processing cases through a system not designed for their clients' realities.

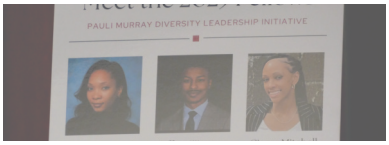
In FY2025, the Forensic Mental Health Division provided support in 926 cases. This includes: on-call litigation advice; assistance in identifying defenses, collecting mitigation evidence, and developing strategies; links to psychologists and psychiatrists for forensic mental health evaluations and related expertise; technical support with discovery and mental health records review; and direct participation in litigation.

Beyond direct representation, the Forensic Mental Health Division drives systemic change that reaches far beyond individual cases. The team leads statewide training sessions, serves on behavioral health commissions, and spearheads policy reforms—transforming how Maryland's legal system treats people at the intersection of mental health and criminal justice.









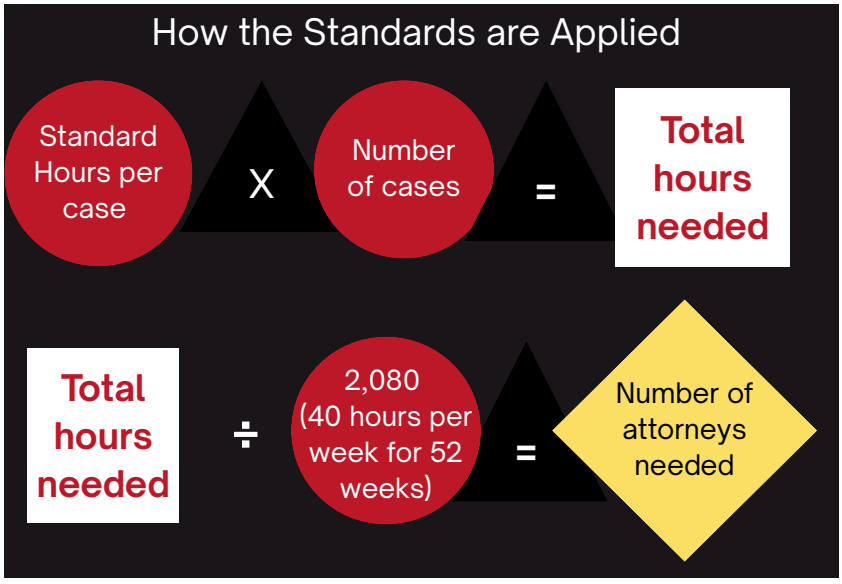
Transparency in Action

Assessing Workloads to Ensure Justice

Effective representation depends on adequate staffing to ensure every client receives the attention and expertise their case demands. Workload standards establish the baseline personnel needs required to fulfill Sixth Amendment guarantees and ethical obligations for competent counsel.

Modern standards must reflect today's practice realities. Electronic filing systems, body-worn camera footage, and extensive digital discovery have exponentially increased case preparation time. The National Public Defense Workload Study, released in September 2023, provides evidence-based benchmarks for the hours attorneys need to devote to specific case types. These standards are designed to prevent crushing caseloads and ensure meaningful representation for every client.

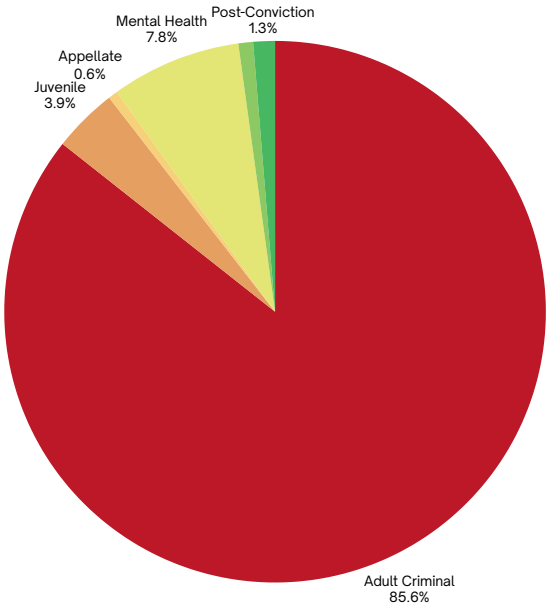
The National Standards focus exclusively on attorneys needed for adult criminal trial practice. Standards developed in 2022 in Oregon and Mexico relied on the same experts and methodology as the national standards and provide measures for juvenile (OR), appellate (NM), and parental defense (OR) practice areas. In 2024, Maine established standards for post-conviction and mental health practice areas. We rely on these standards for these areas of practice.



Coming in FY26: Maryland standards

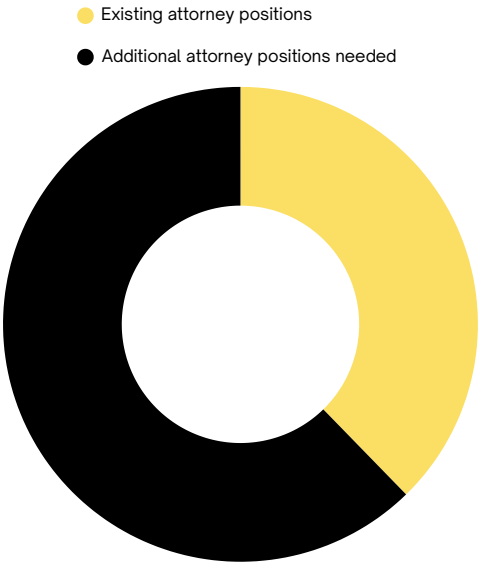
MOPD is currently conducting its own workload study, in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, a leading expert in workload standards and a partner in the National Public Defense Workload Study. At the time of publication, a timekeeping study was underway to get a snapshot of current time expended for the various responsibilities in the different case types. A Delphi study will be conducted at the conclusion of the timekeeping study to gain qualitative input on the amount of time spent versus the time that should be allotted. We anticipate relying on the results of the study in the Fiscal Year 2026 annual report.

Maryland's Holistic Practice

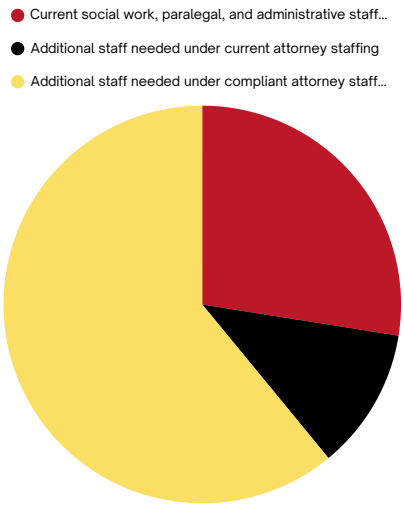


Assistant public defenders represented MOPD clients in 116,330 cases across our six practice areas. Adult criminal defense practice constituted the vast majority of these cases.

Adult Criminal: 99,622 cases
Parental Defense: 1,016 cases
Post-Conviction: 1,507 cases
Mental Health: 9,045 cases
Juvenile: 4,497 cases
Appellate: 643 cases



To comply with the best available standards for each practice area, MOPD would need 1,649 assistant public defenders. There are currently only 623 attorney positions.



To meet the recommended ratios for social work, paralegal, and administrative support staff at the current level of attorney staffing, MOPD would need 107 additional non-attorney positions, for a total of 362 positions. If MOPD's attorney staff complied with the standards, another 565 positions would be needed (for a total of 927 non-attorney staff).

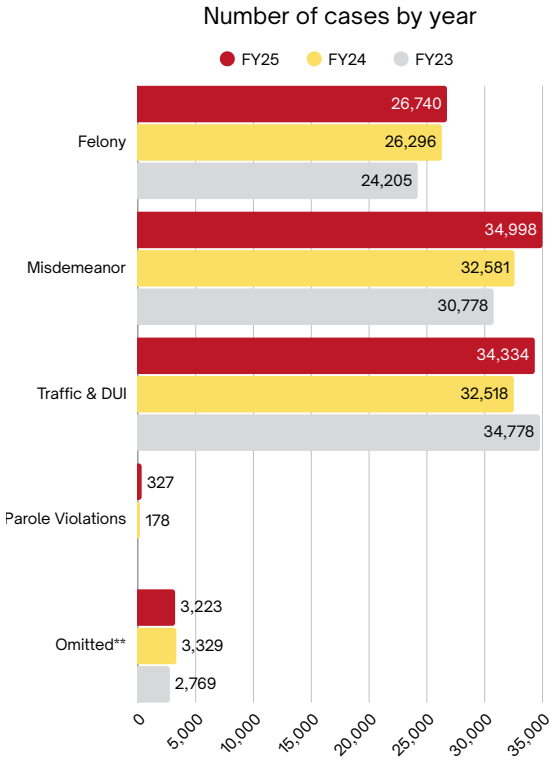
District Operations
Adult Criminal Practice

Criminal practice workloads are measured by the total time needed for the most serious charge in each case. The complexity of the underlying circumstances combined with level of sentencing exposure risk results in more serious felonies requiring more dedicated time than lower level misdemeanors and traffic cases.

District Court proceedings that transfer to Circuit Court merge into one case, with the two proceedings accounted for together. In counting the number of adult criminal cases, the districtcourt matter was excluded whenever it resulted in a circuit court matter.
MOPD attorneys represented more clients in criminal cases in Fiscal Year 2025 than in each of the prior two fiscal years (99,622 in FY25, 94,902 in FY24 vs. 92,530 in FY23).

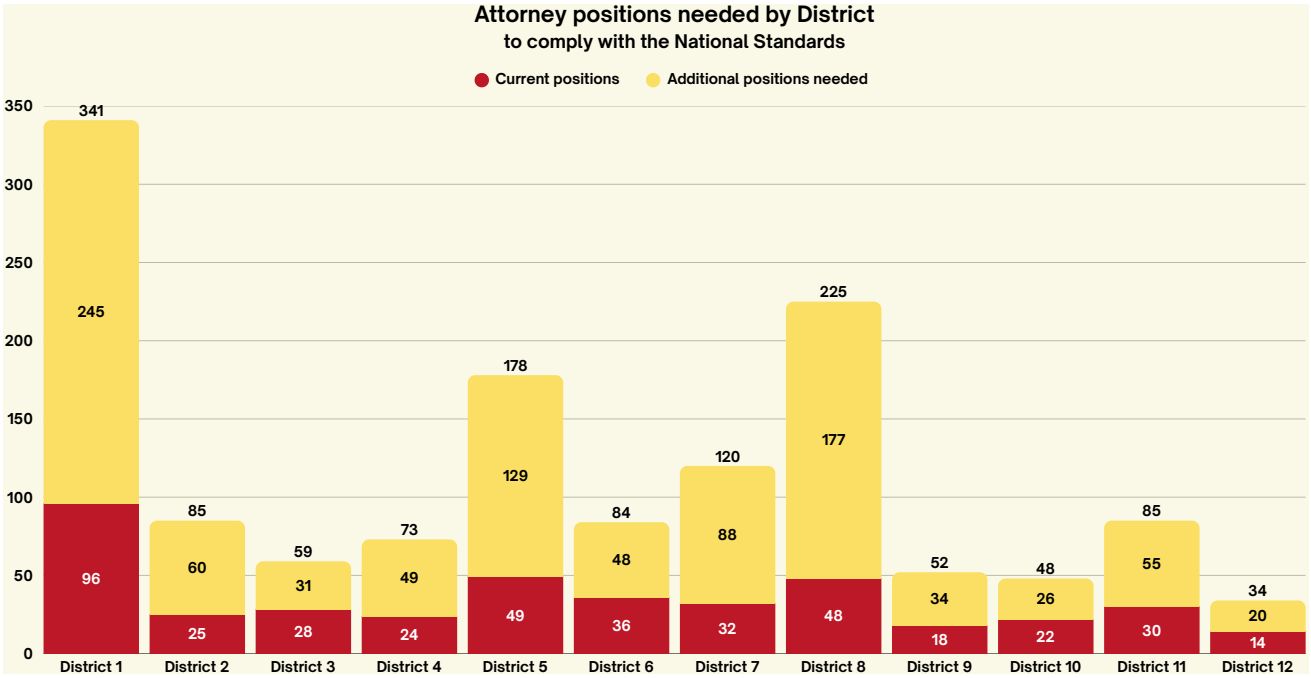
Charge type	New cases	Hours per case	Total hours	Attorneys needed
Incarcerable traffic*	29,979	2	59,958	29
VOP	327	13.5	4,415	2
Misdemeanor low	19,821	13.8	273,530	132
Misdemeanor high	15,177	22.3	338,447	163
DUI Low	4,271	19	81,149	39
DUI High	84	33	2,772	1
Felony Mid	16,433	57	936,681	450
Felony High other	8,944	99	885,456	426
Felony High Sex	525	167	87,675	42
Felony High Murder	838	248	207,824	100
TOTAL	**99,622**			**1,384**

* The National Standards did not include incarcerable traffic cases. MOPD estimated that each of these matters averages two hours of attorney time.

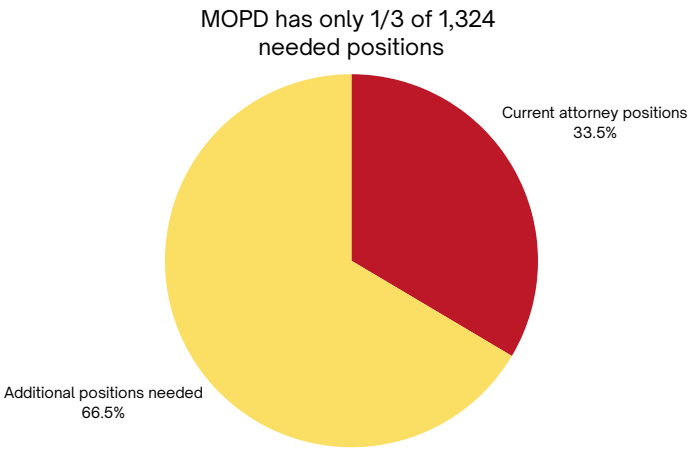


** Cases in MOPD's case management system that did not clearly identify an incarcerable charge as the highest count were omitted from the calculations.

To comply with the National Standards, MOPD would need a total of 1,384 attorneys for its adult criminal practice. There are currently 464 assistant public defender positions designated for adult criminal practice statewide, therefore requiring 920 additional positions to achieve standards compliance.



Every district's workload is above standards, with attorneys managing caseloads that are two to three times what is recommended. Baltimore County (District 8) has less than one-fourth the staffing needed to comply with the National Standards.



Total number of criminal proceedings represented by MOPD attorneys

District Court -- 94,391

- 14,073 transferred to Circuit Court

Circuit Court -- 19,304

Children Charged as Adults

Maryland prosecutes children as adults at the nation's second-highest rate. The law automatically charges 16-year-olds as adults for any of 32 crimes, while four offenses trigger automatic adult prosecution for children as young as 14. State's Attorneys can also petition to transfer additional cases from juvenile to criminal court, further expanding the reach of adult prosecution for youth.

	Children charged as adults
District 1	223
District 2	34
District 3	15
District 4	33
District 5	137
District 6	52
District 7	28
District 8	92
District 9	19
District 10	24
District 11	18
District 12	4
TOTAL	679

The number of children charged as an adult increased in FY25 (798) compared to FY24 (618), despite a record decrease in violent crime in Baltimore City. Representation in these cases is among the most resource intensive proceedings. Best practice generally encourages a legal team with two defense attorneys – one who specializes in juvenile practice and one with adult felony expertise -- and a social worker to prepare mitigation and release plans. An outside psychologist is also often required to evaluate current developmental capacity, with an average cost of $4,000 per client.

MOPD's workload analysis incorporates children charged as adults in its adult criminal practice calculations, as the National Standards (which do not include juvenile court representation) do not account for these hearings. However, Oregon's juvenile standards estimate that these types of cases require 261.48 hours/per case, higher than the amount for even the most serious felony under the National Standards. Under this analysis, MOPD would need 85 attorneys exclusively for representing children charged as adults statewide.

END THE AUTOMATIC CHARGING OF CHILDREN AS ADULTS

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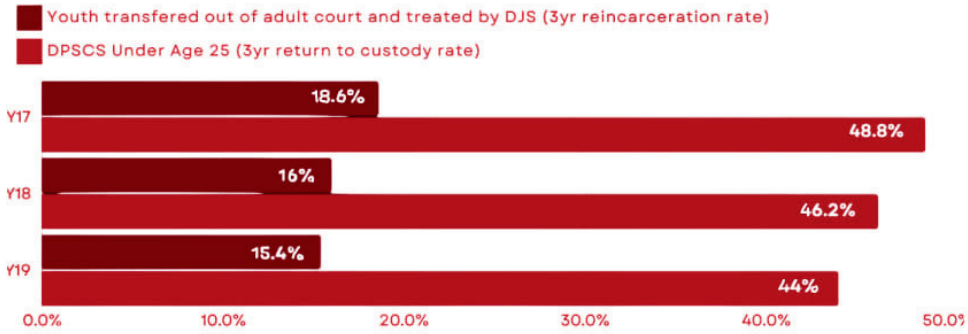
Maryland sends more children aged 14-17 to adult court automatically than any other state except Alabama.

In 6 states– California, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Oregon, & Texas–all youth cases begin in juvenile courts.

Black children make up 31% of Maryland's population but 81% of all children charged as adults. WAMU found "Maryland judges use 'arbitrary,' 'horrendous' reasons to keep teens in adult court"

Charging children automatically as adults is unjust, inefficient, and ineffective.

REINCARCERATION RATES ARE HIGHER FOR CHILDREN IN THE ADULT SYSTEM



In 2022, just 12% of teenagers tried as adults were convicted.

All 871 teens automatically charged as adults faced lengthy and expensive processes to decide if their cases would stay in adult court, with average wait times 103 days longer than those in the juvenile system. This is inefficient and results in backlogs and wasted resources of Maryland's courts, Department of Juvenile Services, public defenders, and prosecutors.

Sources: mgaleg.maryland.gov/meeting_material/2023/jpr%20-%20133190439744448914%20-%20Briefing%20Materials.pdf
djs.maryland.gov/Documents/DRG/Data_Resource_Guide_FY2022.pdf 50.0%
dpscs.maryland.gov/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/2022_p157_DPSCS_Recividism%20Report.pdf

Juvenile Practice

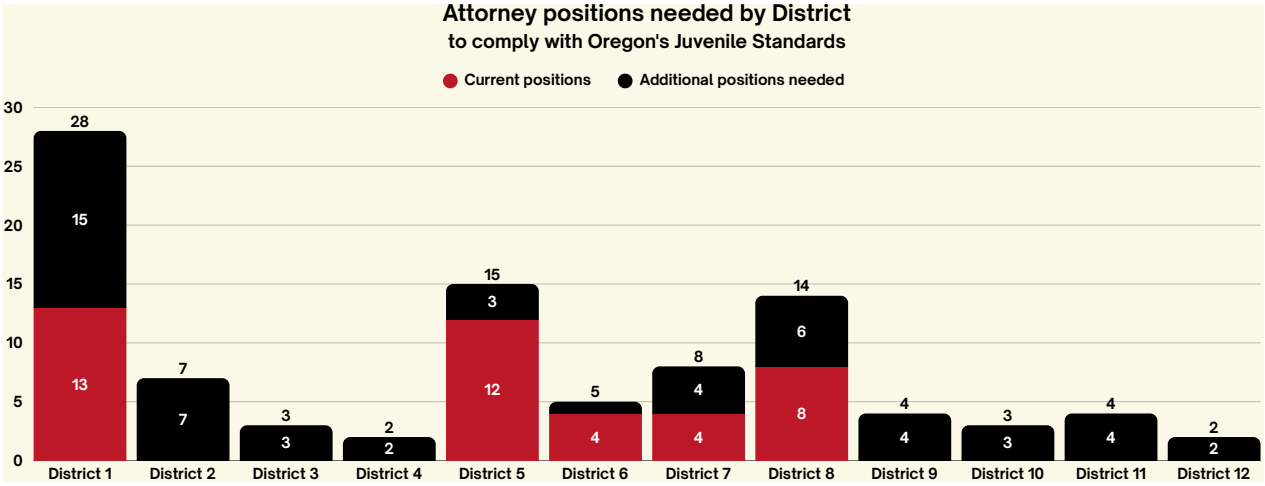
While the National Standards focused exclusively on adult practice, a 2022 workload study in Oregon conducted by co-authors of the National Standards included delinquency representation. The Oregon standards use the same framework and similar charge classifications as the National Standards.

To comply with the Oregon Standards, MOPD would need a total of 103 dedicated juvenile public defenders. There are currently 42 assistant public defender positions designated for juvenile practice statewide (not including hybrid attorneys in rural jurisdictions), therefore requiring 61 additional positions to achieve standards compliance.

Charge type	New cases	Hours per charge	Total hours	Attorneys needed
Misdemeanor & Traffic*	1,108	35.65	39,500	19
Mid-Felony & DUI	2,329	43.79	101,987	49
High Felony	1,060	68.50	72,610	35
TOTAL	**4,497**			**103**

* Driving-related charges were not included in the standards, and in juvenile cases often result in more extensive monitoring and additional proceedings. As a result, incarcerable traffic cases were included in the misdemeanor category.

The number of juvenile cases has steadily increased each of the last two years, from 2,818 cases juvenile cases in FY23 to 3,736 in FY24 to 4,663 in FY25. The most dramatic increase occurred in Baltimore City, where juvenile prosecutions have more than doubled from 499 in FY23 to 846 in FY24 to 1,271 in FY25, despite dramatic decreases in the city's crime rate.



*Rural districts do not have dedicated juvenile defenders. Rather, assistant public defenders hold a hybrid caseload of adult and child clients. As these positions were included in the adult standards, they are not factored in here.

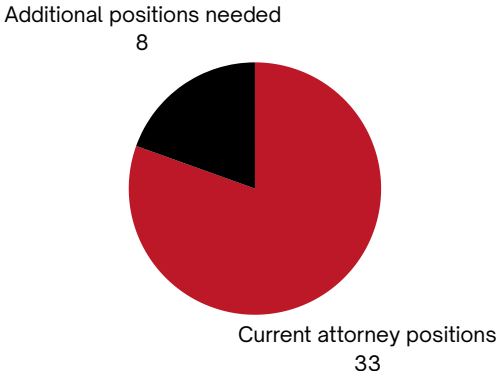
Statewide Divisions

MOPD's practice extends to representing clients on appeal, in post-conviction proceedings, in cases where the state takes custody of their children, and in challenges to involuntary commitment. While the National Standards did not address these areas of law, other public defender offices that have conducted their own workload study relying on the same methodology have. To allow for a similar analysis of our divisions, MOPD relied upon New Mexico standards for appellate practice, Oregon standards for parental defense, and Maine standards for mental health and post-conviction.

Appellate Practice

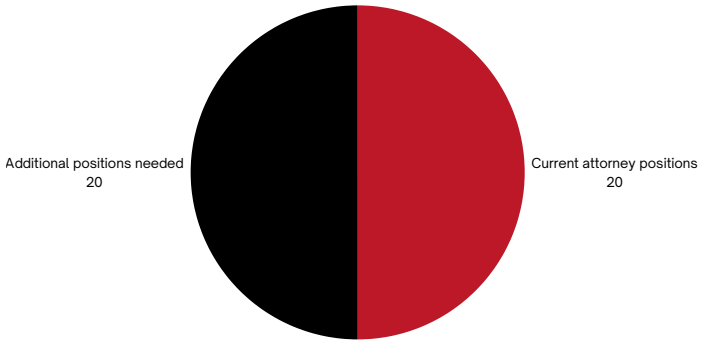
The best measure for the time needed to provide appellate representation is the length of the record to be reviewed. New Mexico's 2022 standards distinguish the different workload needs based on the number of transcript pages. The number of new Appellate Court cases slightly decreased (649 in FY24; 631 in FY25), while the number of Supreme Court cases increased (9 in FY24; 12 in FY25).

MOPD needs 41 attorneys to meet the New Mexico standards for appellate practice. There are currently 33 assistant public defender positions designated for the Appellate Division, requiring an additional 8 positions to achieve standards compliance.



Appeal type	New appeals	Hours per case	Total hours	Attorneys needed
Appellate Court: Record under 250 pages	147	89.87	13,211	6
Appellate Court: Record 250-750 pages	312	123.85	38,641	19
Appellate Court: Record 751-1,500 pages	127	161.14	20,465	10
Appellate Court: Record over 1,500 pages	45	232.07	10,443	5
Supreme Court	12	191.37	2,296	1
TOTAL	**643**		85,056	**41**

*There were 78 appeals in which the number of record pages was not known. MOPD assumed that the records in these cases averaged 500 pages.



MOPD needs 40 attorneys to represent clients involuntarily admitted to a psychiatric hospital to comply with the best available (Maine) Standards. There are 20 assistant public defender positions designated for the Mental Health Division, requiring an additional 20 positions to achieve standards compliance.

Mental Health

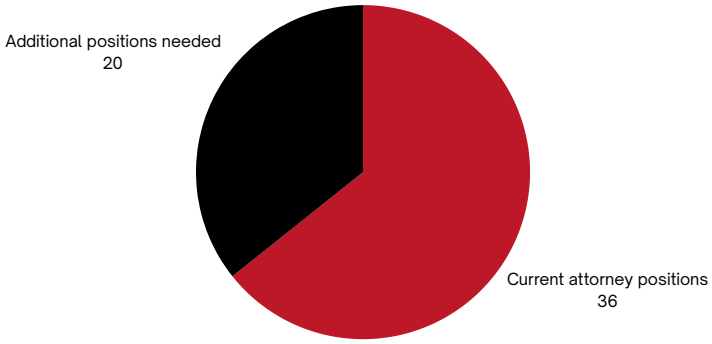
MOPD's Mental Health Division champions the liberty and self-determination of individuals confined in public and private mental health facilities across the state.

This is the first year with standards accounting for modern mental health practice. MOPD previously relied on 2005 Standards that estimated a mere 2.4 hours per client, which did not account for the number of proceedings currently required or the extent of effort needed to ethically represent committed individuals. The Maine standards do not fully distinguish between the variety of proceedings where mental health division attorneys provide representation, but offer a more accurate snapshot.

New cases	Hours per case	Total hours	Attorneys needed
9,045	9.25	83,666	40

Neither the standards nor MOPD's current practice account for 2024 CH 704, which requires coerced outpatient treatment effective July 1, 2026. As the implementation begins, the Mental Health Division will have increased responsibilities monitoring the program and providing representation where needed.

M***OPD needs 56 parental defense attorneys to comply with the best available (Oregon) Standards.*** There are currently 36 assistant public defender positions designated for parental defense, therefore requiring an additional 20 positions to achieve standards compliance.



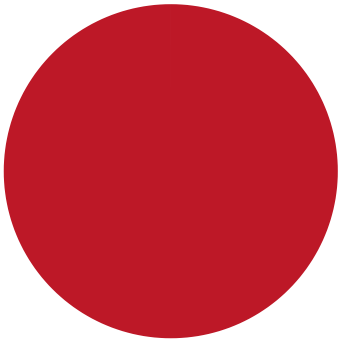
Parental Defense

The Oregon Standards, relied upon for juvenile practice, are also the best available standards for parental defense and distinguish between the two primary types of proceedings – termination of parental rights (TPR) and dependency (Child in Need of Assistance, or CINA).

The number of cases initiated increased from last year in both categories: there was a 40% rise in TPR petitions (81 in FY24; 137 in FY25); and a 10% rise in CINA proceedings (790 in FY24; 879 in FY25).

Proceeding type	New cases	Hours per case	Total hours	Attorneys needed
Termination of Parental Rights	137	104.92	14,374	7
Dependency (CINA)	879	115.62	101,630	49
TOTAL	**1,016**		116,004	**56**

Post-Conviction



Current attorney positions
28

The Post-Conviction Division is the only practice area within the best available (Maine) workload standards. The number of post-conviction matters decreased from FY24 (1,611) to FY25 (1,522).

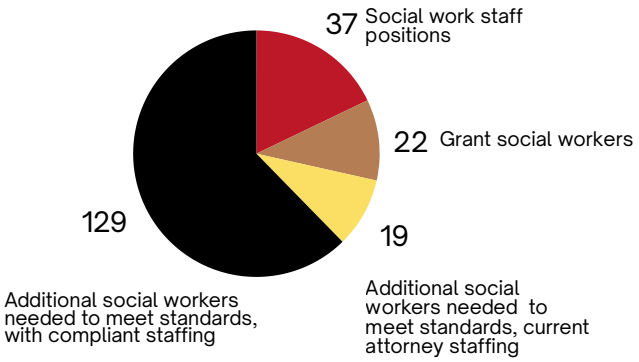
Post-conviction practice includes mechanisms for challenging a conviction (habeas corpus, post-conviction petition, motion to reopen, writ of error coram nobis, writ of actual innocence), seeking a sentence modification (illegal sentence, motion for modification, juvenile restoration act, sentencing review, resentencing hearing), or defending against a parole revocation. These proceedings often require extensive records review; investigations and interviews; visits and calls with clients who are incarcerated several hours away; developing strategies and plans; and preparing and participating in all levels of litigation.

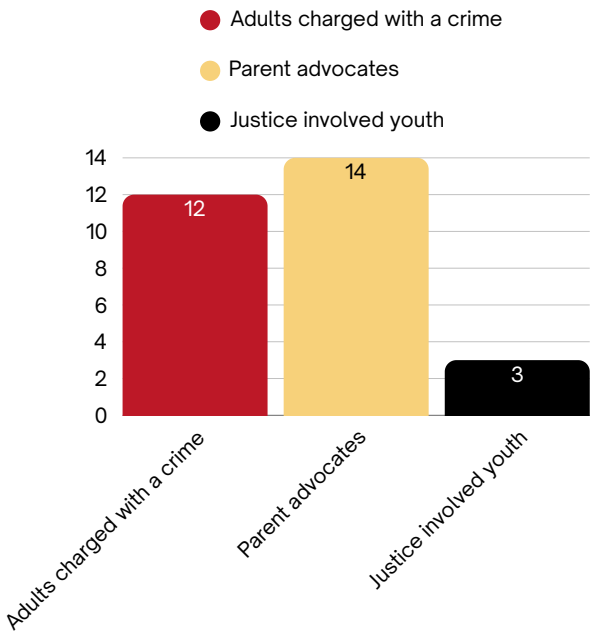
The Maine standards were developed under a slightly different post-conviction scheme. Most notably, Maine post-conviction is not limited to people who are incarcerated – including consideration of less serious charges and simpler allegations that require less time to prepare and litigate. Despite their limitations, however, the Maine Standards are the best available measure for post-conviction workloads. MOPD previously relied on standards developed in 2005 that did not account for many of the proceedings required today or the developments in forensic technology, such as more sophisticated DNA testing and an increased prevalence of videos and other eDiscovery.

Proceeding type	New cases	Hours per case	Total hours	Attorneys needed
Parole Revocation	338	9.25	3,127	2
Sentence modification/review (including JuvRA, 8-505/8-507)	202	22.2	4,484	2
Post-conviction review	967	44.4	49,936	21
TOTAL				**25**

Client Services

Central to MOPD's multidisciplinary practice is the expertise of clinical social workers and peer recovery specialists who are embedded on the legal defense team.



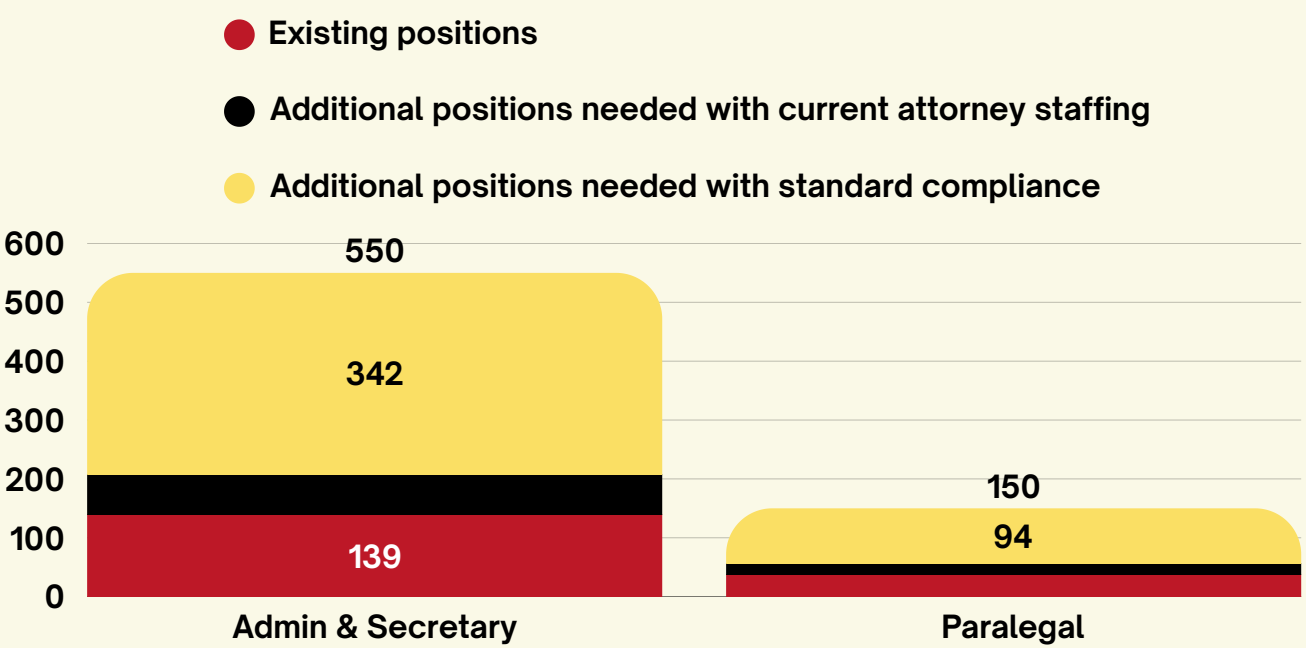


Based on 2005 standards, the recommended staffing for social workers is a ratio of one social worker to eight attorneys. Current state funding provides for 39 social workers to assist the 683 attorneys in our district and division practice areas. OPD has secured grants that provide the salaries for an additional 20 social workers. Staff social workers primarily focus on mitigation for young clients charged as adults and other clients facing lengthy incarceration. Grant social workers focus on specific populations – such as clients with a substance use disorder or complex mental health issue – who are at risk of cycling in and out of the system repeatedly. OPD would need a total of 77 social workers to be compliant with the standards under its current staffing, and 206 social workers to comply under the standards' recommended attorney staffing.

Peer recovery specialists are an emerging best practice in public defense, without existing workload standards. Almost exclusively through grant funding, MOPD has engaged peers to assist adult clients charged with a crime, young clients charged with gun-related offenses, and parents at risk of losing their children. These services are only available in limited jurisdictions, with the goal of growing statewide. (Read more about the peer support unit on page 7).

Administrative Support

Administrative staff are essential members of the defense team, serving as the operational backbone that keeps cases moving forward. They navigate complex electronic filing systems, manage vast amounts of digital discovery, and maintain the organizational infrastructure that enables attorneys to focus on zealous advocacy.



Standards developed in 2005 recommended ratios of one secretary or administrative aide to every three attorneys and one paralegal to every 11 attorneys. Under current staffing, OPD would need 69 more secretaries and 19 more paralegals to achieve compliant ratios. If attorney levels were compliant with the standards, OPD would need an additional 342 secretaries and 94 paralegals.



About US

On March 18, 1963, the United States Supreme Court guaranteed the right to counsel to indigent defendants in criminal cases in the landmark case, Gideon v. Wainwright. On July 1, 1971, the Maryland Legislature created the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (OPD). OPD opened its doors in 1972 and is an independent state agency. A Board of Trustees, composed of 13 members, studies, observes and advises on the operation of the public defender system. The Board appoints the Public Defender who serves a six-year term.

MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

THE OFFICE OF
THE PUBLIC DEFENDER
PROVIDES SUPERIOR LEGAL
REPRESENTATION TO INDIGENT
INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND

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