



Supreme Court of Illinois

September 21, 2026

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT APPOINTS 3 TO STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER COMMISSION

The Illinois Supreme Court announced today three appointments to the State Public Defender Commission (Commission) pursuant to the State Public Defender Act. The Commission will play a vital role in overseeing and supporting the Office of the State Public Defender (OSPD), ensuring the delivery of legal representation to indigent defendants in Illinois mandated by the constitution. The three appointees are Jeffrey D. Colman, the Hon. Brian Otwell (ret.) and Jeffrey York.

The FAIR Act establishes an independent State Public Defender Commission to oversee the Office of State Public Defender, which becomes effective on January 1, 2027. The Commission will be comprised of 11 members, with three members appointed by the Illinois Supreme Court, four members appointed by the Governor, and four members appointed by the Legislature.

“The establishment of OSPD represents a genuine inter-branch partnership that fulfills the right to counsel mandate codified in the constitution,” Chief Justice P. Scott Neville, Jr. said. “The Supreme Court is confident its appointees will be instrumental in making sure this new independent agency housed within the judicial branch fulfills its mandate to provide attorneys who will provide the adversarial testing required by the Constitution.”

Jeffrey D. Colman, of the Chicago law firm Jenner & Block, has focused his 50-year career on complex civil and criminal litigation at both the trial and appellate levels. He has received numerous awards for his extensive pro bono and public service activities and is the namesake for the Jeffrey D. Colman Access to Justice Award given annually by the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice.

Judge Otwell (ret.) served as Sangamon County Chief Public Defender for 15 years before becoming a Seventh Circuit associate judge in 2010. He was a judge for eight years before retiring from the bench.

Jeffrey York has served as the Chief Public Defender for DuPage County since 2010. He began his career with the DuPage County Public Defender's Office as an Assistant Public Defender in 1997 and was promoted to Public Defender in 2000. He became a Supervising Assistant Public Defender in 2006 and Deputy Public Defender in 2007.

Public Act 104-0300, also known as the Funded Advocacy and Independent Representation or “FAIR” Act was signed into law in August 2025, creating a new statewide oversight office that will deliver indigent defense services. The FAIR Act was developed following a 2021 report from the Sixth Amendment Center, which evaluated Illinois’ public defense system and concluded that the current system fails to satisfy the constitution’s adversarial testing standard due to overwhelming caseloads, insufficient funding and resources, and the lack of statewide oversight.

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