Supreme Court of Illinois

November 18, 2026

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT APPOINTS JENNIFER SOBLE AS INITIAL STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

The Illinois Supreme Court announced today the appointment of Jennifer Soble as the Initial State Public Defender as the position becomes effective Jan. 1, 2027.

Ms. Soble brings more than two decades of experience in criminal defense, appellate advocacy, post-conviction representation, public policy, and organizational leadership to the newly created Office of the State Public Defender (OSPD).

“The Supreme Court had an application process which resulted in 27 people who applied for the position,” said Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice P. Scott Neville. “Given her credentials, the Court believes it made an excellent decision in selecting Ms. Soble as the initial State Public Defender.”

Ms. Soble will oversee the OSPD’s efforts to support the delivery of effective indigent defense services throughout Illinois and will work closely with the judiciary, public defenders, attorneys, and justice system stakeholders to ensure uniform indigent defense across Illinois.

“I am thrilled to work with the State Public Defender Commission and the Supreme Court in supporting the crucial work of Illinois' dedicated public defenders,” said Ms. Soble. “Over my past seven years with the Illinois Prison Project, I have worked with a dedicated team of lawyers, paralegals, social workers and advocates to free 220 people from prison, saving them nearly 4,000 years of combined incarceration and taxpayers roughly $400 million. I am grateful for the singular opportunity to bring resources, support, and innovations to the zealous advocates protecting the rights of indigent people statewide.”

Ms. Soble currently serves as Founder and Executive Director of the Illinois Prison Project and Illinois Prison Project Action Fund, organizations she established in 2019 to expand access to legal representation for incarcerated individuals and to advance reform within Illinois' criminal legal system.

Under Ms. Soble's leadership, the Illinois Prison Project grew from a newly established nonprofit into a statewide legal services organization with a staff of approximately 30 employees. Prior to founding the Illinois Prison Project, Ms. Soble maintained a distinguished career as a public defender and criminal defense attorney. She represented indigent clients facing federal offenses as a staff attorney in the trial division of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia and an Assistant Federal Defender in the Northern District of Indiana. She also served as Senior Legal Counsel for two years at The Justice Collaborative, where she worked with organizers, activists, and political candidates to advance criminal legal reform.

Ms. Soble earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and earned her Juris Doctor from Yale Law School, where she received the C. LaRue Munson Prize for excellence in criminal law. She has served as a Visiting Assistant Clinical Professor of Law and an Adjunct in Trial Advocacy at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law's Bluhm Legal Clinic, where she supervised law students and represented youth in delinquency and post-conviction matters.

Ms. Soble's work has been recognized by numerous organizations. For her work with the Illinois Prison Project, she and the organization were honored as recipients of the Emil Gumpert Award by the American College of Trial Lawyers in 2025 and of the Champion of State Justice Award by the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers in 2024. She was the recipient of the Trailblazer Award by the National Lawyers Guild Chicago in 2023 and was honored as Woman of the Year by the Rotary Club of Chicago in 2022.

Her professional affiliations include the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers where she serves on the Decarceration Committee and The Sentencing Project's Second Look Network where she serves on the Advisory Committee.

The Funded Advocacy and Independent Representation (FAIR) Act was signed into law in August 2025. The Act created the OSPD, a statewide agency responsible for overseeing and supporting indigent defense services. The FAIR Act also created the State Public Defender Commission as an independent body to oversee the OSPD, comprised of four legislative appointees, three judiciary appointees and four executive branch appointees. The Commission's effective date was July 1, 2026, and it held its inaugural meeting on Oct. 30, 2026.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Renita Young, Chief Communication Officer of the Illinois Supreme Court at 217.814.6346 or renitayoung@illinoiscourts.gov.)