



Supreme Court of Illinois

March 6, 2023

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES CREATION OF CRIMINAL INDIGENT DEFENSE TASK FORCE

The Illinois Supreme Court has announced the creation of the Illinois Judicial Conference’s (IJC) Criminal Indigent Defense Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force will be studying how to best provide for the constitutional guarantee of criminal defense for indigent defendants as a follow up to the [report](#) issued by the Sixth Amendment Center on the right to counsel in Illinois.

“This year marks the 60th anniversary of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which certified the constitutional right to counsel in felony cases,” Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis said. “I was a public defender before becoming a judge so I am familiar with the challenges of that work. My colleagues on the Supreme Court share my interest in strengthening the public defense system in Illinois.”

The Task Force will develop recommendations for a permanent, sustainable, and equitable system to ensure that everyone entitled to a public defender gets one, and every public defender has the support needed to provide effective assistance of counsel. The Task Force will focus on issues of access, consistency, effectiveness, accountability, and independence across the state.

“Effective lawyers help the courts do their job and help build public trust in our judicial system, and Illinois has a strong tradition of addressing issues around the effective assistance of counsel, most prominently in the statewide Office of the Appellate Defender,” said Justice P. Scott Neville, Jr, a member of the IJC and Task Force. “We are excited about helping to develop a system that meets the needs of this state and ensures the rights of individuals who are charged with crimes.”

The Task Force’s main objectives will include:

- Reviewing data and current practices and recommending a permanent statewide solution that will ensure the right to counsel when warranted.
- Providing cost estimates for a permanent solution and/or the funding needed to implement the solution at the circuit and appellate levels.
- Recommending changes to legislation for a permanent solution (if applicable).
- Prioritizing/suggesting an approach for implementing the permanent solution.

The Chair of the Task Force is Kathy Saltmarsh, who serves as Executive Director of the Sentencing Policy Advisory Council. The Vice Chair is 21st Judicial Circuit Judge J. Imani Drew. Membership includes public defenders, judges, state’s attorneys, and other system stakeholders. The Task Force will provide its report to the IJC this fall.

This initiative is part of the 2022-2025 Strategic Agenda for the Illinois Judicial Branch. The IJC, which crafted the strategic agenda, is comprised of 29 voting members: 15 judges and 14 non-judges, with the Chief Justice serving as Chair. The judicial members include a second member of the Supreme Court, as well as judges from all levels and geographic areas of the state appointed either by nature of their position or individually selected by the Supreme Court. The IJC non-judicial members include the Director of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and 13 other justice partners selected by the Court from the following categories: court clerks, court administrators, attorneys, and public members. The full strategic agenda and IJC roster are available [here](#).

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