

Press Release



Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness & Justice Joins Bipartisan Call for Increased Indigent Defense Funding

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness & Justice stands in strong support of efforts to increase state funding for indigent defense and participated in the Fund PA Public Defenders—We Can't Afford to Wait press conference on March 26, 2025, at 10:00 AM in the East Wing Rotunda of the Pennsylvania Capitol.

This event brought together lawmakers, public defenders, and advocates to demand critical funding for indigent defense in the 2025-2026 state budget. Pennsylvania remains one of the lowest-funded states for public defense, placing an overwhelming burden on counties and jeopardizing the constitutional right to counsel for those who cannot afford an attorney.

“Equal access to justice is a fundamental right, not a privilege,” said Maraleen Shields, Executive Director of the Commission. “Without adequate funding, public defenders face insurmountable caseloads, and Pennsylvanians risk being denied their right to fair representation.”

The press conference also highlighted legislative efforts, including Senate and House resolutions recognizing “Public Defender Day” in Pennsylvania. The bipartisan group of speakers and supporters included Senator Vincent Hughes, Representative Dan Miller, Sara Jacobson (Executive Director, Public Defenders Association of PA (PDAP)), Jeff Snyder (Clinton County Commissioner), public defenders, and community leaders.

The Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness & Justice urges lawmakers to act now to increase funding for indigent defense in the 2025-26 PA state budget.

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