HBCU COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP

HOST SITE PROJECTS

Black Public Defender Association

ABOUT US

The Black Public Defender Association (BPDA) is a Black movement-led organization that supports a national network of skilled Black defenders (trial attorneys, social workers, investigators, civil defense, immigration, family defense, and client advocates) who fight against mass incarceration and other racist carceral systems. Building a pipeline of Black defenders is one of our core pillars.

ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

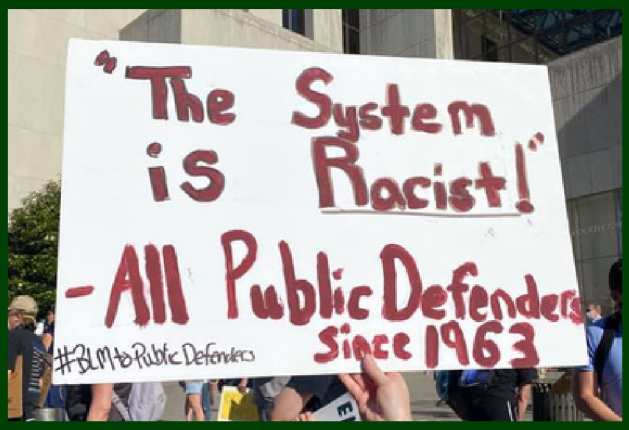
The BPDA Community Engagement Fellowship is a 12-week summer program that pairs Black undergraduate and graduate HBCU students, who aspire to do racial equity and community defense work, with public defender offices. The program is open to students seeking careers in all areas of public defense.

This internship opportunity will offer hands-on lessons about addressing systemic issues of racism that plague the legal system while inspiring young people to achieve their educational goals and consider careers in public defense.

The BPDA Community Engagement Fellowship also provides an opportunity for participating public defender offices to access a fully paid, full-time intern for the summer at little to no cost to them. The chosen host sites will provide excellent opportunities to implement a project or program that expands their outreach to the communities they serve in an effort to promote racial equity.

VIRGINIA INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

ALEXANDRIA



The BPDA Fellow will provide a detailed breakdown of the potential impact of body-worn camera (BWC) footage on criminal cases in Alexandria. The Alexandria Police Department will start using BWC for the first time this year during "high impact shifts" and in "high need" areas.

- The Fellow will document the length of BWC footage, the number of videos provided for cases, additional time needed to prepare cases with BWC footage, dispositional differences between cases with and without BWC footage, etc.
- A presentation showing the relative impact of BWC will help the Public Defender strategically implement BWC policy that is most helpful for the office, and also potentially make a case for additional staffing or funding.
- The Fellow, if possible and comfortable, can also conduct surveys in the "high need" areas to get a sense of what community members need regarding police presence, resources, etc.

An alternative project is to implement an expungement clinic in the City of Alexandria, using as a model the expungement clinic conducted in Arlington County on December 3, 2022.

- Expungement is a separate legal process for which individuals do not receive court-appointed counsel. Increasing knowledge in the community and among community groups will aid individuals, as well as lead to increased interest in and discussion of barriers facing individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system, even if they were not convicted of the crimes they were charged with.
- Although expungement of criminal convictions are limited, expungement of charges that did not result in a conviction can be very beneficial to individuals seeking employment, housing, and other social goods.

MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER (MOPD)

BALTIMORE

The Fellow will focus on connecting public defender clients with community-based services that can facilitate their pretrial release and improve their overall wellbeing. Specifically, the Fellow will join our Baltimore Service Array Team (BSAT), which includes attorneys, social workers, and community engagement staff who collaborate to provide holistic reentry services to MOPD's Baltimore City clients. The Fellow will specifically focus on the rapid response needs of clients at their bail review, and on expanding collaboration between MOPD and community partners.

Public defenders first meet a docket of clients just a few hours before their bail review hearings. After a brief interview, they often identify resources needed to significantly enhance the likelihood of release. This may include alternate housing, drug treatment and recovery support, food security, and job training. The Fellow will facilitate referrals; provide short-term client follow-up; assist in identifying additional resources and services that can address client needs; and help facilitate information dissemination about MOPD's community partnerships.

The Fellow will be exposed to all aspects of pretrial representation by being a part of clients' legal teams developing and implementing alternative release plans and coordinating these plans with court proceedings and release conditions. The Fellow's activities will include communicating with clients and service providers; collaborating with MOPD lawyers, social workers, and peer recovery specialists; participating in site visits to community service partners; observing court proceedings; and attending coalition and other community engagement meetings.

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES (BDS)

BROOKLYN

BDS' Family Defense Policy and Community Engagement Project will provide a Fellow with the opportunity to work directly with policy staff to support the organization's legislative campaigns and family defense staff working in court and in the community to support parents impacted by the family regulation system.

To that end, the Fellowship will allow the Fellow to:

- Work on state legislative efforts preparing for the next legislative session that will begin January 2024. The Fellow will work under the direct supervision of the Family Defense Policy Counsel to draft and update letters and memos of support for or in opposition to state legislation as well as draft legislative campaign materials for the 2024 legislative session.

- Join staff in local and state coalitions meetings to understand the political landscape in which our campaigns operate. The Fellow will meet advocates, defenders, and impacted community activists working to reform NY's criminal legal and family regulation systems. The Fellow will be essential by taking notes, reporting back on meetings, and under close supervision, assist with drafting testimony for hearings and other policy-related materials.

- Work closely with the Early Defense Team to expand its community outreach efforts and assist with training on the family regulation system for impacted community members, community-based service organizations, and mandated reporters working with parents and families from communities often targeted by this system. The team provides advocacy to parents during the initial stages of an investigation. The team's goal is to avoid court filings and family separation.
    - The Fellow will work closely with coalition partners and community members to assist in organizing and holding additional Know Your Rights events for parents and families targeted by the family regulation system. The goal is to support and grow relationships between BDS and our partners, and support and increase their capacity to educate highly policed communities about their rights and access to resources and legal advice.

CUYAHOGA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

CLEVELAND

The community engagement project for 2023 encompasses a two-part approach to help increase our public footprint. The first approach is to establish an online presence, including social media, increased access to our office, and promotional information about community-based resources.

- We are seeking to engage with the community on several issues, including our in-house expungement program, license reinstatement resources, and other post-conviction assistance we have to offer to help increase the impact we have on collateral consequences resulting from a criminal conviction.
- We also seek to inform our clients, communities, and the general public on community-based events, potential legislative changes, and state and local criminal justice reform efforts.
- By demonstrating the wide-ranging and impactful work of our Office, we want to help de-stigmatize the image of of Public Defenders, build trust with the community and potential clients, and illustrate that Public Defenders are one of the most important institutions within the justice system.

The second approach is to establish a resource room and bank of information for people being released from the Cuyahoga County Jail back into the community.

- Our goal is to create relationships with agencies in the community who help serve people upon re-entry to gather donations, supplies, and resources so that we can partner with the jail to ensure people being released have a way to safely reach a place where they can fight their case on bond.
- Our team's dream scenario would be to outfit each person with a fresh shirt, personal hygiene toiletries, contact information for a variety of needs, a first meal, bus tickets, etc.

PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (PDS)

DC

The Fellow will support the Prisoner and Reentry Legal Services (PRLS) team in its community engagement, education, and outreach programming.

During the last several years, there have been several developments and updates to laws that impact reentry, including legislation around housing, employment, and occupational licensing. In addition, changes are expected imminently related to criminal record sealing and expungement.

The Fellow will also assist the Community Defender Division (CDD) Chief and PRLS Deputy Chief in planning events, trainings, and communications with community members, community-based organizations, and grassroots groups to promote awareness, education, and collaboration.

THE CONNECTICUT DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

HARTFORD

This year, the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services will provide our clients, their families, and the communities we serve with information about their rights when interacting with law enforcement and knowledge on navigating the criminal justice system. We believe that empowering our communities with the truth about their rights will reduce the number of arrests, consensual searches, and fatalities while increasing reports of illegal police conduct.

The BPDA Fellow will play a huge role in making this campaign unique, memorable, and successful. We have started reaching out to our communities of color, including community centers, local churches, and minority-owned businesses, all in communities we know are over-policed.

We will attend small and large-scale events throughout the state. The BPDA Fellow will craft surveys, review and ask questions about legal rights, and document experiences within and shaped by the criminal justice system based on the race, ethnicity, and gender of all attendees.

The BPDA Fellow will work one-on-one with the Chief and assist our attorneys and support staff in one of our Community Courts and three of our field offices. The BPDA Fellow will Interact with our clients and their families in court and the community, perform research, data collection, and analysis, and work on framing a new clinic to assist our incarcerated and formerly incarcerated clients as they transition back into regular life. The BPDA Fellow will compile and analyze the data gathered at these events.

ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS OFFICE

NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans' demographics were forever changed post-Katrina due to a multitude of factors. One of the most significant was the shuttering of several housing complexes within the city center that provided housing for low-income New Orleanians.

As a result, the last 18 years has seen more and more low-income families pushed to the outskirts of the city, specifically New Orleans East, where many of the everyday services remain limited to this day. Public transportation is not sufficient and remains a burden for people needing to access the government and economic center of the city.

Creating a community-based public defender hub would bring our representation and services directly to the community in a much more easily accessible way, and hopefully a more beneficial opportunity to engage outside of the courthouse. Ideally, we would also partner with community resources to bring additional services to the residents of New Orleans East.

While the community hub would be the main project, the Fellow will also be an asset in researching and writing legislation, gathering community input on areas ripe for reform, and assisting with presentations on the need for reforms.

Police, prosecution and city leadership base much of their decisions in reactionary, fear-based policies, which makes local and statewide legislative initiatives difficult. However, we still push forward. Many of the previous legislative plans remain in place as the 2022 legislative session was particularly unsuccessful.

Planned local initiatives include: continued work to ensure the recent mass pardon of marijuana convictions by the City Council are made meaningful by large-scale expungements; continued push back against increased surveillance of citizens; and protecting and expanding local reforms in the use of money bail and pretrial detention.

Statewide, our main focus remains on pretrial justice and pretrial detention. We continue working to shorten the time period in which arrested people can be held without being charged. While we were partially successful in that endeavor, there remains work to be done.

DEFENDER ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA

Junior Defenders is a community education program designed for middle and high school students who attend school in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system. We designed the program to educate youth about the courts, engage young people who have ambitions and talents (that are typically not invested in) to become leaders in their schools and community, and encourage youth to challenge injustice and participate in pro-social behaviors to build safer, stronger, communities. The Fellow will assist in coordinating the inaugural summer session of our Junior Defenders program.

The Fellow will assist the program coordinator to:

- Accompany the Junior Defenders during weekly sessions to court watch and shadow Defenders at work;
- Facilitate debriefs of court watch sessions and shadowing opportunities;
- Work as the Junior Defender team lead to create supplemental legal materials;
- Serve as a youth navigator to refer children who have been arrested and their families who attend community lawyering events to the Youth Participatory Defense hub, as appropriate;
- Schedule community lawyering events, including our monthly Barber Shop series, and promote the events on social media;
- Attend the specialized training for attorneys; and
- Providing feedback on the implementation of this pilot project.

MEET THE TEAM

HBCU COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP

ALAINA BLOODWORTH

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JASMINE COLE

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

THANK YOU

Student applications due:
March 31, 2023

For more information, visit: blackdefender.org

Contact: blackpublicdefenderassociation@gmail.com