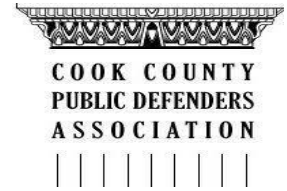




*Cook County Public Defenders Association AFSCME Local 3315*  
*President - Kevin Ochalla Vice President - Mark Douglass*  
*Secretary - Kyan Keenan Treasurer - Brett Gallagher*  
*Crystal Brown - Theresa Nelson - Takenya Nixon*  
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February 5, 2022

Dear Maryland Legislators,

We write this letter in support of the attorneys of the Maryland Public Defender's Office in their effort to establish collective bargaining rights for themselves and their core staff and social worker colleagues. While we understand that Union Public Defenders from Cook County Illinois are not your constituents, we write in support of HB90/SB255 to so show that collective bargaining has been incredibly beneficial for the quality of representation by our office.

Collective bargaining has been a significant factor in raising the quality and skill level of the attorneys in our office. We organized 1987 and prior to that time the average attorney's length of employment was often only a couple of years. This had a negative effect on representation in that attorneys would gain some courtroom experience and then move on to private practice thereby denying indigent defendants the benefit of the experience that they gained. Also as there was no real system for assigning attorneys to courtroom assignments or for assigning cases to qualified attorneys less experienced attorneys were assigned to complex, serious cases well before they were truly qualified to handle such matters.

Collective bargaining helped establish several things that have benefits to those we represent. For example, there is now a process for promotion that takes into account both experience and seniority. There is a process where an attorney can bid to a location where they want to work or in an area of law they want to practice; juvenile justice, child protection, misdemeanor, felony or homicide.

The Union is also a mentoring system where members meet with other members from all over the county. Through Union culture younger members meet more experienced members and professional relationships are established, benefiting both members and the clients. We currently have about 420 Union attorneys in our office. The Union has also pushed continuing legal education even before it was mandated in our state.

Union attorneys from the Cook County Public Defender's Office are some of the most skilled lawyers in the state. The job of a Public Defender is one of the most challenging and difficult in the law. Those that choose to do this work take on the trauma of those they represent. No one meets a Public Defender because they had a good day. Public Defenders, in representing their clients must often confront the state's attorney, the judge, the police and often times the public. A Union, committed to supporting Public Defenders, creating a positive work environment, establishing standards for continuing education and promotion, and that fosters a culture of highly skilled employee retention will only strengthen any criminal justice system in which they operate by ensuring the best quality of representation for indigent defendants.

In Solidarity,

*K J Ochalla*  
President

*Joshua Nathan*  
Chief Steward

*Mark Douglass*  
Vice-President

*Brett Gallagher*  
Treasurer

*Kyan Keenan*  
Secretary

*Crystal Brown*  
Executive at Large

*Theresa Nelson*  
Executive at Large

*Takenya Nixon*  
Executive at Large