



## THE OFFICE OF THE JUVENILE DEFENDER

### HISTORY

The Office of the Juvenile Defender (OJD) developed out of a study issued in October 2003 that explored the quality of representation in juvenile delinquency court in North Carolina. As a result, a recommendation of the Indigent Defense Services (IDS) Juvenile Committee was the creation of the Juvenile Defender of North Carolina position. The office opened in January 2005.

### OUR MISSION

- **Provide services and support to juvenile defense attorneys.** In conjunction with the UNC School of Government, OJD organizes and presents numerous statewide, regional, and local trainings including introductory, intermediate, and advanced topics; we also worked with the UNC School of Government to develop a practical manual for juvenile defense counsel (which is currently being updated). OJD maintains a clearing house of juvenile delinquency related material on our website. OJD assists legal counsel by providing information to individual questions or ongoing consultation, for cases pending in delinquency or adult trial court, or on appeal. A Juvenile Defender listserv, website and blog have been created to allow juvenile defense counsel to discuss case problems, systemic issues and other relevant topics quickly and efficiently. OJD hosts quarterly statewide conference calls with defense counsel to discuss recent issues and brainstorm solutions to challenges in the field.
- **Evaluate the current system of representation.** Since our inception, OJD has visited 80% of NC counties to observe court, speak with court officials, and make recommendations to IDS as needed to improve the quality of juvenile defense representation. In an effort to strengthen juvenile defense representation, our office recommends, as needed, entering into contracts with local counsel to represent juveniles. Currently there are contracts in fourteen counties across the state. OJD has also taken the lead in developing policy related to qualification standards for practicing in juvenile delinquency court and performance guidelines for juvenile defense representation. OJD has also explored other dimensions of representation such as education rights, post-dispositional advocacy and collateral consequences of adjudication.
- **Elevate the stature of juvenile delinquency representation.** In an effort to bring attention to the need for quality defense counsel in delinquency proceedings, OJD regularly presents our initiatives to various justice groups and adds a defense counsel voice to several boards and committees. OJD also works to inspire aspiring attorneys to consider juvenile defense representation as a career by presenting at all seven law schools and hosting legal interns and externs. OJD assisted in the formation of the Juvenile Defense Section of the NC Advocates for Justice. OJD worked with the NC State Bar to develop a juvenile delinquency sub-specialization in 2012, one of only a few such programs in the nation.

- **Work with juvenile justice advocates to promote positive change in the juvenile justice system.**  
OJD has partnered with numerous advocacy groups including but not limited to the NC Bar Association Juvenile Justice and Children's Rights Section, the Governor's Crime Commission, NC Child and the NC Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities to address critical juvenile justice issues such as Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) and raising the age of jurisdiction in delinquency court. Most recently, OJD worked with several groups and individuals for passage of statutory changes to the juvenile code which promote stronger due process protections and better outcomes for youth in juvenile delinquency courts across the state.

### **CURRENT INITIATIVES**

OJD will continue to pursue our mission through several new initiatives including providing direct representation to juveniles involved in the delinquency system, continuing to explore representation and support of those juveniles committed to youth development centers and reentering the community, improving legal representation of special populations of youth, focusing on expunction and immigration issues, and researching issues related to juvenile appellate cases.

#### **Office of the Juvenile Defender**

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