



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, February 12, 2024

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After Governor Shapiro Proposes Historic Indigent Defense Funding in 2024-25 Budget, PCCD Hosts Inaugural Meeting of Indigent Defense Advisory Committee

Governor Shapiro secured first-ever sustainable state funding for indigent defense in 2023-24 budget, allowing Pennsylvania to shed the shameful distinction of being one of only two states in the country that did not allocate state funding for public defenders.

Building on the \$7.5 million secured in the 2023-24 budget, Governor Shapiro proposed a \$2.5 million increase for indigent defense funding in the 2024-25 budget – proposing a total of \$10 million to be funded through PCCD and the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee to create more opportunity for all.





Harrisburg, PA — Today, less than one week after **Governor Josh Shapiro** proposed **\$10 million** for indigent defense to be funded through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) in his [2024-25 budget proposal](#), PCCD’s [Indigent Defense Advisory Committee](#) held its inaugural meeting to begin developing statewide standards and a statewide funding system for indigent defense services, which provide legal representation for those who cannot afford it on their own.

Until 2023, Pennsylvania was one of only two states in the country that did not provide state funding for indigent defense – but the Governor [secured \\$7.5 million](#) to fund indigent defense for the first time in Pennsylvania history to ensure public defenders have the resources they need to provide legal representation to defendants who cannot pay for it on their own.

“Last year, for the first time, we came together to lose the shameful distinction of being one of just two states to invest zero state dollars in public defense and allocated sustainable funding to help meet the needs of public defenders and the poor defendants who rely on them. Under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Davis and the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee, we are working hard to drive that money out quickly, so counties can put it to work for poor defendants,” said **Governor Josh Shapiro**. “We need to do more to build equity in our criminal justice system, but it’s critically important that we start here – with sustained, dedicated funding for public defenders. The time to invest is right now. That’s why my budget invests another \$10 million in our public defenders this year to ensure that everyone has a fair shot – and that both sides have an adequate opportunity to present a strong case in court.”

As he traveled across the Commonwealth, Governor Shapiro promised to fund legal representation for indigent Pennsylvanians, and he delivered on that promise by signing into law [\\$7.5 million in indigent defense funding as part of the 2023-24 budget](#). The [law](#) established the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee within PCCD and authorizes the use of \$7.5 million for the new Indigent Defense Grant Program to expand support and resources for public defenders to ensure access to constitutionally required legal defense for adult and juvenile ‘indigent’ defendants.

“Everyone deserves fair and equal treatment in the justice system, and if someone is unable to afford legal defense, that can lessen their chances of receiving that,” said **Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis, PCCD Chair**. “The Shapiro-Davis Administration is taking bold steps to ensure Pennsylvanians are given the tools to move their lives forward in a positive direction, and this first meeting of the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee highlighted gaps in data collection and the importance of this funding for our underserved population of indigent defendants.”

During the inaugural meeting, the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee began the work to get these critical funds out to Pennsylvania communities, laying the groundwork for a future grant program to support public defenders.

Per Act 34, the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee is also responsible for:

- Proposing minimum standards for the delivery of effective indigent defense services for adoption by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court;
- Developing and adopting county-level data reporting standards, and partnering with other agencies to collect data on indigent defense services;
- Establishing a defender training library of programs developed and/or approved by Committee;
- Adopting standards for use of case management systems/software; and
- Identifying trends and effectiveness of services and submitting a biennial report to the General Assembly.

“Just last year, 200,000 adult and juvenile cases came through Pennsylvania’s criminal justice system. That’s 200,000 lives that we have the opportunity to positively impact,” said **Sara Jacobson, Esq., Chair of the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee and Executive Director of the Public Defender Association of Pennsylvania**. “The \$7.5 million investment in Governor Shapiro’s budget last year is a good start – a down payment – and serves as a historical opportunity to serve indigent Pennsylvanians and make the justice system a fairer place.”

“As a former public defender, I am proud that Pennsylvania finally took a step toward equal justice by dedicating state dollars to indigent defense last year, and that Governor Shapiro has bolstered that commitment in this year’s budget proposal,” said **Speaker Joanna McCClinton**. “However, even with this historic investment, many communities still lack the resources to offer the defense that is guaranteed by our Constitution. I look forward to advocating for an increased investment in this initiative and other reforms that strengthen our justice system.”

“Thank you, Governor, Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis, and all the members of this tremendous committee. I was fortunate to be appointed to this committee. I’m so glad to serve,” said **Senator Art Haywood**. “This entire initiative is so fundamentally about protecting the inherent dignity of our neighbors, our neighbors who will lose their liberty, but for having some decent, constitutionally required legal representation. That’s the dignity that can be lost when you have someone almost unrepresented in plea negotiations, whether they stay in jail or fight for their freedom – it’s identity that can be lost not just in the plea negotiations, but in the quality of everyday legal representation.”

“This afternoon, Pennsylvania’s Indigent Defense Advisory Committee held its first meeting. This committee is charged with ensuring that no matter what county you’re in, or the money in your bank account – if you are accused of a crime, you can afford an attorney with the time, resources, training, and team available at their disposal to give your innocence the representation it deserves,” said **Representative Napoleon Nelson**.

Visit the [PCCD website](#) to stay up to date on the latest news related to the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee.

Read more about how Governor Shapiro’s 2024-25 budget proposal will create opportunity for those in the justice system [here](#).