



For Immediate Release

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Federal and State Officials Converge to Examine Michigan's Public Defense System

Congressional briefing and legislative hearing set for Dec. 14 in Detroit

Lansing, MI --- In the ongoing and statewide effort to reform Michigan public defense system, Monday, Dec. 14, is a very big day. Leaders from Washington, D.C., and Lansing are set to converge at Wayne State University in Detroit for two events focused on examining failures within Michigan's public defense system and solutions needed to ensure that Michigan and other states can better meet their constitutional obligations to provide adequate representation for people unable to afford an attorney.

At 9 a.m., the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, chaired by Cong. John Conyers (MI-14), will hold a Briefing on Solutions to the Indigent Defense Crisis. The event will feature a diverse panel of national and state experts on the issue of public defense, including:

- Barry Scheck, Innocence Project;
- Dennis W. Archer, Dickinson-Wright, PLLC;
- David Carroll, National Legal Aid and Defender Association and author of a recent study on Michigan's public defense system;
- Chief Justice Marilyn J. Kelly, Michigan Supreme Court;
- Hon. Cynthia D. Stephens, Michigan Court of Appeals; and,
- Hon. Fred Borchard, Chief Judge Pro Tempore, Michigan 10th Circuit Court.

Following the morning's federal panel, at 1:30 p.m., chairman of the State House Judiciary Committee, State Rep. Mark Meadows (D-East Lansing), will convene a committee hearing to discuss proposed legislation to reform Michigan's public defense system.

Both events will take place on the campus of Wayne State University, in the Student Center Ballroom, located at 5221 Gullen Mall, in Detroit.

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“A public defense system that fails the people it’s supposed to help is also a system that fails taxpayers and fails to keep our communities safe,” said Laura Sager, executive director of the Campaign for Justice. “Leaders on both the federal and state levels understand this, and their efforts on Dec. 14 and beyond are a significant boost to the campaign to bring long-needed reform to Michigan.”

Charles R. Toy, president of the State Bar of Michigan, added: “To have prominent leaders in Congress and the State Legislature come together to address problems in Michigan’s public defense system should be a signal to all that this is much more than an issue affecting only people accused of a crime. Inefficiencies and ineffectiveness throughout the system waste money, damage lives and make communities less safe. Reforming our system won’t happen overnight, but as these upcoming events show, momentum is building and reform is coming soon.”

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The Campaign for Justice, www.mijustice.org, is a broad-based group of organizations and individuals from across the political spectrum fighting for a fair and effective public defense system in Michigan. The Campaign believes that legislative reform is needed to improve cost effectiveness, protect the public’s safety and ensure one’s Constitutional right to counsel.

*Established in 1935, the **State Bar of Michigan** represents more than 40,000 practicing attorneys and judges. The mission of the Bar is to improve the administration of justice, promote the legal profession, and build public understanding of our legal system. More information about the Bar can be accessed at www.michbar.org.*