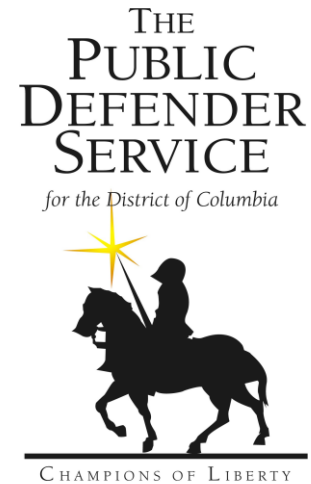


PUBLIC DEFENDERS MARCH FOR BLACK LIVES

Public defenders are a new kind of tired—and a new kind of inspired.

As the risks from the coronavirus increased, as with many working people, the efforts of public defenders did too. We argued for reductions of police arrests and detentions; reductions in prosecutions; and reductions in judicial detentions. Public defenders sought and achieved early release from jails and prisons, and helped released clients reestablish themselves in the community. Public defenders used every tool available to them—and invented one or two—to protect clients from the coronavirus by calling on the criminal, juvenile, and mental health systems to administer law and justice in a manner befitting the challenge of the crisis.



Sometimes public defenders even put their own lives at risk as they represented their clients. For many, the work was close to non-stop, and it was exhausting. But the work was also inspiring. Working collaboratively across new lines and seeing clients spared from exposure to the coronavirus in transport vehicles, holding cells, penal institutions, and mental hospitals motivated public defenders to keep forging ahead. This was certainly happening at PDS and in the District of Columbia defense bar at large, but it was also true for local and federal public defenders across the country.

But after George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police officers, as he lay handcuffed on the ground with a police officer's knee driven into his neck for more than eight minutes, public defenders reached a new level—a new kind of tired. The job public defenders do gives us a close-up view of policing and its harsh impact on our adult, juvenile, and mental health clients. Seeing black people killed by police officers has an impact on us personally and professionally. While in some ways, it was the same old story in hundreds of years of such stories, this time was different. People everywhere were inspired to rise up. And so too are we.

On Monday, public defenders all over America marched in support of the demonstrations we see daily and nightly in news reports. District of Columbia public defenders took their place in formation too in our part of the world. For the first time in recent history—and possibly ever—public defenders marched as a group of their own and joined demonstrators who have been inspiring us all with their dedication, persistence, and insistence. We forgot the tiredness of the work and of the pandemic, and we marched in solidarity in the quest for reform.

Some say we will never go back to the same old ways before the pandemic hit us. Let's vow that we will never go back to the same old ways of policing that caused the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others before them.