

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Heather N. Pinckney Named Director of DC Public Defender Service

WASHINGTON -- The Board of Trustees of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia is pleased to announce the appointment of Heather N. Pinckney as the next Director of the Public Defender Service. Ms. Pinckney succeeds outgoing director, Avis E. Buchanan, who announced her retirement late last year.

“The Board’s appointment of Ms. Pinckney follows an extensive national search,” said PDS Board Chair Jonathan Stern. “Ms. Pinckney is an exceptional leader and she has broad-ranging experience with the District’s justice system, both as a public defender and in private practice. That experience, and her profound commitment to racial justice and criminal justice reform, make Ms. Pinckney eminently qualified to serve as PDS’s next Director and the Board looks forward to working with her.”

Ms. Pinckney will leave her current position as the Executive Director of the Black Public Defender Association, which works to improve the quality of public defense by creating a pipeline of skilled Black public defenders, to lead PDS where she began her career as a trial lawyer.

A native Washingtonian, Ms. Pinckney was educated through law school in the District of Columbia and joined PDS as a Staff Attorney in 2000. After serving as Deputy Chief of PDS’s Trial Division, she left in 2008 to establish Harden & Pinckney, PLLC, a litigation firm representing clients in both the Superior Court for the District of Columbia and the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Throughout her career, Ms. Pinckney has served on working groups and advisory committees aimed at improving court programs and enhancing the quality of representation for people charged with crimes in the District of Columbia.

Well known for her accomplishments as a litigator, Ms. Pinckney is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and a member of the National Black Lawyers Top 100. She serves on the faculty of the National Criminal Defense College and Gideon’s Promise, teaches a seminar on public defense as an adjunct professor at her alma mater, The George Washington University Law School, and has maintained a full travel schedule to provide training to national legal organizations and public defender offices throughout the country. During her tenure with the Black Public Defender Association, Ms. Pinckney helped establish a national fellowship program to place Black law students and undergraduates with public defender offices and a Black Defender Leadership Institute to nurture future transformational leaders who are committed to racial equity. Ms. Pinckney is also a past Chair of the PDS Board of Trustees.

Ms. Pinckney has long worked to advance racial justice in the courts and the larger community and to address the need for systemic reform in the criminal legal system. Honoring her deep roots here, she has an abiding commitment to the people of Washington, D.C.

In response to her appointment, Ms. Pinkney said, “D.C. is my entire heart and spirit. This city and the love of its people have made me who I am today. The opportunity to lead this office, at this moment in history, is the perfect integration of all of my passions. I stand on the shoulders of the leaders who came before me and led PDS with vision, strength, and boldness.

“I look forward to leading this amazing institution into its new chapter as a 21st century organization, rooted in racial equity and community engagement. As the new director, I will work collaboratively with the outstanding PDS staff, to continue to provide superb, client-centered representation and bring long overdue change to the criminal legal system. I am home and I am thankful.”

Established by federal statute in 1970, PDS provides and promotes high quality legal representation to adults and children facing a loss of liberty in the District of Columbia, thereby protecting society’s interest in the fair administration of justice. It provides exceptional legal services through seven legal divisions: Trial, Appellate, Mental Health, Special Litigation, Parole, Civil Legal Services and Community Defender, whose work is supported by the Investigations Division, the Office of Rehabilitation and Development, the Defender Services Office and administrative support. <https://www.pdsdc.org>

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