

San Diego County Public Defender Office Pledge to Confront Systemic Racism, Promote Equity, Inclusion and Address Implicit Bias

I. Public Defenders

Public defenders safeguard fundamental human rights guaranteed under the United States Constitution (*Gideon v. Wainwright*). Specifically in San Diego, our mission is “to protect the rights, liberties, and dignity of all persons in San Diego County and maintain the integrity and fairness of the American Justice System by providing the finest legal representation in the cases entrusted to us.” To do so effectively, we must fight the many injustices facing our clients and in the communities we serve, whether individual or systemic injustices, intentional or unintentional injustices.

II. The Reality of Systematic Racism and Black Oppression

Public defenders, court appointed attorneys and other criminal defense practitioners bear witness to the direct and indirect consequences of over four hundred (400) years of violence and oppression of Black communities by the criminal legal system. Systematic racism also affects other communities of color. Systemic racism and bias devastate communities, families and individuals, through mass incarceration, inequitable treatment and other unjust outcomes throughout the criminal system. As public defenders, we cannot remain silent about these injustices.

We must recognize and oppose all forms of racial injustice. We must fight racial injustice at every level of the criminal legal system and community. We must seek to end systemic racism by actively confronting and challenging it.

III. Equity and Inclusion for Underrepresented Communities

In addition, as public defenders we must create and implement policies and practices to include employees from underrepresented and disenfranchised groups and communities: including Black, Indigenous, people of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, women, religious groups, immigrants, people with disabilities, people for whom English is not their first language, and those who have historically or systemically experienced injustice.

To foster equity, inclusion and retention we must also provide meaningful support systems and mentorship while enacting practices for accountability and measurable outcomes. With greater diversity we bring forth a variety of perspectives, experiences, backgrounds and talents to better reflect the diversity within the communities we serve. With greater diversity we are better.

As we continue our efforts to create equity in the justice system we must critically examine our own internal biases, standards and practices. Through comprehensive training, active learning and shared experiences we must work fervently to identify and overcome our own implicit biases.

IV. Addressing Implicit Bias at Every Phase of the Criminal Justice System

We must also address bias in every phase of the criminal system. We must always take a client-centered approach to our representation by respecting and valuing our clients’ diverse experiences, cultures, and backgrounds while encouraging their active participation in their defense and providing the tools for them to do so.

To build trust and confidence in the criminal justice system we must also identify and confront bias when we encounter it by challenging it. We must see our clients as whole individuals and seek to understand and address how their experiences within the criminal system impacts their entire lives and their community.

As a community of defenders and in collaboration with our clients and community we must take all necessary action to use our power to end systemic bias in our criminal system. We will not be silent about the harm done to these marginalized people and we will not be complicit in that harm.

The San Diego County Public Defender Office pledges to:

1. Recruit diverse staff using aggressive and measurable policies and practices to recruit from underrepresented groups and promote their inclusion and advancement within public defender and indigent defense organizations and communities;
2. Ensure diverse staff is retained by providing adequate support, meaningful promotion and anonymous surveys regarding the office's equity and inclusion diligence;
3. Ensure the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Panel is well-supported and that its members do not fear retaliation;
4. Create, develop and maintain strong partnerships with community groups, secondary schools, universities, law schools and stakeholders to build pipelines for diversity, inclusion and equity in the profession;
5. Develop and implement a process for annually evaluating our organization's progress towards addressing diversity, inclusion and equity;
6. Advocate for the equitable, humane and just treatment of all people, especially underrepresented and marginalized people and communities;
7. Implement rigorous, ongoing diversity and implicit bias staff trainings led by proven experts in the field;
8. Implement rigorous, ongoing diversity and implicit bias supervisor/management trainings led by proven experts in the field.



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