



"The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned."

Bryan Stevenson
Founder & Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024 - 2028

FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



Our MISSION

Fighting to uphold the dignity of our clients by protecting their fundamental rights and liberties through zealous, compassionate, and holistic defense services.



Our VALUES

We are passionate public servants who are dedicated to ethical and inclusive justice. We are guided by these values: equity, empathy, innovation, and integrity.



Our VISION

Justice. Growth.
Reform.

Much has changed since 2020 and the creation of our first public-facing strategic plan. Our community continues to weather the effects of the pandemic, and our clients are disproportionately experiencing the effects of the upheaval. An unprecedented social service workforce crisis, continued lack of safe and affordable housing, rising inflation, and economic instability have pushed those we serve even further to the margins. Despite public support for police and prosecutorial reform, treatment in lieu of incarceration, and the decriminalization of mental illness, homelessness, and substance use, we continue to see very little legislative or legal change in Montgomery County. BIPOC children and adults are still policed, prosecuted, and sentenced more often and more severely than their white counterparts. Individuals experiencing homelessness and/or poverty are unjustly held in jail on cash bonds for low-level, non-violent offenses. Members of our community living with addiction and mental illness still cannot access quality treatment and supports.

Currently, the office is in the midst of several initiatives that are not only moving us closer to fulfilling the goals of our previous strategic plan, but setting the stage for future growth, change, and advocacy. At the publication of this plan, we will have completed our third trial school – a five-day, intensive training program that teaches the skills needed to litigate a criminal case for our attorneys, private counsel, and public defenders from all over the state. Additionally, we are partway through a multi-million dollar renovation that will transform our main office, improving client experience and equipping staff with the space and technology needed to increase efficiency and productivity. Other projects include launching a program in municipal courts that will forgive outstanding costs and fines for individuals experiencing homelessness, diverting individuals in active drug and alcohol withdrawal from the jail, and increasing the number of high-level felony cases represented by our defense teams.

Although our office has grown significantly in the past several years, we believe that there are still gaps in services that our team is positioned to fill. We look forward to increasing capacity in both our Felony and Child and Family Law Divisions to increase representation in criminal cases and to begin supporting children and parents with involvement in the child welfare system. In the coming years, our office will prioritize training and legal specialization to not only increase the volume of cases, but to improve client outcomes across divisions as well. While individual client representation and advocacy will always be our focus, we also plan to continue to utilize our community partnerships to advocate for policy change at the local, state, and federal level. With our partners, we will continue to combat systemic racism and the criminalization of poverty, mental illness, and addiction, with the ultimate goals of reducing incarceration and recidivism.

Our growth and our commitment to individual client service and community advocacy demands that we continue to adapt to ensure that staff are well-trained and well-supported. Their jobs are stressful, demanding, and occasionally, traumatizing. Accordingly, we will focus on fostering wellness, communication, collaboration, and healthy work/life balance. The goal of improving technology and the wrap-up of the office-wide renovation project will also serve to streamline workflows, increase productivity, and support staff of all divisions. We are so excited to leverage our office's current momentum to embark on this next chapter of strategic initiatives. By the end of 2028, our office hopes to not only meet, but exceed the goals and objectives laid out in the enclosed plan. We invite you to join us in continuing to fight for the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of our community.



Theresa G. Haire
Public Defender



Kelli R. Howard
Deputy Public Defender

OUR PREVIOUS PLAN: 2021 - 2023

BUILD AN OFFICE CULTURE OF HOLISTIC DEFENSE

- Create office programs and events to assist Montgomery County residents with an array of free legal services including but not limited to record-sealing, resolving warrants, accessing driver's license amnesty programs, assisting with child support modifications, and applying for clemency.
- Create partnerships with a wide variety of community providers, including substance abuse and mental health providers and housing and homelessness providers. Utilize these partnerships to access additional funding through grant resources to decrease barriers to services for clients.
- Advocate within the courts and with probation to develop alternative and creative sentencing options for clients, including expanding access to treatment, affordable housing, and supportive services.

ADVOCATE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

- Participate in community conversations and implementation of police and criminal justice reform. Our office will continue to do our part to dismantle structures of oppression and discrimination that directly and negatively impact our clients.
- Develop and support a Participatory Defense program. This community organizing model supports people facing charges, their families, and communities to impact the outcomes of cases and transform the landscape of power in the court system.
- Advocate at a local level for bail/bond reform, reducing court fees and fines, and substituting treatment for incarceration.

PROMOTE STAFF AND OFFICE WELLNESS

- Require compliance with caseload standards for all attorneys.
- Prioritize training and staff development with a focus on diversity and inclusion, holistic defense, and substance abuse and mental health education.
- Cultivate a healthy work environment where staff can prioritize their well-being while still providing zealous and holistic defense services for clients.

PRIORITIZE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE OFFICE

- Advocate for additional office space to accommodate the expansion of holistic defense services.
- Upgrade flooring and office furnishings so staff and clients can work in a professional, clean, safe, and functional environment.
- Upgrade office technology to increase efficiency and ensure the ability to meet ever-changing staff needs for teleworking, storing evidence, and communication with clients, courts, and community partners.

REFLECTION & LEARNING

Our office has worked tirelessly over the past three years to not only provide quality criminal defense services, but to build a holistic program to address the root causes of criminal justice involvement. Today, the office boasts a holistic team of eighteen full-time social workers, case managers, and client engagement specialists who provide referrals and supportive services to clients. In 2022 alone, the holistic defense team served 1,094 individuals, reducing their collective incarcerations by 51,782 days, totaling a cost savings of over 3 million taxpayer dollars that would have otherwise been spent on jail, community-based correctional facilities, and prison stays. The office also stepped up to fill in community-wide gaps in legal services, serving over 300 individuals in our internal record-sealing clinic, co-hosting quarterly driver's license reinstatement clinics with Dayton Metro Library, and collaborating with the Montgomery County Probate Court to provide free, full-time legal assistance with pro se filings.

In addition to expanding services and individually advocating for our clients, our office has pushed for legislative and policy change. We spoke out against the use of predatory police technology in communities of color, assisted with the passage of a source of income discrimination clause in the city of Dayton, and are working closely with stakeholders to divert individuals with severe and persistent mental illness from the criminal justice system altogether. Additionally, our office invested in the professional and personal well-being of staff, ensuring adherence to caseload standards, implementing an office-wide twelve week paid parental leave policy, and prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion and self-care training offerings. Our staff are active in the community - attorneys and social workers in our office sit on over 20 task forces, coalitions, and boards aimed at police reform, diversion and deflection from jail, expanding reentry services, and improving the mental health and addiction treatment landscape.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Enhance, Augment, and Specialize Legal Defense Services

OBJECTIVE 1

Prioritize attorney, investigator, and paralegal training to facilitate specialization and increase capacity for adult felony cases.

OBJECTIVE 2

Increase advocacy for children and their families by expanding the Child and Family Law Division's legal and holistic defense services.

OBJECTIVE 3

Provide office staff, colleagues, and public defense professionals with access to relevant and timely trainings, with a focus in trial skills, DEI, and evidence-based practices.



STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Leverage Holistic Defense Practice to Advocate for Criminal Justice Reform



OBJECTIVE 1

Expand collaboration with partners to address collateral consequences of criminal justice involvement and gaps in legal services.



OBJECTIVE 2

Participate in legislative, political, and legal advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to reduce incarceration rates, protect clients' constitutional rights, and abolish oppressive and racist practices.



OBJECTIVE 3

Collaborate with community partners to improve clients' access to services and housing, provide alternatives to incarceration, and reduce recidivism by addressing the root issues of criminal justice involvement.

STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Invest in Staff to Sustain a Healthy and Productive Office Culture

OBJECTIVE 1

Engage in leadership development to better support frontline staff, improve communication, and increase accountability.

OBJECTIVE 2

Implement initiatives, activities, and programs to foster team-building and collaboration across all divisions.

OBJECTIVE 3

Develop and maintain policies to sustain caseload standards, ensure coverage for staff absences, and facilitate healthy work/life balance.



STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Conclude Capital Improvements and Update Technology for Improved Service Delivery



OBJECTIVE 1

Complete the main office renovation and utilize upgraded spaces to improve staff productivity and client experience.

OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure all staff have access to technology outside of the main office to support advocacy and engagement with clients in the field, in outlying offices and courts, and in the jail.

OBJECTIVE 3

Explore the utilization of technology to increase efficiency and productivity through the use of electronic filing and cloud-based storage.



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