

What is the National Juvenile Defender Center (NJDC)?

NJDC is a nationally recognized non-profit, non-partisan organization that exists to secure justice for all children by strengthening and building the capacity of the juvenile defense bar and working to improve access to and quality of counsel for all young people in delinquency court. Known for innovative approaches to system reform, NJDC is the recipient of the 2012 prestigious John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

Where does NJDC receive its funding?

NJDC is funded by both private and public sources. As the training and technical assistance center for OJJDP, NJDC receives an award from the Federal Government. In addition, NJDC applies to private foundations and are the recipients of grant funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Open Society Institute, and several anonymous donors. NJDC also accepts donations from private individuals.

What does the staff of NJDC do?

The staff at NJDC conducts research, evaluates juvenile defense practices, delivers specialized training on substantive law and practice skills, and provides technical assistance to juvenile defenders. NJDC employs a dual system approach that elevates the level of practice while simultaneously engaging juvenile court actors in concrete systemic reform.

Does NJDC represent clients?

NJDC does not provide direct representation to young people. NJDC “clients” are juvenile defenders who seek assistance on issues related to the representation of their clients. NJDC works with nine regional centers around the country to connect youth and families with defenders and other resources in their area. NJDC does not engage in direct appellate advocacy, but does

engage in *amicus* (friend of the court) work on select matters affecting juvenile defense issues.

Why do kids need a lawyer?

The Constitution requires that all individuals have a right to counsel, but it wasn't until 1967 that the United States Supreme Court affirmatively applied that to children charged in a delinquency court. The Supreme Court recognized that children need the guiding hand of counsel to protect their legal rights, help protect them from bias, and avoid the long-term consequences of court involvement that often negatively impact a child's future opportunities.

What juvenile court policies have been affected by NJDC?

NJDC has been instrumental in advancing a number of policy reforms that have improved the delivery of juvenile defense and have resulted in better outcomes for youth. Those reforms include ensuring counsel is appointed as early as possible, recognizing that kids don't have independent means to pay for an attorney, encouraging youth not to waive their right to an attorney, ending the use of shackles on kids in court, raising awareness of the many collateral consequences that attach after court involvement, and continuing representation even after a youth has been found delinquent.

How is NJDC engaged in policy reform?

As the only juvenile defense-focused national organization in the country, NJDC's counsel is often sought by states, judges, advocates, and policymakers on ways to improve their juvenile court practices. In response, NJDC developed a rigorous assessment process that thoroughly examines state juvenile court systems. NJDC has conducted 21 state-wide assessments of juvenile court systems, issued comprehensive reports and recommendations based on those findings, and partnered with stakeholders to implement sustainable reforms.

What else does NJDC do?

NJDC is constantly seeking innovative ways to raise the level of juvenile defense practice. Two recently released products do just that. The *National Juvenile Defense Standards (Standards)* present a national approach to systematizing competent and diligent juvenile defense practice, articulate the responsibilities of a juvenile defender, and reflect a core commitment to the unique role of the juvenile defender. These *Standards* have been widely disseminated to juvenile justice stakeholders and NJDC delivers presentations and trainings on the Standards. The Juvenile Training Immersion Program (JTIP) is a highly specialized, comprehensive, 40-lesson trial advocacy training program for juvenile defense attorneys, structured to help defenders improve their practice skills. NJDC, in collaboration with Georgetown Law, also runs an intensive week-long JTIP Summer Academy for front-line juvenile defenders.

Can NJDC point to successful national reform efforts?

NJDC partners with private foundations and the federal government to engage in strategic innovations on a national scale. NJDC's advocacy resulted in the elimination of the juvenile death penalty and the elimination of mandatory sentences of life without parole for juveniles. In 2008, NJDC became part of the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change, Action Network. Working with eight states, NJDC spearheaded policies that resulted in competency legislation for juveniles, age-appropriate court instructions, standardized contracts for court-appointed attorneys, access to counsel starting at detention hearings and continuing through disposition, performance standards, decreased waiver of counsel, a presumption of indigence for youth, mandatory training requirements, increased age of juvenile court jurisdiction, and much more.

What are NJDC's latest projects?

NJDC is pleased to be a part of the MacArthur Foundation's newly created Resource Center Partnership (RCP). As an RCP member, NJDC engages policymakers, judges, prosecutors, probation, and other non-defenders in a conversation to improve juvenile defense policy and practice.

NJDC also hosts the Equity Project, a collaboration to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in the juvenile court system are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

In addition, NJDC is engaged with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to create a roadmap to fully develop the field of juvenile indigent defense. The goal of this special initiative is to expand and enhance juvenile defense practices and policies across the nation.

NJDC plays an important role in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation ensuring that juvenile defenders have a place in detention reform developing useful tools, training, and national indicators for effective juvenile defense disposition and post-disposition practice.

How can an attorney get assistance from NJDC?

Call or email us at: Inquires@njdc.info, 202-452-0010



**NATIONAL JUVENILE
DEFENDER CENTER**

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MISSION

Promoting justice for all children by ensuring excellence in juvenile defense.

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

NJDC believes that a strong juvenile defense delivery system is a vital mechanism for ensuring that:

- *All children in the justice system have ready and timely access to skilled, well-resourced, well-trained lawyers;*
- *All children are afforded full protection of their constitutional, statutory and human rights;*
- *All children receive legal representation that is client-centered, individualized, developmentally and age appropriate, and free of bias; and*
- *All children have opportunities to attain their potential to become productive members of society.*

For these reasons, NJDC believes that the juvenile defense bar must:

- *Enhance its skill, capacity, and commitment to professionalism;*
- *Cultivate leadership to promote accountability and bring about reform in the juvenile justice system; and*
- *Build collaborations, partnerships, and community involvement to advance the juvenile defense delivery system.*

VISION STATEMENT

NJDC works to create a strong juvenile defense delivery system where:

- *The representation of children is specialized and resources and opportunities exist for juvenile defenders to fully exercise and enhance their legal, management, leadership, and advocacy skills;*
- *All children are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness;*
- *Juvenile courts are knowledgeable, sensitive, and responsive to the needs of children;*
- *Juvenile defenders have parity of resources, compensation and opportunity for advancement with adult defenders and prosecutors; and*
- *Excellence is routine.*

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FAQs

www.njdc.info