

Judge Robert S. Lasnik

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON  
AT SEATTLE

-----X  
JOSEPH JEROME WILBUR, *et al.*,

No. C11-1100RSL

Plaintiffs

v.

STATEMENT OF  
INTEREST OF THE  
UNITED STATES

CITY OF MOUNT VERNON, *et al.*,

Defendants.  
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**STATEMENT OF INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES**

The United States files this Statement of Interest to assist the Court in answering the question of what remedies are appropriate and within the Court’s powers should it find that the Cities of Mount Vernon and Burlington violate misdemeanor defendants’ right to counsel. The United States did not participate in the trial in this case and takes no position on whether Plaintiffs should prevail on the merits. The United States files this SOI to provide expertise and a perspective that it may uniquely possess. If the Plaintiffs prevail, it is the position of the United States that the Court has discretion to enter injunctive relief aimed at the specific factors that have caused public defender services to fall short of Sixth Amendment guarantees, including the appointment of an independent monitor to assist the Court. The United States has found monitoring arrangements to be critically important in enforcing complex remedies to address systemic constitutional harms.

In discussing the remedies available to the Court in this Statement, the United States will address questions (1) and (3) of the Court’s Order for Further Briefing, with particular focus on the role of an independent monitor. (Dkt. # 319.) To answer the Court’s first question, the United States is unaware of any federal court appointing a monitor to oversee reforms of a public defense agency, but the Ninth Circuit has recognized a federal court’s authority in this area under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *Miranda v. Clark County, NV*, 319 F.3d 465 (9th Cir. 2003). The United States is aware of one case in which a federal court, through a Consent Order instituting reforms of a County public defender agency, received reports from the county regarding the progress of those reforms. *Stinson v. Fulton Cnty. Bd. of Comm’rs*, No. 1:94-CV-240-GET (N.D. Ga. May 21, 1999). However, the Court did not have the benefit of an independent monitor to assist it in assessing the implementation of the reforms.

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2 Also, an independent monitor is currently monitoring systemic reform of a juvenile  
3 public defender system through an agreement between the United States and the Shelby County  
4 (TN) Juvenile Court (“Shelby County”).

5 Finally, it is worth noting that but for removal to federal court by the Cities here, this  
6 matter would have proceeded in state court, and state court litigation over the crisis in indigent  
7 defense is not at all unusual. Those cases bear out the practicality—and, at times, the  
8 necessity—of court oversight in this area.

9 In answer to the Court’s third question, a number of states have imposed “hard” caseload  
10 standards,<sup>1</sup> but the United States believes that, should any remedies be warranted, defense  
11 counsel’s *workload* should be controlled to ensure quality representation. “Workload,” as  
12 defined by the *ABA Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System*, takes into account not  
13 only a defender’s numerical caseload, but also factors like the complexity of defenders’ cases,  
14 their skills and experience, and the resources available to them. Workload controls may require  
15 flexibility to accommodate local conditions. Due to this complexity, an independent monitor  
16 would provide the Court with indispensable support in ensuring that the remedial purpose of  
17 workload controls is achieved.

18 The Washington State Bar’s Standards for Indigent Defense, incorporated by its Supreme  
19 Court in its criminal rules, considers the importance of workloads in evaluating the efficacy of  
20 defender services. Washington’s move to implement workload controls is a welcome  
21 recognition of its obligation under *Gideon*. The United States recognizes that these standards are  
22 the result of work commenced at least since 2003 by the Washington State Bar Association’s  
23 Blue Ribbon Commission on Criminal Defense and supported by the State Legislature, the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Arizona, Georgia, and New Hampshire have specific caseload limitations. A number of states have  
“soft” caseload caps by using a weighted system. See attached Exhibit 1 for a description of select jurisdictions.

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2 Washington Defender Association, and the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys,  
3 among others. These workload controls are scheduled to go into effect October 2013.<sup>2</sup>

4 **INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES**

5 The United States has authority to file this Statement of Interest pursuant to 28 U.S.C.  
6 § 517, which permits the Attorney General to attend to the interests of the United States in any  
7 case pending in federal court. The United States has an interest in ensuring that all  
8 jurisdictions—federal, state, and local—are fulfilling their obligation under the Constitution to  
9 provide effective assistance of counsel to individuals facing criminal charges who cannot afford  
10 an attorney, as required by *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963). The United States can  
11 enforce the right to counsel in juvenile delinquency proceedings pursuant the Violent Crime  
12 Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, 42 U.S.C. § 14141 (Section 14141). As noted  
13 above, the United States is currently enforcing Section 14141’s juvenile justice provision  
14 through a comprehensive out-of-court settlement with Shelby County.<sup>3</sup> An essential piece of the  
15 agreement, which is subject to independent monitoring, is the establishment of a juvenile public  
16 defender system with “reasonable workloads” and “sufficient resources to provide independent,  
17 ethical, and zealous representation to Children in delinquency matters.” *Id.* at 14-15.

18 As the Attorney General recently proclaimed, “It’s time to reclaim Gideon’s petition –  
19 and resolve to confront the obstacles facing indigent defense providers.”<sup>4</sup> In March 2010, the  
20 Attorney General launched the Access to Justice Initiative to address the access-to-justice crisis.  
21 Indigent defense reform is a critical piece of the office’s work, and the Initiative provides a

22 \_\_\_\_\_  
23 <sup>2</sup> The United States does not by this mean to endorse or detract from the efforts of these entities.

24 <sup>3</sup> Mem. of Agreement Regarding the Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby Counties, Tennessee (2012), *available*  
25 *at* <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/findsettle.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks at the Justice Department’s 50th Anniversary Celebration of the U.S.  
Supreme Court Decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, March 15, 2013, *available at*  
<http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/ag/speeches/2013/ag-speech-1303151.html>.

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2 centralized focus for carrying out the Department's commitment to improving indigent defense.<sup>5</sup>  
3 The Department has also sought to address this crisis through a number of grant programs.<sup>6</sup> The  
4 most recent is a 2012 \$1.2 million grant program, *Answering Gideon's Call: Strengthening*  
5 *Indigent Defense Through Implementing the ABA Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery*  
6 *System* administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.<sup>7</sup> In light of the United States' interest  
7 in ensuring that any constitutional deficiencies the Court may find are adequately remedied, the  
8 United States files this Statement of Interest on the availability of injunctive relief.

### 9 BACKGROUND

10 The Plaintiffs' claims of deprivations of the right to counsel, if meritorious, are part of a  
11 crisis impacting public defender services nationwide. Fifty years ago, the Supreme Court held  
12 that "any person haled into court, who is too poor to hire a lawyer, cannot be assured a fair trial  
13 unless counsel is provided for him." *Gideon*, 372 U.S. at 344. And yet, as the Attorney General  
14 recently noted, "despite the undeniable progress our nation has witnessed over the last  
15 half-century—America's indigent defense systems continue to exist in a state of crisis," and "in  
16 some places—do little more than process people in and out of our courts."<sup>8</sup>

17 Our national difficulty to meet the obligations recognized in *Gideon* is well documented.<sup>9</sup>  
18 *See, e.g.* ABA Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants Report, *Gideon's*  
19 *Broken Promise: America's Continuing Quest for Equal Justice*, (December 2004). Despite  
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21 <sup>5</sup> The office works with federal agencies, and state, local, and tribal justice system stakeholders to increase access to  
22 counsel, highlight best practices, and improve the justice delivery systems that serve people who are unable to afford  
23 lawyers. More information is available at <http://www.justice.gov/atj/>.

<sup>6</sup> See Government Accountability Office, *Indigent Defense: DOJ Could Increase Awareness of Eligible Funding* 11-  
14 (May 2012), available at <http://www.justice.gov/atj/idp/>.

<sup>7</sup> Grants have been awarded to agencies in Texas, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

<sup>8</sup> Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks at the American Film Institute's Screening of *Gideon's Army*, June 21, 2013,  
24 available at <http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/ag/speeches/2013/ag-speech-130621.html>.

<sup>9</sup> In March 2013, the Yale Law Journal held a symposium on the challenges of meeting Gideon's promise and  
25 published resulting articles in its most recent issue. *See* 122 Yale L.J. \_\_ (June 2013).

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2 long recognition that “the proper performance of the defense function is . . . as vital to the health  
3 of the system as the performance of the prosecuting and adjudicatory functions,” Attorney  
4 General's Committee on Poverty and the Administration of Federal Criminal Justice, *Final*  
5 *Report* 11 (1963), public defense agencies nationwide remain at a staggering disadvantage when  
6 it comes to resources. Steven W. Perry & Duren Banks, U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics,  
7 *Prosecutors in State Courts, 2007 Statistical Tables* 1 (2012) (noting that prosecution offices  
8 nationwide receive about 2.5 times the funding that defense offices receive); National Right to  
9 Counsel Committee, *Justice Denied: America's Continuing Neglect of Our Constitutional Right*  
10 *to Counsel* 61-64 (2009) (collecting examples of funding disparities).

11 Due to this lack of resources, states and localities across the country face a crisis in  
12 indigent defense. Cara H. Drinan, *The Third Generation of Indigent Defense Litigation*, 33  
13 N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change 427 (2009) (describing crises nationwide). In many states,  
14 remedying the crisis in indigent defense has required court intervention. *E.g.*, *State v. Citizen*,  
15 898 So.2d 325 (La. 2005); *Hurrell-Harring v. New York*, 930 N.E.2d 217 (N.Y. 2010); *Missouri*  
16 *Public Defender Comm'n v. Waters*, 370 S.W.3d 592 (Mo. 2012). The crisis in indigent defense  
17 extends to misdemeanor cases where many waive their right to counsel and end up unnecessarily  
18 imprisoned. NACDL, *Minor Crimes, Massive Waste* 21 (2009).<sup>10</sup>

## 19 DISCUSSION

20 It is the position of the United States that it would be lawful and appropriate for the Court  
21 to enter injunctive relief if this litigation reveals systemic constitutional deficiencies in the  
22 Defendants' provision of public defender services. Indeed, the concept of federal oversight to  
23 address the crisis in defender services has gained momentum in recent years. *See, e.g.*, *Gideon's*  
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25 <sup>10</sup> The report is available at <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/minor-crimes-massivewaste>.

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2 *Broken Promise, supra*, at 41-42 (recommending federal funding); Drinan, *The Third Generation*  
3 *of Indigent Defense Litigation, supra* (arguing federal judges are well suited to address systemic  
4 Sixth Amendment claims); Note, *Gideon’s Promise Unfulfilled: The Need for Litigated Reform*  
5 *of Indigent Defense*, 113 Harv. L. Rev. 2062 (2000) (advocating systemic litigation). (Again,  
6 the United States takes no position on the merits of the underlying suit.)

7 **I. The Court Has Broad Authority to Enter Injunctive Relief, Including the**  
8 **Appointment of an Independent Monitor, if It Finds a Deprivation of the Right to**  
9 **Counsel.**

10 If Plaintiffs prevail on the merits of their claims, or as part of a consent decree, this Court  
11 has broad authority to order injunctive relief that is adequate to remedy any identified  
12 constitutional violations within the Cities’ defender systems. *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*  
13 *Bd. of Educ.*, 402 U.S. 1, 15 (1971); *see also Thomas v. County of Los Angeles*, 978 F.2d 504,  
14 509 (9th Cir. 1992) (noting that courts have power to issue “broad injunctive relief” where there  
15 exist specific findings of a “persistent pattern of [police] misconduct”). When crafting injunctive  
16 relief that requires state officials to alter the manner in which they execute their core functions, a  
17 court must be mindful of federalism concerns and avoid unnecessarily intrusive remedies.  
18 *Labor/Community Strategy Center v. Los Angeles County*, 263 F.3d 1041, 1050 (9th Cir. 2001).  
19 Courts have long recognized—across a wide range of institutional settings—that equity often  
20 requires the implementation of injunctive relief to correct unconstitutional conduct, even where  
21 that relief relates to a state’s administrative practices. *See, e.g., Brown v. Plata*, 131 S. Ct. 1910  
22 (2011) (upholding injunctive relief affecting State’s administration of prisons); *Brown v. Bd. of*  
23 *Educ.*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955) (upholding injunctive relief affecting State’s administration of  
24 schools). Indeed, while courts “must be sensitive to the State’s interest[s],” courts “nevertheless  
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2 must not shrink from their obligation to ‘enforce the constitutional rights of all persons.’” *Plata*,  
3 131 S. Ct. at 1928 (quoting *Cruz v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 319, 321 (1972)).

4 In crafting injunctive relief, the authority of the Court to appoint a monitor is well  
5 established. *Eldridge v. Carpenters 46*, 94 F.3d 1366 (9th Cir. 1996) (holding that district  
6 court’s failure to appoint a monitor was an abuse of discretion where defendant insisted on  
7 retaining a hiring practice already held to be unlawfully discriminatory); *Nat’l Org. for the*  
8 *Reform of Marijuana Laws v. Mullen*, 828 F.2d 536, 543 (9th Cir. 1987); *Madrid v. Gomez*, 889  
9 F. Supp. 1146, 1282 (N.D. Cal. 1995) (holding that the “assistance of a Special Master is clearly  
10 appropriate” because “[d]eveloping a comprehensive remedy in this case will be a complex  
11 undertaking involving issues of a technical and highly charged nature”).

## 12 **II. Appointment of an Independent Monitor Is Critical to Implementing Complex** 13 **Remedies to Address Systemic Constitutional Violations.**

14 In the experience of the United States, appointing a monitor can provide substantial  
15 assistance to courts and parties and can reduce unnecessary delays and litigation over disputes  
16 regarding compliance. This is especially true when institutional reform can be expected to take a  
17 number of years. A monitor provides the independence and expertise necessary to conduct the  
18 objective, credible analysis upon which a court can rely to determine whether its order is being  
19 implemented, and that gives the parties and the community confidence in the reform process. A  
20 monitor will also save the Court’s time.

21 In Grant County, Washington, an independent monitor was essential to implementing the  
22 court’s injunction in a right-to-counsel case. *Best et al. v. Grant County*, No. 04-2-00189-0  
23 (Kittitas Cty. Sup. Ct., filed Dec. 21, 2004). There, the monitor assisted the court and parties for  
24 almost six years by conducting site visits, assessing caseloads, and completing quarterly reports  
25 on the County’s compliance with court orders. We note that the monitor’s term in Grant County

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2 was limited from the outset to a defined period, and the monitor's final report noted work that  
3 still remained to be done.<sup>11</sup> In our experience, it is best to continue monitoring arrangements  
4 until the affected parties have demonstrated sustained compliance with the court's orders.

5 In 2009, the United States entered a Memorandum of Agreement with King County,  
6 Washington to reform the King County Correctional Facility. *United States v. King County,*  
7 *Washington*, No. 2:09-cv-00059 (W.D. Wash., filed Jan. 15, 2009). That successful reform  
8 process was assisted by an independent monitor. Other significant cases involving monitors  
9 include: *United States v. City of Pittsburgh*, No. 97-cv-354 (W.D. Pa., filed Feb. 26, 1997)  
10 (police; compliance reached in 1999); *United States v. Dallas County*, No. 3:07-cv-1559-N (N.D.  
11 Tex., filed Nov. 6, 2007) (jail); *United States v. Delaware*, No. 1-11-cv-591 (D. Del., filed Jun 6,  
12 2011) (mental health system); *United States v. City of Seattle*, No. 12-cv-1282 (W.D. Wash.,  
13 filed July 27, 2012)(police). In each of these cases, the independent monitor improved efficiency  
14 in implementation, decreased collateral litigation, and provided great assistance to the court.<sup>12</sup>

15 The selection of a monitor need not be a strictly top-down decision by the Court. The  
16 parties may agree on who should fill the role of the monitor, but if they cannot, the Court can  
17 order them to nominate monitor candidates for the Court's consideration. In addition, it should  
18 be noted that the cost of an independent monitor, however it is paid, should not reduce the funds  
19 available for indigent defense.

20 Finally, it should be noted that the appointment of an independent monitor can ensure  
21 public confidence in the reform process. With allegiance only to the Court and a duty to report  
22 its findings accurately and objectively, the monitor assures the public that the Cities will move  
23

24 <sup>11</sup> The monitor's final report and two of its quarterly reports are attached as Exhibit 2.

25 <sup>12</sup> Summaries of those cases, relevant pleadings, and reports from the monitors can be found at  
<http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/findsettle.php>.

1  
2 forward in implementing the Court's order, and will not escape notice if they do not. Moreover,  
3 the Cities' progress towards implementing the Court's order will be more readily accepted by a  
4 broader segment of the public if that progress is affirmed by a monitor who is responsible for  
5 confirming each claim of compliance asserted by the Cities.

6 **III. If the Court Finds Liability in this Case, its Remedy Should Include Workload**  
7 **Controls, Which Are Well-Suited to Implementation by an Independent Monitor.**

8 Achieving systemic reform to ensure meaningful access to counsel is an important, but  
9 complex and time-consuming, undertaking. Any remedy imposed by the Court may require  
10 years of assessment to determine whether it is accomplishing its purpose, and the Court and the  
11 parties may need independent assistance to resolve concerns about compliance.

12 One source of complexity will be how the Court and parties assess whether public  
13 defenders are overburdened. In its Order for Further Briefing, the Court asked about "hard"  
14 caseload standards, which provide valuable, bright-line rules that define the outer boundaries of  
15 what may be reasonably expected of public defenders. *ABA Ten Principles, supra*. However,  
16 caseload limits alone cannot keep public defenders from being overworked into ineffectiveness;  
17 two additional protections are required. First, a public defender must have the authority to  
18 decline appointments over the caseload limit. Second, caseload limits are no replacement for a  
19 careful analysis of a public defender's *workload*, a concept that takes into account all of the  
20 factors affecting a public defender's ability to adequately represent clients, such as the  
21 complexity of cases on a defender's docket, the defender's skill and experience, the support  
22 services available to the defender, and the defender's other duties. *See id.* Making an accurate  
23 assessment of a defender's workload requires observation, record collection and analysis,  
24 interviews with defenders and their supervisors, and so on, all of which must be performed  
25 quarterly or every six months over the course of several years to ensure that the Court's remedies

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2 are being properly implemented. The monitor can also assess whether, regardless of workload,  
3 defenders are carrying out other hallmarks of minimally effective representation, such as visiting  
4 clients, conducting investigations, performing legal research, and pursuing discovery. ABA  
5 Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants, *Eight Guidelines of Public Defense*  
6 *Workloads* (August 2009). These kinds of detailed inquiries, carried out over sufficient time to  
7 ensure meaningful and long-lasting reform, are critical to assessing whether the Cities are truly  
8 honoring misdemeanor defendants' right to counsel, and they can be made most efficiently and  
9 reliably by an independent monitor. As shown in Exhibit 2, these are the kinds of inquiries made  
10 by the independent monitor in the Grant County, Washington case. Also, should non-  
11 compliance be identified, early and objective detection by the monitor, as well as the  
12 identification of barriers to compliance, allow the parties to undertake corrective action.

13 An independent monitor may also obviate the need for the Court to dictate specific and  
14 rigid caseload requirements. In the Shelby County juvenile justice enforcement matter, for  
15 example, the County is required to establish a juvenile defender program that provides defense  
16 attorneys with reasonable workloads, appropriate administrative supports, training, and the  
17 resources to provide zealous and independent representation to their clients, but the agreement  
18 does not specify a numerical caseload limit. *See* Mem. of Agreement at 14-15.

## 19 CONCLUSION

20 Should the Court find for the Plaintiffs, it has broad powers to issue injunctive relief.  
21 That power includes the authority to appoint an independent monitor who would assist the  
22 Court's efforts to ensure that any remedies ordered are effective, efficiently implemented, and  
23 achieve the intended result.  
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Respectfully submitted,

JOCELYN SAMUELS\*  
Acting Assistant Attorney General  
Civil Rights Division  
United States Department of Justice

ROY L. AUSTIN, JR. (DC 980360)\*  
Deputy Assistant Attorney General  
Civil Rights Division

Of Counsel:  
Deborah Leff (DC 941054)\*  
Acting Senior Counselor for  
Access to Justice  
Telephone: (202) 514-7073  
deborah.leff@usdoj.gov

JONATHAN M. SMITH (DC 396578)  
Chief  
Civil Rights Division  
Special Litigation Section

Larry Kupers (DC 492450)\*  
Senior Counsel  
Access to Justice  
Telephone: (202) 514-7173  
Larry.B.Kupers@usdoj.gov

JUDY C. PRESTON (MD)\*  
Principal Deputy Chief  
Civil Rights Division  
Special Litigation Section

    /s/ Winsome G. Gayle      
WINSOME G. GAYLE (NY 3974193)\*  
Trial Attorney  
Civil Rights Division  
Special Litigation Section  
Winsome.Gayle@usdoj.gov

    /s/ Paul Killebrew      
PAUL KILLEBREW (LA 32176)\*  
Trial Attorney  
Civil Rights Division  
Special Litigation Section  
Paul.Killebrew@usdoj.gov

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530  
Telephone: (202) 514-2000  
Facsimile: (202) 514-6273

*Attorneys for the United States of America*

\*Conditional Admission is Pending

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that on August 14, 2013, a copy of the foregoing was filed electronically. Notice of this filing will be sent by email to all parties by operation of the Court's electronic filing system. Parties may access this filing through the Court's CM/ECF System.

    /s/ Winsome G. Gayle      
WINSOME G. GAYLE\*  
Trial Attorney  
Civil Rights Division  
Special Litigation Section  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530  
Telephone: (202) 514-2000  
Facsimile: (202) 514-6273  
Winsome.Gayle@usdoj.gov

*Attorney for the United States of America*

\* Conditional Admission is Pending