

**NEW YORK STATE
DEFENDERS ASSOCIATION**

**2026
ANNUAL
REPORT**



Expanding Capacity, Strengthening Defense

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Our Mission

The New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA), a not-for-profit, membership organization, has been providing support to New York's public defense community since 1967. Our mission is to improve the quality and scope of publicly supported legal representation to low-income people.

Public Defense Backup Center

Established in 1979 and State-funded since 1981, the Public Defense Backup Center provides a range of services to public defense attorneys and defense team members, as well as public defense, legal aid, and assigned counsel offices. Those services include training, case consultations and research, publications, and the Public Defense Case Management System (PDCMS).

The Backup Center also provides information to the public, as well as guidance and recommendations related to public defense and the criminal and family legal systems to county governments, and the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of New York State's government. Our legal staff participate in the NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services' advisory groups, bar association committees, and other state and national councils and coalitions.

We seek to identify and address legal developments and social and policy challenges that affect the criminal and family legal systems, including issues related to poverty, racism, mental health, and individual and community trauma.

Veterans Defense Program

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) provides training, support, and legal assistance to promote trauma-informed effective representation of veterans and service members in New York State's criminal and family court systems. The first of its kind in the nation, the VDP was launched in 2014 in response to a crisis situation as growing numbers of veterans with service-related mental health issues were lost in the criminal justice system.

Message from the Executive Director

The pages that follow provide a window into the work and impact of our Association over the past year, and our plans and goals for the coming year. We are able to thrive because we all have the same goals - elevating zealous client-centered representation; ensuring that policymakers and the public understand the importance of public defense as well as our constitutional rights; and the need for systems and policies that support individuals and families across New York.

Our longtime and new staff bring energy, expertise, compassion, and creativity to the many programs and projects of the Association. The work is challenging and acknowledging the need to provide greater support to our ever-growing staff, we hired a Director of Operations this year. We can only support the defender community, members, and clients when we take care of our team.

Implementation of our strategic plan remains at the forefront of our work. Many of the efforts described in this report have come from the plan's goals, and the Association's board is hard at work building a stronger governance structure. We look forward to continuing to expand our team, strengthen our organizational structure, and bolster our services.

We are grateful to our members, donors, training presenters, funders, and partners for your support. Thanks to you, we are able to continue to meet the needs of criminal and family defenders, defense teams, public defense offices, and their clients.

Next year we will celebrate NYSDA's 60th anniversary in 2027, as well as the 40th anniversary of the Basic Trial Skills Program. We hope that you will join us in celebrating our history and commit to being part of our Association's bright future.

With gratitude,
Susan C. Bryant



Turning Support into Impact

NYSDA's strength lies in its ability to support defenders at every stage of their work. Through training, consultation, resource development, case support, and statewide collaboration, NYSDA provides the tools and expertise needed to meet evolving challenges in public defense. The following pages highlight the programs, services, and initiatives that advanced our mission and strengthened defense representation across New York State in the past year.

Public Defense Backup Center

Built on Responsiveness and Collaboration

The Public Defense Backup Center continues to serve as a central pillar of NYSDA's work, providing direct and responsive support to defenders across New York State. The Backup Center ensures that attorneys have access to timely guidance, strategic insight, and critical resources when representing their clients and navigating complex legal challenges.

At the core of this work is a commitment to responsiveness and accessibility. Intake calls connect attorneys with NYSDA staff, ensuring that questions can be addressed efficiently.

Attorneys frequently express appreciation for this approach, noting that it reinforces a sense of support and ensures they are not working in isolation. These interactions also create opportunities for shared learning and professional connection.

Beyond immediate case assistance, the Backup Center plays an important role in identifying broader trends across cases and jurisdictions. Insights gained through intake work inform training topics, resource development, and organizational priorities, helping NYSDA remain responsive to the evolving needs of defenders.

This work often takes place behind the scenes, but its impact is both immediate and far-reaching. By connecting attorneys with the guidance, expertise, and resources they need, the Backup Center **strengthens** defense practices, **supports** better outcomes for clients, and **reinforces** a statewide network of public defense professionals.

Discovery and Forensic Support Unit

NYSDA's Discovery and Forensic Support Unit continues to support criminal and family defenders across New York by providing attorneys with the tools, guidance, and connections to technical expertise and referrals needed to navigate complex evidence. Building on a strong foundation, the Unit has expanded its work in case consultation, training, and resource development.

The Unit's intake work simultaneously reflects the evolving nature of modern evidence and the desire to stay connected in a largely remote world. NYSDA's legal staff use a collaborative model to help attorneys seeking assistance, often through video brainstorming meetings. Defenders are able to receive guidance from NYSDA staff who have various backgrounds and experience and feel supported when handling challenging cases. Defenders are more likely to reach out for help in the future as a result of the connections built during these consultations.

In tandem with case consultation, the Unit continues to build and maintain a growing network of experts and consultants who practice in various areas of forensics. By curating and strengthening these relationships, the Unit connects defenders with the expertise necessary to challenge forensic evidence and develop effective case strategies.

The Unit also remains engaged in broader systemic work through projects and collaborations. Ongoing efforts include FOIL and data collection projects focused on police misconduct records and forensic laboratory practices, as well as contributions to amicus briefs in cases involving emerging forensic and evidentiary issues. These initiatives help inform litigation strategies and shape future training opportunities for defenders statewide.

Training remains a core component of the Unit's work. This year, staff presented at conferences and trainings on topics such as video evidence and digital forensics and continued to develop programming, including a DNA expert series and additional webinar offerings. These trainings equip attorneys with practical skills and up-to-date knowledge in an increasingly technical legal landscape.

Additionally, the Unit expanded its resource development, producing guides such as the *Expert Funding Guide*, *Subpoenaing Cell Phone Records Guide*, and *AI Starter Guide*, along with materials addressing issues such as body-worn camera audit trails and automatic discovery. These resources help attorneys make informed decisions and strengthen their advocacy.

Veterans Defense Program



The Veterans Defense Program provides training, support, and legal assistance to promote trauma-informed, client-centered representation of veterans and service members involved in New York State's criminal and family courts.

Values

Teach Military Cultural Competence
Seek Therapeutic Alternatives to Incarceration
Open Access to Services
Restore Healthy Veterans to Their Families & Communities

Vision

The Veterans Defense Program (VDP) has continued to support justice-involved veterans across New York State through mitigation, advocacy, training, and resource coordination. Over the past year, the program experienced a 73% increase in case volume while continuing to expand its team and strengthen collaboration with defender offices across the state.

The VDP has broadened its approach to mitigation work through the addition of staff with diverse backgrounds, expanding the program's ability to address the personal, social, and service-related factors affecting veteran clients. In addition to reviewing military and VA records, the team continued developing comprehensive mitigation reports that provide defenders with additional context regarding clients' military service, personal history, and support needs.

The VDP also expanded outreach efforts in New York City and in counties where veteran-specific defense resources are limited. Through continued collaboration with Veteran Justice Outreach Coordinators (VJOs), Veterans Service Officers (VSOs), and local providers, the VDP strengthened connections to treatment, support services, and advocacy resources for veterans involved in the criminal and family court systems.

Defenders continued to report that the program's trainings, consultations, and mitigation support strengthened their ability to better understand, collaborate with, and advocate for veteran clients. The VDP's work also contributed to increased access to therapeutic and supportive interventions, including alternatives to incarceration.

Despite the significant increase in case volume, the VDP staff maintained their strong team-based approach and ensured that those seeking help received timely high-quality support. The continued growth of the program reinforced the importance of cross-disciplinary coordination in supporting defender offices and veteran clients statewide.



Modernizing Case Management

This year marked a significant step forward in the modernization of NYSDA's Public Defense Case Management System (PDCMS). We completed the development of PDCMS Pro, a new cloud-based platform designed to improve functionality, accessibility, and long-term sustainability for defender offices across New York State.

The development project is a major infrastructure investment in the system that has supported defender offices for more than 30 years. The transition to PDCMS Pro is designed to strengthen case management capabilities for defender offices by improving case tracking, reporting, and data accessibility. The system supports attorneys and staff in managing detailed case information, including court events, outcomes, and reporting requirements for both state and county officials. Throughout the year, the team also assisted offices with reviewing and correcting reporting data related to ILS-195 and PRR-195 requirements, helping offices identify and address data issues and improve accuracy.

In addition to the development project, work continued on the implementation of a new Learning Management System (LMS) designed to support users transitioning to PDCMS Pro. The integration of training resources into the system reflects NYSDA's broader focus on usability, long-term support, and improved access to technical guidance for defender offices statewide.

The project also involved ongoing collaboration with external partners. Together, these partnerships supported the continued development, testing, security implementation, and management of the new platform. Efforts throughout the year also focused on ensuring that PDCMS Pro aligns with NIST 800-171 security standards and modern cloud infrastructure requirements.

This work reflects NYSDA's continued investment in innovation, modernization, and long-term operational support for public defense offices statewide. PDCMS Pro will improve efficiency, strengthen reporting capabilities, and provide defender offices with more sustainable and secure case management infrastructure for the future. We look forward to bringing PDCMS Pro to the defender community and working with offices and users to enhance the system to meet their needs in the months and years to come.

Family Defense

This year marked several significant developments in NYSDA's family defense work, including the organization's first standalone two-day family defense conference since 2018.

Held in Utica, the conference brought together defenders, advocates, and multidisciplinary professionals to discuss emerging issues, strengthen statewide connections, and share strategies for supporting families involved in the family court and family policing systems.

The conference highlighted the continued growth of family defense work in counties throughout the state and created opportunities for collaboration and information-sharing among defenders working in different regions and practice settings. The event allowed defenders from upstate and downstate offices and assigned counsel programs to network with each other and NYSDA staff from the Backup Center and VDP and reinforced NYSDA's role in supporting family defenders statewide.

Throughout the year, the team expanded access to support and training for attorneys working in resource-limited environments. Webinars on timely family court topics, along with continued development of family resource and motion practice materials, provided defenders with practical tools and guidance for navigating complex cases. NYSDA's Family Court resource page, particularly the motion practice section, has continued to serve as a valuable resource for attorneys across the state.

This year also reflected broader shifts within the family court landscape. Increased state funding for early defense representation and caseload relief, along with several significant Court of Appeals decisions, contributed to a growing sense of cautious optimism regarding continued progress and systemic change within family court practice. While challenges remain for defender offices and families statewide, the Backup Center remains focused on expanding access to resources, strengthening advocacy efforts, and supporting attorneys navigating complex family court matters.

Recruitment and Retention Project

NYSDA's Recruitment and Retention Project continues to support public defense offices across New York State by strengthening pathways into the field and addressing ongoing staffing challenges.

The initiative focuses on building connections between students, new attorneys, and public defense offices, while supporting long-term hiring and retention strategies. The project also includes ongoing work to identify and share best practices that support local recruitment and retention efforts across offices statewide.

This year, NYSDA maintained a presence at key outreach events, including tabling at the Public Interest Networking Event at Cardozo School of Law.

NYSDA also partnered with Brooklyn Law School to host a program introducing students to careers in public defense. The event featured a panel of practicing public defenders who shared insight into their work and engaged directly with students through a live Q&A.

Through these efforts, NYSDA continues to increase awareness of public defense careers, strengthen connections between offices and prospective candidates, and lay the foundation for a more sustainable and inclusive public defense workforce.



29 Training Events



37 On- Demand CLE Courses





89 *Presenters*





3,650+

CLE Certificates Issued





***38% Increase in Annual
Conference Attendees***



CLE Trainings

This year, NYSDA continued to expand its training and CLE programming to meet the evolving needs of defenders across New York State. Through webinars, regional trainings, conferences, and on-demand learning, NYSDA provided accessible professional development focused on both emerging legal issues and practical litigation skills.

Trainings addressed a range of timely and high-demand topics impacting defender practice, including discovery, immigration consequences of court involvement, and changes related to DMV policies and procedures. Attendance remained strong across both virtual and in-person programming, reflecting the continued call for responsive and practice-focused defender training. Many in-person programs reached capacity, while webinars consistently drew significant participation from attorneys and defense team members around New York and other states.

NYSDA also enlarged access to training through its on-demand CLE platform, launched in 2025. The platform increased flexibility for defenders managing demanding caseloads and varying schedules by allowing attorneys to complete courses remotely, at their own pace. Continued growth of the platform reflects increasing interest in accessible, high-quality training options that better accommodate the realities of public defense work.

In-person trainings and regional programs continue to provide valuable opportunities for defenders to connect with colleagues, exchange strategies, and strengthen professional networks across different regions and practice areas. These programs reinforce the importance of collaboration and community within public defense work while supporting both newer and experienced attorneys statewide.

Feedback from participants throughout the year continued to highlight the value of both accessible virtual learning and opportunities for in-person connection. Defenders consistently emphasized the importance of trainings that are timely, practical, and responsive to the challenges they face in daily practice. As legal issues and defender needs continue to evolve, NYSDA remains focused on offering training programs that provide meaningful educational experiences that support effective public defense representation across New York State.

Annual Conference & Metropolitan Trainer



NYSDA's 2025 Annual Conference and 2026 Metropolitan Trainer each brought together defenders and public defense professionals from across New York State to engage with emerging legal issues, strengthen advocacy skills, and examine developments impacting defense practice.

Attendance at the 58th Annual Meeting and Conference rose significantly. Over two days, attendees participated in CLE sessions, panel discussions, and practice-focused programming addressing timely issues in criminal and family defense. The conference also provided opportunities for defenders to engage in broader conversations surrounding the future of defender work. NYSDA was pleased to host a number of law students who were doing summer internships at public defense offices at the conference and to recognize and celebrate the great work being done by individual defenders and leaders.

The Metropolitan Trainer similarly provided attorneys with focused programming on evolving areas of practice, including discovery developments, mitigation strategies, veteran representation, forensic issues, and litigation challenges. The program emphasized practical guidance and real-world application, equipping defenders with tools and information directly relevant to their work.

Together, these programs demonstrate NYSDA's commitment to practice-focused trainings that support defenders navigating an evolving legal landscape.

Family Court Conference & Fall Forensics Conference



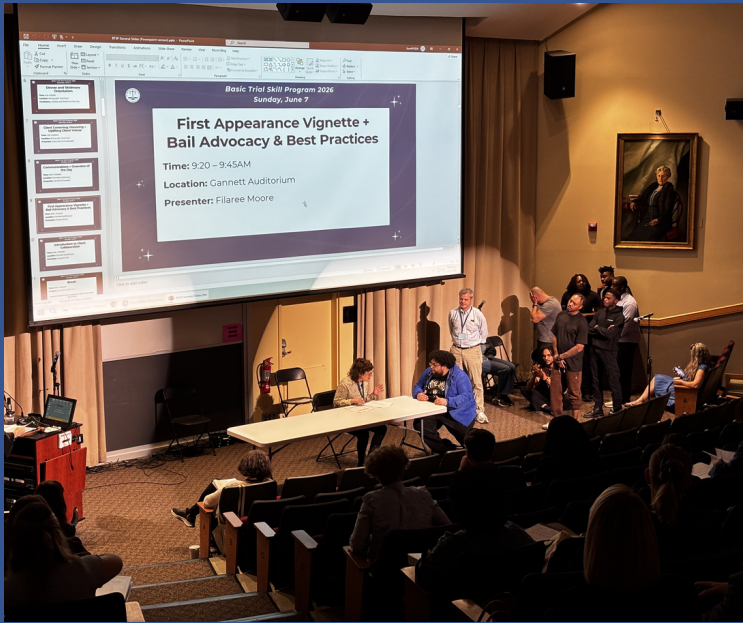
Family Court Conference

The Family Court Conference provided family defense practitioners with an opportunity to engage in specialized training, share emerging strategies, and discuss challenges facing families in New York's family court system. Sessions addressed developments in law and practice, interdisciplinary collaboration, and effective advocacy techniques. The conference also fostered networking among defenders, advocates, and multidisciplinary professionals committed to improving outcomes for families and children. Each session provided attorneys with opportunities to deepen their knowledge of complex and developing issues impacting families in New York.

Fall Forensics Conference

NYSDA's Fall Forensics Conference, *Evidence Unlocked*, brought together defenders and advocates for two days of specialized forensic programming focused on digital evidence, DNA transfer, cross-examination strategies, and Fourth Amendment issues in the digital age. Through expert-led presentations and litigation-focused sessions, attendees explored emerging forensic topics and the growing role of technical evidence in criminal defense representation. The conference underscored the importance of forensic education in helping defenders navigate increasingly complex evidentiary challenges in modern defense practice.

Basic Trial Skills Program



NYSDA's Basic Trial Skills Program (BTSP) brought together public defenders from around New York State for a week of intensive, hands-on advocacy training designed to strengthen courtroom skills and client-centered representation. Through simulated case exercises, faculty feedback, and practical skills development, participants gained experience in trial advocacy while building connections with colleagues from across the defense community.

This year's program marked an important leadership transition, with Deputy Director Natalie Brocklebank serving as Program Director for the first time and Stephanie Batcheller continuing her longstanding involvement as Director Emeritus. Their leadership, combined with the expertise and dedication of faculty, actors, staff, and participants, helped create a dynamic learning environment focused on professional growth and excellence in public defense.

BTSP continues to play a vital role in preparing defenders to meet the challenges of courtroom practice while supporting the continued growth of New York's public defense community.

Advocacy and Impact



NYSDA continued supporting advocacy efforts impacting defenders, clients, and families across New York State. Working alongside impacted families, young people, public defenders, civil legal services providers, and community organizations, staff participated in advocacy days and legislative hearings on family rights, youth justice, public defense funding, attorney loan forgiveness, and other issues.

NYSDA also continued contributing to systemic advocacy efforts through amicus work, forensic advocacy, and collaboration with defense partners around the state. The organization signed onto and supported multiple amicus briefs addressing issues related to due process rights, evidentiary standards, forensic evidence, and access to information critical to defense representation.

Advocacy efforts also included continued support for family defense initiatives, increased awareness surrounding emerging forensic and evidentiary issues, and resource development for defenders navigating complex legal challenges. This work reflected NYSDA's ongoing commitment to supporting defenders and addressing broader issues impacting clients and public defense practice across New York State.

Staff Changes

This year reflected continued growth across NYSDA's public defense support and advocacy work through the expansion of staff capacity and the addition of new attorneys and team members in multiple areas of the organization. New staff have brought a wide range of professional backgrounds, litigation experience, and subject matter knowledge that strengthen NYSDA's ability to support defenders throughout New York State. This growth has been successful thanks to the strong foundation built over the past 59 years and NYSDA's existing staff, the majority of whom have been with the organization for many years.

Along with organizational growth, NYSDA has also worked to enhance collaboration across programs and practice areas, a key goal of the Association's strategic plan. Staff worked together on trainings, resource development, advocacy initiatives, and technical assistance efforts, contributing to a broader culture of knowledge-sharing and cross-disciplinary support. This approach strengthened NYSDA's ability to respond to emerging issues impacting defenders and public defense systems statewide.

We recognize the contributions of two staff members who are leaving NYSDA in July 2026.

Kiarra Coleman, Legal Assistant and Program Coordinator, is embarking on a new journey to Maruice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University in the fall. During her two years at NYSDA, Kiarra has been an important member of the Discovery and Forensic Support Unit, has made significant contributions to the Recruitment and Retention Project and Association publications, and has enhanced our social media presence. While Kiarra will be missed, we wish her the very best as she continues her education and commitment to uplifting underserved communities.

Diane DuBois, Executive Assistant, has been a vital member of the NYSDA's staff for more than 18 years. Diane's professionalism, knowledge, and longstanding commitment to NYSDA's work have had meaningful impact on the Association and the broader defender community, and her contributions to all areas of our work will continue to be felt for years to come. We cannot thank Diane enough for all she has given to NYSDA and wish her all the best.

Looking Ahead...

Building on this year's progress, NYSDA remains committed to strengthening public defense through innovation, collaboration, and responsive support for defenders, public defense teams, and offices around the state.

Future Outlook

As NYSDA continues to expand its programs, resources, and statewide initiatives, the organization remains focused on strengthening support for defenders and responding to the evolving needs of the public defense community in New York State. Growth across training, advocacy, forensic support, family defense, and technology initiatives reflects NYSDA's ongoing commitment to providing meaningful support for defenders in every region of the state.

In the coming year, NYSDA will continue supporting the rollout and development of the new PDCMS Pro. The organization also plans to continue expanding access to training opportunities through regional programming, webinars, conferences, and on-demand learning options that allow defenders greater flexibility in accessing professional development opportunities.

Family defense and the Discovery and Forensic Support Unit will also remain important areas of focus. As these issues continue to evolve, NYSDA is committed to developing resources, trainings, and collaborative opportunities that help defenders navigate the increasingly complex areas of practice and elevate the quality of public defense representation for clients statewide.

NYSDA looks forward to the opening of the Defender Institute, a new training and event space located in downtown Albany. The Institute will host education and training programs, conferences, networking and recruitment events, and provide opportunities for greater engagement within New York's public defense community. Client-centered representation will be central to the Institute.

As the organization looks ahead, NYSDA remains committed to innovation, high-quality representation, and building stronger systems of support for defenders, clients, and communities across New York State. Through collaboration, training, advocacy, and organizational growth, NYSDA will continue working to strengthen public defense and support those carrying out this critical work every day.

**THE NYSDA TEAM,
COLLEAGUES,
AND
CONTRIBUTORS**

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Rebecca Besdin, Staff Attorney

Kimberly Bode, Family Court Staff Attorney

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Kiarra Coleman, Legal Assistant and Program Coordinator

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John Cutro, Restorative Justice Practitioner

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Thank you! NYSDA appreciates the support of everyone who became members, donated to the Association, or did both in the last year.

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Key:

- Bolded names = Both member and donor
- Asterisk (*) = BTSP Graduate
- Names in italics = Donor

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Genevieve Bombard

Michael Bongiorno

Martin Bonventre

Scott Bookstein

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Gratitude and Appreciation

We are indebted to the many presenters who have shared their time, skills, and expertise to educate and inspire the New York public defense community at our in-person and web training programs. We couldn't do our work without you!

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Annual Report of Directors Pursuant to Section 519 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law

Pursuant to Section 519 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law,
the Board of Directors herewith submits to the membership
the Corporation's most recent certified financial statement.



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