

## The Law School Partnership Project

A partnership between Gideon's Promise, the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, southern public defender offices, and law schools

**Committed Law Schools** need only to support a graduate for NO MORE THAN one year. In return the graduate will be placed in a **Gideon's Promise** partner office. The **partner office** promises to move the graduate into a permanent position within the first year. The graduate will receive three years of training and support as a member of the Gideon's Promise community through a generous grant from the **Department of Justice**.

### THE NEED

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Fifty years ago a movement of young people changed the world. Thanks to these committed, idealistic reformers, and the communities that supported them, basic civil rights were realized in the areas of voting rights, education, and employment. But our work is not finished. The greatest civil and human rights abuses of our time continue in the American criminal justice system. Public defenders, meant to be the ultimate guardians of our Constitution, have been overwhelmed and beaten down. Poor people are routinely processed through a mechanical criminal justice system without an advocate to ensure our system lives up to its ideals. The result is that lives are destroyed, families torn apart, and communities decimated. Without the meaningful right to counsel, all other rights are left unrealized and the promise of equal justice left unfulfilled.

### THE SOLUTION

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The celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Supreme Court's guarantee of the hallowed right to counsel, makes it incumbent upon those of us committed to *equal access* to justice to finally make this mandate a reality. For the last seven years *Gideon's Promise* has been grooming the next generation of public defenders who are raising the standard of representation every day in courthouses across the South and becoming tomorrow's leaders who will finally drive the reform movement needed to making *Gideon* a reality. What started with sixteen passionate young defenders from two public defender offices has now evolved into over 200 defenders from thirteen states, and over 30 partner-offices. They are doing the profession's most important work on the front lines – where change begins! This community of public defenders represents **this generation's Civil Rights Movement**.

With the support of a growing alliance of organizations, individuals, and law schools across the country, *Gideon's Promise* is partnering with public defender offices to build a community of committed and passionate advocates to drive indigent defense reform across the South and, ultimately, nationwide. Our collaborative model for transformative change will help finally realize the meaningful right to counsel for everyone.

*"I believe the training I received here will forever change the way I view indigent defense, the way I deal with clients, and the way I practice law overall. I was so amazed at the things I learned in this program — many of which I did not learn in law school."*

— Member of the Gideon's Promise Class of 2011

## How Can Law Schools Make a Difference?

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### Participate in our Law School Partnership Project (LSPP)

Many of your best graduates want to join the Gideon's Promise movement and work in a public defender office in the South. Many of our Southern public defender partner offices, on the front line of the indigent defense reform movement, want to hire your graduates. Through the LSPP we can turn one year of support into a permanent career and support one of your graduates as they develop into a leader of today's civil rights movement!

### The Challenge

Before *Gideon's Promise*, public defender offices in the South were not viable options for law students seeking careers in public defense. Before *Gideon's Promise*, many offices in the region did not look beyond their own communities to hire lawyers. Because of *Gideon's Promise*, law students across the country are eager to join this growing public defender movement in the South and defender offices in the region are excited to recruit the best future public defenders nationally. Together we can populate public defender offices where the need is greatest with the country's most dedicated prospects...but there is a challenge.

Graduating law students need a job offer in hand by early Spring of their third year to allow them to meet Bar exam registration deadlines. Southern offices, facing the challenges of heavy caseloads and limited resources, are not able to leave positions unfilled for several months while qualified law students finish their third year and go through the process of getting licensed to practice. As a result, despite an army of law students eager to join our community, and many public defender offices anxious to employ them, graduates who could help transform indigent defense are unable to do so.

### What Law Schools Can Do

We are building partnerships between *Gideon's Promise*, public defender offices across the South, the Department of Justice, and law schools committed to justice. We are asking law schools to help support their graduates for up to one year. In return *Gideon's Promise* will place the graduate in a Southern public defender office and provide three-years of training and mentorship through a generous grant from the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. The partner office will guarantee that within the first year, the graduate will be moved into a full-time position. Therefore, by providing support up front, law schools can help their graduates secure permanent employment, acquire the training and support they need, and join a transformative movement as important as any in the legal profession.



Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has." Through *Gideon's Promise* thoughtful, committed communities of public defenders are changing the world for the clients who depend on us. Join Us!

***Jonathan Rapping, Founder/President of Gideon's Promise***

## MEMBERS OF THE GIDEON'S PROMISE COMMUNITY

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*"It's hard to put into words; but the Gideon's Promise community is how I get in touch with the lawyer I want to be. It reminds me of why I became a public defender when barriers seem difficult to overcome."*

**Brett Willis, Graduate 201 Member**  
Hall County, Georgia Public Defender



*"I am a better attorney because of Gideon's Promise. I learned skills I didn't learn in law school or my first two years as a public defender. Unless other public defenders get the training Gideon's Promise provides, they are more than likely failing their clients. There's a great need for reform in the system and the way to reform it is by duplicating the Gideon's Promise model throughout the nation particularly in urban and rural areas."*

**June Hardwick, Gideon's Promise Class of 2009 graduate**  
Jackson, Mississippi Public Defender



*"The young lawyers from my office who are attending Gideon's Promise will be the future leaders of meaningful indigent defense reform in this country. The Gideon's Promise Leadership Summit taught me how I can best support these lawyers, given our day-to-day challenges of running a Public Defender Office. I met some outstanding Chiefs from other PD offices who inspired me with their commitment and passion for the work we do. The meeting provided an opportunity for us to learn from each other and to share some solutions to common problems we all have in our offices. [Gideon's Promise] is building a community of leaders who share a common vision of providing excellent representation for our clients and I am honored to be part of this exciting and innovative program. I left the meeting with a renewed sense of pride in what we do and also left feeling empowered to return to my county to fight for what is right, fight for what is just, and fight for what we need."*

**Claudia Saari, Circuit Public Defender**  
Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit, DeKalb County, Georgia



**Fifty years after *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the right to counsel remains an unfulfilled promise in much of the country. The time is NOW for law schools to join Gideon's Promise, before another generation watches as the right to counsel becomes an even more distant aspiration.**

**Visit us at [www.gideonspromise.org](http://www.gideonspromise.org)**