

Introducing the Defend Nashville Initiative



DAWN DEANER
Metro Public Defender

Dear Nashville Community Partner,

Over the past year, Americans from all walks of life have started talking about the injustices that plague our criminal justice system. Stories about police, prosecutors, judges, and defense lawyers abusing their power or ignoring their responsibilities have become a regular feature on the evening news. Meanwhile, we have raised our national consciousness about the failures and harsh consequences of our “war on drugs” and misguided “tough-on-crime” policies. Mass incarceration has become an embarrassing (and extremely expensive)

American phenomenon that arguably has not made us any safer. None of which speaks to another embarrassing reality – that we have convicted and imprisoned thousands of people in this country only to discover years later that they were innocent.

Nashville is not immune to these problems. Every day, the staff at the Public Defender’s Office bears witness to a criminal justice system that dehumanizes our clients, rewards efficiency over fairness, and values wealth over poverty. We strive to represent every client as we would a member of our family, but we sometimes fail — not for lack of trying, and certainly not for lack of skill, ability or desire. When we fail, it is most often due to the impossible volume of work we face and our inability to do everything necessary in the time we have to defend every client as the law requires. The consequences to our clients, their families, and our community can be devastating.

In today’s Nashville, I believe anyone who understood this reality would find it unacceptable. The trouble is that very few people beyond our client community know about it.

To change that, and to help us send a message to the larger Nashville community that the Public Defender’s Office stands with our clients and their families in the fight for equal justice for everyone, the Public Defender’s Office is launching a new initiative called *Defend Nashville*.

Through *Defend Nashville*, we hope to both share our experiences as witnesses to injustice and listen to those who have faced injustice so we can better learn what they see as the biggest problems. We hope to launch conversations that will unite our Office, our client community, and other Nashvillians into a grassroots movement powerful enough to bring meaningful reform to our courthouse.

Will you join us in our *Defend Nashville* campaign? However you choose to connect to this powerful movement – whether through our Speaking Tour, Listening Tour, Court Watch Program, or Participatory Defense (read about campaign initiatives below)—we need and welcome you. Together, we can shift the balance of power in the courtroom and beyond.

Dawn Deaner
Metro Public Defender

DEFEND NASHVILLE: a Five-Part Community Empowerment Initiative

Speaking Tour



If your organization or congregation is interested in learning more about the criminal justice issues plaguing our nation and city, what the Public Defender office does, and what the Defend Nashville campaign entails, we would love to add you as a stop on our **Speaking Tour**. Our Metro Public Defender Dawn Deaner, along with some of our Nashville Defenders, will come speak to your group and answer any questions you may have. If you are interested, please contact Sara Sharpe at SaraSharpe@jjs.nashville.org.

Listening Tour



If there are members of your organization or congregation who have had experience with the criminal justice system and would like to share their experiences, concerns, or ideas with the Public Defender office, we would be honored to add you as a stop on our **Listening Tour**. Meaningful reform will never happen unless we recognize that those who have suffered the most know best what needs to change. Our Metro Public Defender Dawn Deaner, along with some of our Nashville Defenders, will come to your community and invite members of the public to voice their concerns and share their ideas for change. If you are interested in being a part of the Listening Tour, please contact Sara Sharpe at SaraSharpe@jjs.nashville.org.

Court Watch



If you would like to witness what happens in our courtrooms every day, we invite you to participate in our **Court Watch** program. Sit in on actual court proceedings and see our criminal justice system in action. For more information, please contact Sara Sharpe at SaraSharpe@jjs.nashville.org.

Court Watch happens the third Thursday of every month from 8:00 am – 12:00 pm.

Participatory Defense



If you have a loved one who is facing criminal charges, we invite you to join in **Participatory Defense**. Participatory Defense is a community organizing model for people facing charges, their families, and their communities to impact the outcome of cases and transform the landscape of power in the court system. Participatory Defense is a valuable opportunity to come together with other people impacted by the criminal justice system in order to share knowledge and resources, and to learn to navigate the system. It is also a reminder that YOU ARE NOT ALONE, and that family and community involvement can dramatically change the outcome of the case of a loved one. If you are interested in Participatory Defense, please contact Sara Sharpe at SaraSharpe@jjs.nashville.org.

Currently, there are two meetings in Nashville, both at 6:00 PM: Monday nights at the Martha O'Bryan Center and Thursday nights at the Family Reconciliation Center. Come to the one most convenient for you and your family.

Our Clients, Ourselves



The **Our Clients, Ourselves** initiative documents and collects the stories of the clients and staff of the Public Defender's Office in order to humanize the people operating within the criminal justice and public defense systems. The goal of this initiative is to bridge the gaps in communication and understanding across the Nashville community. In February 2016, the *Our Clients, Ourselves* initiative released the first in a series of videos. See in on our website at <http://publicdefender.nashville.gov/>

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Host a Speaking Event
Host a Listening Event
Attend Court Watch
Join Participatory Defense
Share your story
“Like” our Facebook page

DEFEND NASHVILLE

We Defend Nashville's right to a fair and functioning court system.

We Defend Nashville's right to liberty and justice for all.

We Defend Nashville's right to equality.

We Defend Nashville's right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

We Defend Nashville's right to be free of systemic racism.

We Defend Nashville's right to not be criminalized for being poor.

We Defend Nashville's right to be treated with respect.

We Defend Nashville's right to share its stories.

WE DEFEND NASHVILLE

MEET THE NASHVILLE DEFENDERS



"Meet the Defenders" on Facebook and Twitter

 "Nashville Defenders"
 @nash_defenders