The 1963 United States Supreme case Gideon vs. Wainwright changed the criminal justice system forever by making it a requirement for states to provide attorneys to defendants who cannot afford private attorneys. Public defenders represent 80% of the people processed through our hyper punitive criminal justice system. On Wednesday, May 8th, California Senator and 2020 Presidential Democratic candidate hopeful, Kamala Harris put a bill before Congress that will support public defenders role within our criminal justice system. "After spending my career around the criminal justice system, I’ve seen up close how it can fail to ensure that poor defendants receive a fair trial and due process as guaranteed to all of us in our constitution,” said Senator Harris. The Ensuring Quality Access to Legal Defense, also known as the EQUAL Act asks for case load limits, pay parity for prosecutor offices, comprehensive training and support, and loan forgiveness for public defense professionals. If this bill is passed, it will be a major achievement for public defenders. Our President, Jonathan Rapping was a major contributor of this effort and believes that this bill is a starting point to public defenders being included in the criminal justice reform conversation. He stated in an interview with VOX, “I am hopeful that this act prompts us all to continue to understand public defenders as a critical piece of the criminal justice solution, and to build on its important foundation to ensure marginalized communities have the advocates necessary to fulfill our democratic promise of equal justice.” Every individual deserves the right to have quality defense, this bill will support that right. Gideon’s Promise is grateful that Congress is talking about public defenders as critical elements in criminal justice reform.

The 1963 Promise
GIDEON’S NEIGHBORHOOD
BUILDING GIDEON’S ARMY IN THE COMMUNITY

Senior Development Coordinator, Christopher Pearson and Clark Atlanta University Intern, Mike Gumm raising awareness at the 2019 Hunger Seder at the Ahavath Achim Synagogue.

From Left to Right: Criminal Justice Attorney; Serena Nunn, Staff Attorney for DeKalb County Public Defender’s Office; Elizabeth Taxel, Founder of Gideon’s Promise; Jonathan Rapping, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice; Dr. Larry Stewart, President of Atlanta Metropolitan State College; Dr. Gary A. McGaha took a photo at the “How has the Criminal Justice System Shaped the Landscape of Higher Education Institutions?” panel discussion.

Gideon’s Promise staff volunteered to paint with the “Brush with Kindness Project” for Habitat for Humanity Atlanta along with other volunteers.

Our 2019 Summer Law Clerks mingling at our 2019 Meet and Greet. At the “Meet and Greet” our Summer Law Clerks had the opportunity to converse with local Atlanta public defenders and Gideon’s Promise Staff.

Executive Director, Ilham Askia and Senior Development Coordinator, Christopher Pearson attended the 2019 Great Whiskey Debate. This year White Bull Restaurant premiered their signature event drink, “The Public Defender.”

Gideon’s Promise held sessions at our headquarters as part of the 2019 Mitigation Conference conducted by the National Association for Public Defense.

PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT

Gideon’s Promise would like to recognize Gideon’s Promise alumni, Aisha McWeay (Class of 2010). Aisha McWeay worked with the Metropolitan Public Defender’s Office in Nashville, Tennessee for 10 years and served as its Deputy director for 2 years. She was awarded the Stephen B. Bright Award in 2017 for her contribution to the criminal justice reform movement by advocating for indigent defense in the South, and continues to make her mark on the criminal justice reform movement. In February 2019, Ms. McWeay was appointed the Executive Director of Still She Rises Tulsa, a public defender’s office dedicated to improving the challenges that Oklahoma women face inside and outside of the prison system. Still She Rises goals are to lower the number of women being sent to prison and keep families together. Ms. McWeay has provided training and guidance to a number of upcoming public defenders over the years at our Summer and Winter Institutes. She has been a staunch advocate for her clients and is a great addition to the leadership team of Still She Rises. “In order for us to truly address injustice, it requires us to look at what role we play in allowing both casual and formal de-humanization of individuals,” said Ms. McWeay. “...That’s how I want to begin to transform [criminal justice] in my community.”
EXECUTIVE EVENTS

Executive Director, Ilham Askia spoke at the 2019 TechBridge Innovation Summit about how data can measure the impact of culture change in the criminal justice system.

President, Jonathan Rapping, Gideon's Promise faculty and lawyers, partners from NACDL & the Mississippi Public Defenders Association met to discuss how to change lengthy pretrial jail terms in Mississippi.

Executive Director, Ilham Askia presented at the 2019 Mitigation Conference hosted by the National Association for Public Defense.

2019 LAW SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

*Click on the logos to learn more about our 2019 LSPP Fellows*

First Annual Spring Faculty Retreat

In order to provide support for the next generation of lawyers, Gideon's Promise gathers together our extraordinary faculty for planning retreats. This year Gideon's Promise hosted the 1st Annual Spring Faculty Retreat in Montgomery, Alabama. The purpose of this gathering is to train the next generation of faculty through our Alumni Program. The 2019 Spring Faculty Retreat gave our faculty the opportunity to brainstorm new and exciting presentations and workshops for the upcoming 2019 Summer Institute taking place August 2nd to August 17th in Atlanta, GA. During the retreat our faculty and alumni visited the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration. The Legacy Museum & Memorial displays the history of the African-American experience in America from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration. “Exposing our faculty to the history of slavery and mass incarceration helps them understand why we weave theses experiences into our instruction,” said President Jonathan Rapping. “Words cannot begin to describe [this experience].”
On Friday, March 15, 2019 Gideon’s Promise presented Igniting Change – Black & White Affair held at the Ritz Carlton in Downtown Atlanta. The night was filled with laughs, good conversations, and memorable moments. Guests danced and mingled to smooth sounds of Atlanta based group, Gritz and Jelly Butter. We presented the 2019 John R. Lewis Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Gary A. McGaha, President of Atlanta Metropolitan State College and the 2019 Community Impact Award to Nzinga Shaw, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer of the Atlanta Hawks and State Farm Arena. Dr. McGaha, who was honored for his efforts in bridging the gap in education in the most vulnerable communities was humbled and stated in his acceptance speech that, “It means a great deal to receive this award. Because of what John Lewis means, who he is, and what he has done for this country.” Ms. Shaw works to improve and educate organizations and individuals on diversity and inclusion in the sports industry as well as the corporate world. “This work is so important and giving a voice to the voiceless, it’s so important,” said Ms. Shaw. “Everyone has a story and 9 times out of 10 those stories are not being told in an authentic manner.” Igniting Change - Black & White Affair was an unforgettable event that recognized the achievements and efforts made within the criminal justice reform system movement. We hope to see everyone at Igniting Change 2020.
This year our Programs Team attended the 8th Annual Justice Day held at the Georgia Capitol. Justice Day gathered all communities and organizations to show lawmakers that there needs to be significant changes made to the criminal justice system. Throughout the day participants heard speeches and presentations from various criminal justice organizations and advocates. Many organizations were in attendance such as, the Georgia Justice Project, Southern Center for Human Rights, and more. Gideon’s Promise staff had the pleasure of assisting with the Storytelling Room. The Storytelling Room gave individuals the opportunity to share their experiences about how the criminal justice system has affected their lives and/or their family. Many participants creed out for criminal justice reform within the Georgia prison system. Please click the links below to listen to these heart felt stories.

JUSTICE DAY STORIES PART TWO

JUSTICE DAY STORIES PART THREE

Gideon’s Promise’s Training and Recruitment Director, Elizabeth Jones and Gideon’s Promise Class of 2009 Alumni Tiffany Williams Roberts, pose for a picture at the 8th Annual Justice Day at the Capitol in Atlanta, GA.