Jonathan Rapping is a nationally renowned criminal justice innovator and 2014 MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Fellow, who moved from Washington, D.C. to Atlanta, because he found the injustice within our criminal justice system – particularly in the South – to be unacceptable.

In 2007, Rapping founded Gideon’s Promise and began an initiative to change the public defense landscape across America by grooming a generation of public defenders – many of whom are often so overwhelmed by crushing caseloads that they are unable to provide their clients the representation the Constitution demands – to rise up and fight against the injustice within our justice system.

In his quest to train and equip public defenders with the resources necessary to ensure all citizens receive their Constitutional right of “equal justice for all,” Rapping and his organization have become symbols of a new civil rights movement.

This movement, led by Rapping and driven by his trailblazing nonprofit organization, is delivering his vision to inspire the nation’s public defenders to transform criminal justice in our nation’s most broken systems. And the nation is taking notice. Rapping and Gideon’s Promise have appeared and been featured on several national platforms including:

- Atlanta Journal Constitution
- CNN: The Situation Room and New Day
- Creative Loafing Atlanta
- Emmy-nominated HBO Documentary: “Gideon’s Army”
- Essence magazine
- HuffPost Live
- Huffington Post
- Inside Scoop with Mark Levine
- Moyers & Company
- NPR
- TalkPoverty.org
- TEDx Atlanta
- The Nation
- The New York Times

Rapping currently serves as a lecturer on Criminal Law at Harvard Law School and was previously an adjunct professor of trial advocacy at Georgetown University. He is also a professor and the director of the Honors Program in Criminal Justice at Atlanta’s John Marshall Law School. And in 2014, Gideon’s Promise began a partnership with Maryland to help improve public defense services across the state.

Rapping received a J.D. from the George Washington University School of Law, a M.P.A. from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, and a B.A. from the University of Chicago.

@JRapping
Ilham Askia is the co-founder of Gideon’s Promise, and currently serves as the organization’s executive director.

Askia was 5 years old when her father, although he had long since ended a life of crime to become a devout Muslim, was arrested on an armed robbery warrant. He was convicted and served 10 years in prison. Her father was served by a public defender.

And whether it was due to lack of training or overwhelming case load, the public defender did not provide the court details of Askia’s father’s character change – important information that could have led to community service instead of jail time. This is why Askia helped found Gideon’s Promise.

She believes that by providing these overwhelmed public defenders with training, coaching, motivation and inspiration, the nation’s justice system can focus on client-centered approaches that help support the zealous defense our Constitution demands. That’s why she is responsible for recruiting new public defenders as well as developing and maintaining relationships with offices throughout the Southeast.

Askia collaborates with law school career departments to help place recent law graduates in Gideon’s Promise partner offices. And she monitors and administers the organization’s annual budget; updates and ensures implementation of by-laws, personnel policies, the strategic plan and other policies approved by the board of directors; and ensures the organization complies with all local, state and Federal regulations.

Askia maintains a strong organizational infrastructure that supports the foundation for Gideon’s Promise programs and services, so essential to the organization’s effort to build a movement of zealous public defenders who refuse to accept the status quo.

Askia received a Masters in Teaching from Trinity University in Washington, D.C. and a B.S. from Cornell University.
Organization Background

Nearly 80 percent of the 12 million people who move annually through America's criminal justice system cannot afford a lawyer. As a result, many innocent people plead guilty simply because they cannot afford to take their case to trial. In fact, the public defender system is so overwhelmed by crushing volume, that adequate and meaningful defense often fails them as well.

That's why Gideon's Promise, launched in 2007, is working to challenge this status quo by building an army of passionate public defenders equipped with the tools and resources necessary to provide all citizens accused of crimes with the fair and zealous defense the Constitution promises. This army, led by Jonathan Rapping, Ilham Askia, and an amazing team of faculty members is working tirelessly to ensure citizens of all economic backgrounds and ethnicities receive the same treatment as those who can afford high-dollar defense teams.

Based in Atlanta, Ga., yet armed with a national reputation, Gideon's Promise is leading this new civil rights movement to help prevent millions of people from being deprived justice because they are poor. Gideon's Promise is building an army of advocates to fight for the many innocent or overcharged citizens processed into prison cells with an advocate too overwhelmed to provide the representation they deserve.

And many of the nation's leading law schools are joining the fight as part of the organization's Law School Partnership Program. This program is a partnership between Gideon's Promise; the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance; participating law schools from across the country; and public defender offices in the Southeast where Gideon's Promise is primarily focused. The program recruits talented, third-year law students who are interested in public service and places them in positions at underserved public defender offices. Students who participate in the LSPP receive a commitment of a permanent job within one year from the public defenders' offices where they are placed.

To date, many of the nation's top law schools have joined this initiative including: American University Washington College of Law; Boston University School of Law; George Washington University Law School; New York University School of Law; Northwestern University School of Law; University of California, Berkeley School of Law; University of Chicago Law School; University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law; Harvard University School of Law; University of Michigan Law School; University of Oregon School of Law; University of Pennsylvania Law School; University of Texas Law School; Vanderbilt Law School and William & Mary Law School.

Facts and Statistics

- Founded 2007
- Based in Atlanta, Ga.
- 32 partner offices across 13 states
- 18 partner law schools
- 300+ trained public defenders across country
- 2015 Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award winner
In 1963, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Gideon v. Wainwright* that state courts are required under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to provide counsel in criminal cases to represent defendants who are unable to afford to pay their own attorneys. That same year, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom took place in our nation’s capital. Both occurrences marked a monumental shift towards equality in the justice system and social infrastructure in our country.

Although 1963 was a pivotal year for civil and human rights, jails and prisons are still populated with people who are not receiving quality representation due to financial, structural and cultural challenges in the criminal justice system. Those impacted by the criminal justice system are overwhelmingly poor and disproportionately of color. For them, this promise remains unfulfilled and justice out of reach.

Gideon’s Promise is the only organization dedicating to partnering with public defenders in under resourced offices to drive transformative changes in systems where the need is greatest. It infuses a value based approach into its comprehensive and ongoing public defender training and mentorship programs as it forges a community of the best public defenders in the country to transform criminal justice.

**Our Mission**
To transform the criminal justice system by building a movement of public defenders who provide equal justice for marginalized communities.

**Our Vision**
A nation where every person has access to zealous, outstanding representation necessary to ensure “equal justice for all” in the criminal justice arena.

**Our Goal**
To ensure that those accused of crimes who are most vulnerable have the same access to criminal justice as everyone else.