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From the Desk of Jonathan Rapping, Gideon's Promise President

Four out of every five people in the criminal justice system rely on public defenders. It is through public defenders that their stories are heard.

In the national conversation about criminal justice reform, we only value public defenders to the extent that we value the voices of impacted communities.

When we discuss sentencing reform without mentioning public defenders, we focus on reducing the prison population but not the need to actually treat those we punish with dignity.

When we talk about decriminalization without discussing public defenders, we look to shrink the system without a commitment to the humanity of those who remain in it.

When we consider reforming prosecutors without mentioning public defenders, we assume that these professionals can make just decisions about poor people's lives without hearing from those their decisions impact most.

We cannot talk about humanely policing, prosecuting, or punishing without talking about public defenders. Any conversation about criminal justice reform that ignores these advocates is incomplete.

The absence of public defenders from this conversation reveals a blind-spot in our approach to justice reform. In our effort to respond to the most obvious symptoms of a broken system, we have overlooked the humanity of those caught in it.

Jonathan Rapping

President, Gideon's Promise