



# PARTNER OFFICE PROFILE

## RICHMOND PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

RICHMOND, VA

# OF GIDEON'S PROMISE LAWYERS IN YOUR OFFICE?

6

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT DISTINGUISHES THE CLIENTS IN YOUR JURISDICTION?

We have a large area of highly concentrated poverty in Richmond.

DIFFERENT UNITS WITHIN YOUR PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE?

- Juvenile
- Domestic Relations
- Murder
- Adult Treatment Drug
- Mental Health Issues
- Behavioral Health
- Felony
- Misdemeanor

DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIFIC SKILLS THAT ARE REQUIRED IN YOUR OFFICE?

Spanish fluency is always desired, the number of our clients who are native spanish speakers continues to grow. Social work skills are highly valued, although we don't currently have anyone with a JD/MSW.

### POPULAR ATTRACTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS TO VISIT WHILE IN YOUR CITY

The river is a huge attraction, there is a huge park on either side of the river, with hiking trails. The river itself has large flat rocks where people swim, sunbathe, and picnic. We host the annual folk festival on an island in the river. There are festivals every weekend for 9 months out of the year. We have been described as a "Hipster Haven" for our numerous breweries, warehouses renovated for housing, excellent restaurants and dozens of thrift stores and tattoo parlors. Richmond has a very vibrant arts scene, due to the strong art program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Intramural sports are a big thing here, with adult leagues for dodge ball, volleyball, basketball, etc.

### ARE RESOURCES, SUCH AS AVAILABILITY OF EXPERTS AND INVESTIGATIVE SUPPORT, ACCESSIBLE TO THE STAFF ATTORNEYS?

We have four investigators in our office, available to every attorney. We must rely upon the courts for funding of experts. (And we are not permitted to make an ex parte request!). In exceptional circumstances, we have been able to secure expert funds from the Indigent Defense Commission.

[CLICK HERE FOR SUMMER LAW CLERK INFO](#)



VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



DOWNTOWN RICHMOND

101 MARIETTA ST. NW, SUITE 250 ATLANTA, GA 30303



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# RICHMOND PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

RICHMOND, VA

### DIFFERENT UNITS WITHIN YOUR PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE? (CONTINUED...)

We have five attorneys and an investigator assigned to the juvenile and domestic relations court. We have one full time and one part time appellate attorney who handle all of the appellate work. Other than those attorneys, every other attorney receives a full range of cases, based upon their experience. Initially, new attorneys are assigned misdemeanor cases for several months. When their supervisor believes they are ready, they will receive low level felonies, that they attorney and supervisor will work on jointly. The most experienced attorneys are assigned the most serious cases, murder, multiple count sex offenses, aggravated malicious wounding. They will have a less experienced attorney act as co-counsel. They are still assigned misdemeanors as well.

We have two mitigation specialists in the office, that work with all of the attorneys. One attorney works with our Mental Health Docket and another works with the Adult Drug Treatment Court.

### IS THERE ANYTHING THAT DISTINGUISHES THE CLIENTS IN YOUR JURISDICTION?

We have a collaboration with the ACLU and Legal Aid Justice Center to provide Know Your Right presentations to the community. We are also working with them to establish a participatory defense program in Richmond. We work closely with the Richmond Community Bail Fund to have our clients released pre-trial. We are working with the Virginia Holistic Justice Initiative to provide holistic representation for our clients. (We are only authorized to represent clients charged with criminal offenses, but our clients need much more than that. We have built relationships with attorneys who practice in different areas, such as disability, employment, and housing). During open enrollment for the state's medicaid expansion, our office worked to enroll as many citizens as possible, whether or not they were clients. We participate in the annual Homeless Connect, during which providers to the homeless community gather in the convention center to meet with individuals and link them to services. We are a pilot office in Virginia, sending text message reminders to clients about their court dates.

### WHAT MAKES PRATICING IN YOUR JURISDICTION UNIQUELY CHALLENGING?

Structural problems with the laws and procedure, the system in Virginia is entirely structured to make convictions fast and easily obtained. We have jury sentencing, but we are preventing from informing the jurors about mandatory minimum sentences during the guilt phase. Some mandatory minimums only apply to jury sentencing, however, during sentencing judges have the ability to suspend all or part of a sentence. Discovery is non-existent, trial by ambush is the norm. No witness lists, no witness statements. The average time between a felony arrest and a trial is four months. There is no post-conviction relief, other than appeal. The appellate courts actively look for ways to find that the defendant has defaulted on their appeal, for instance by failing to properly state the assignment of error. People convicted of a felony can only have their rights restored by order of the governor, on an individual basis. I could go on and on.

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