



April 10, 2020

As news of the COVID-19 crisis hit, Luzerne County's chief public defender and his team were concerned. They knew there was a huge risk to incarcerated people and the Luzerne County Correctional Facility was already over capacity. The small, but dedicated staff immediately began filing motions. They fought to reduce or eliminate bail for people detained pretrial. They fought to parole people who were nearing their release dates and to release others who were particularly vulnerable due to their age or medical histories. Within the last 30 days, this team of public defenders has been able to secure the release of approximately 220 people from the jail – roughly a third of the population at the time they sprang into action.

Motions for release, and hearings on those motions continue to this day.

In one news account, John Hakim, attorney administrator for the Luzerne County Department of Conflict Counsel, credited chief Steven Greenwald with “leading the charge” to secure these releases.

Greenwald disagrees. He credits his team.

“This is a massive undertaking, involving all of the office staff. Most are working from home, making the job more difficult and time consuming. We are proud of all involved. The passion instilled in our lawyers through Gideon's Promise has helped them to step up, and continue to step up, every day. I am hopeful about the future because our DAs, courts, and corrections recognize that our thoughtful approach to reducing jail populations has proven helpful during this pandemic. This leads me to be optimistic that joint efforts to ensure justice will continue when we get through this.”

So proud to partner with the public defenders of Luzerne County, PA who never stop fighting to fulfill Gideon's Promise.

Information for this story provided by:

Steven Greenwald
Chief Public Defender
Luzerne County Public Defender's Office