



Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates giving her opening remarks at the Second Annual Meeting of the Right to Counsel National Consortium.

Second Annual Meeting of the Right to Counsel (R2C) National Consortium

On October 25th, The Right to Counsel National Consortium, which is coordinated by the Justice Programs Office at American University, held its second annual meeting in the Great Hall of the U.S. Department of Justice. The meeting brought together a group of criminal justice stakeholders, policymakers and advocates to show their continued commitment to protecting citizens' Sixth Amendment right to effective counsel. The day began with an invigorating speech by U.S. Deputy Attorney General Sally Q. Yates in which she stated, "I've talked with correctional officers, inmates, law enforcement officers, public defense advocates, elected officials and community leaders, and despite their differing roles, the common message is clear: the status quo needs to change." The message of collaboration and cross-discipline coordination rang loud throughout the day as a requisite means for reforming public defense systems and safeguarding the constitutional right to counsel.

Following the Honorable Sally Q. Yates, attendees listened to presentations on the past year of the consortium's activities, current state and local public defense delivery system reform efforts, and future outlooks for instilling change. Individuals had the opportunity to engage with panelists and other attendees to discuss the issues they see in current public defender systems at the ground level, how to inform policy for effective change, and take personal commitments to continue working toward a common goal: ensuring that the Sixth Amendment right to effective counsel as meaningfully carried out.

Topics included in-depth discussions of state-specific reform efforts in places such as Missouri - 49th in the country for public defense funding - where the Director of the Missouri State Public Defender Office sparked a media awareness campaign that brought national attention to the crisis of public defense. New York officials presented on the filing of a class action lawsuit that precipitated reforming the state's public defense delivery system. By hearing from individuals working at the ground level, attendees were able to learn new ways state and local level stakeholders are thinking outside the box to contribute to the national conversation about the right to counsel and how they too can use various approaches to achieve system change.

A portion of the day was dedicated to gaining perspective on where the reform is headed. The conversation focused on the need for a combination of effective leadership at the national level and collective action at the state and local level. Attendees heard from defense leaders, conservative policymakers, U.S. Department of Justice leadership, judges, and a corrections secretary, all of whom expressed the value of strong public defense systems, the impact these systems have on their day to day work, and the need for *all* actors in the criminal justice system to take a stand and commit to safeguarding the Sixth Amendment right to counsel.

The day concluded with impassioned conversations about federal, state, and local policy recommendations. Consortium members had an opportunity to contribute their unique perspectives in smaller discussion groups as they brainstormed policies to address the crisis in public defense delivery systems and ways they each can contribute to this reform. Some discussions highlighted that professionals working in the system must focus on ensuring defendants' have appointed counsel at all stages of the process, including initial appearances and bail hearings, and some emphasized that perhaps the biggest way to implement change was to focus on data collection and using data to inform policy and to educate the public on the Sixth Amendment right to counsel.

When the meeting adjourned, the consensus was clear – there is a national commitment to safeguard the constitutional right to counsel and we each have a role to play in achieving the change the system needs.

[See more photos >>](#)

UPCOMING WEBINARS



Tuesday, November 15

The Role of Prosecutors in Drug Treatment Courts

1:00-2:30pm EST

[Register here >>](#)

Tuesday, December 13

Reviewing the Veterans Treatment Courts Report

2:00-3:30pm EST

[Register here >>](#)

Tuesday, December 6

Selecting and Using Risk Assessment Tools in Problem-Solving Courts

1:00-2:30pm EST

[Register here >>](#)

For recorded webinars, visit our [YouTube Channel](#).



Veterans Treatment Courts: 2015 Survey Results

JPO at AU is proud to announce the upcoming release on Thursday, November 17 of our new report, **Veterans Treatment Courts: 2015 Survey Results**. The report surveys the current status of Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) nationwide to capture information on the operational and programmatic status of these courts. The report provides a foundational understanding of these programs to assist with the continual development and improvement of VTCs, as well as information on innovative program features, implementation issues, and advice to others contemplating the development of a VTC program. In conjunction with the release of this report, JPO at AU will be conducting a [webinar](#) on Tuesday, December 13 2016 from 2-3pm Eastern to discuss the results of the survey in more depth. We hope that you will take the time to read the report and join us for our webinar as we continue our work to support veterans and Veterans Treatment Courts! Follow **#VTCReport #JPO** for live updates about the release on November 17.

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Keep up with what the Justice Programs Office is working on in between our newsletters by following us on [Facebook](#). Learn more about us in reading our most recent staff profile featuring [Kerwin Henderson](#), and our most recent consultant profile featuring [Lars Levy](#).

The Justice Programs Office (JPO), under the School of Public Affairs, at American University is pleased to present its second monthly newsletter. Each month, we will send you valuable information on our current initiatives such as the Drug Court and Veterans Treatment Court Technical Assistance projects, the Right to Counsel (R2C) National Campaign, and Training and Technical Assistance for State Administering Agencies. Please forward this newsletter to your colleagues and partners in the field, and if you have been forwarded this email but would like to receive it directly, email justice@american.edu.

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