

Criminal Defense

Article by: Steve Valentino

Very often, a question is raised about what happens when someone accused of a crime does not know anything about defense procedures and is also unable to pay for the legal fees. In such cases, in New York, the Legal Aid Society's Criminal Defense Division (CDD) comes to the aid of the accused. This division has a national reputation for excellence and is often cited as a model for other public defender offices. The Division assists clients in specialized courts that deal with domestic violence, mental illness, drug abuse and juvenile offenders. It also consults city and state officials on legislation and policy issues of importance to its clients, to securing system-wide reform through its Special Litigation Unit.

With trial offices in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, CDD has nearly 500 attorneys and regularly represents more than 200,000 clients annually, in cases ranging from disorderly conduct to first-degree murder. CDD attorneys share a strong commitment to ensuring that defendants receive excellent legal services and representation is not compromised because they cannot afford to hire an attorney.

This results in CDD attorneys frequently working round the clock. Their commitment is shared by talented and dedicated social workers, investigators and support staff, who work collaboratively with attorneys to ensure that the Division provides superior, client-centered legal and social work services.

The Special Litigation Unit (SLU) brings test case litigation and class action lawsuits in federal and state courts to protect the civil and constitutional rights of CDD clients. Successful litigation by the SLU has achieved significant reforms within the New York criminal justice system. The Unit has won New Yorkers accused of crimes the right to appear before a judge for arraignment within 24 hours of arrest, access to medical care following arrest, access to counsel when incarcerated and privacy in medical records.

Social workers and forensic social work assistants in CDD's Defender Services Program provide client-centered alternative-to-incarceration plans that promote public safety by providing clients with vocational, educational, medical, psychiatric and drug treatment services.

There is a provision to also arrange for crisis intervention on behalf of clients who need emergency housing or public assistance, or medical, psychiatric or drug treatment interventions. The CDD also has special units to provide aid to juvenile delinquents and in cases where clients have a mental illness or chemical addiction to alcohol or drugs.

CDD's Parole Revocation Defense Unit, which was created in 1972 and the first office of its type in the nation, provides both legal and social work services to clients who are facing a return to prison on charges they have violated the conditions of early release. Around 1500 parolees are represented every year by this unit. Criminal Defense provides detailed information on Criminal Defense, Criminal Defense Attorneys, White Collar Criminal Defense, Criminal Defense Law and more. Criminal Defense is affiliated with San Diego DUI Laws.