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State Appellate Defender Office (SADO) Partners with Attorney Discipline Agencies on Innovative Support Project

Support is on the way for criminal defense attorneys in Michigan who face discipline proceedings for conduct arising from a criminal case. Many attorneys handling these challenging cases are in solo practices, receiving modest pay as assigned counsel and lacking access to experienced colleagues. To address the need for resources and a support community, SADO will provide both training and access to online resources for criminal defense attorneys who are referred by either the Attorney Grievance Administrator (AGC) or Attorney Discipline Board (ADB) panels.

The support will function much as other tools available within the disciplinary system, such as the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, which helps attorney with substance or alcohol abuse problems, or the State Bar's Law Practice Management training, which helps attorneys having difficulty running their law practices. To help criminal defense attorneys gain competence to practice, AGC attorneys and ADB hearing panels may include participation in the SADO Support Project as a condition of discipline or reinstatement order. Attorneys representing those who face potential discipline may request a referral, as well.

At a modest cost to a participating attorney subject to discipline, SADO will provide:

- Training on criminal defense legal research and online resources, offered at numerous times throughout the year, in numerous locations; and
- One year of access to online criminal defense tools offered by SADO's Criminal Defense Resource Center, at www.sado.org.

Since 1969, SADO has supported the criminal defense bar in Michigan with access to pleadings, practice manuals, summaries of appellate decisions, newsletters, and training events. More recently, online resources provide access to databases of testimony, a listserv of defense attorneys, and community pages offering "second chair" opportunities, local information and scouting reports.

Criminal defense attorneys referred to the project will gain access to other criminal defense attorneys who are willing to mentor, answer questions, stand in on a case, and provide meaningful real-time support. Access to this community may make the difference to a struggling attorney who simply needs a network and research tools to empower his or her effective representation of clients.