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MAACS and SADO Receive Federal Grant to Launch Juvenile Defense Project

The United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has awarded a three-year federal grant to the Michigan Appellate Assigned Counsel System (MAACS), a division of the State Appellate Defender Office (SADO), to establish a Juvenile Defense Project in Michigan. The grant will fund the design, implementation, and oversight of a statewide roster of attorneys to represent children appealing their juvenile adjudications under the direction of a full-time Project Director and volunteer Advisory Board.

The grant comes on the heels of a June 2020 report by the National Juvenile Defender Center (NJDC) entitled *Overdue for Justice: An Assessment of Access to and Quality of Juvenile Defense Counsel in Michigan*. The NJDC found that “Michigan’s current service delivery for delinquency representation is inadequate to ensure constitutional guarantees for children”—it “is not subject to any state standards, receives no state funding, and has no consistent, effective monitoring or enforcement mechanism.” As the NJDC explains, SADO and MAACS are uniquely positioned to address this crisis at the appellate level:

Michigan already has an effective model of providing adult representation through SADO and MAACS, which could be replicated for juvenile delinquency cases, including trial-level training, consultation, and other support. It could incorporate juvenile appellate representation within that office and examine other ways to strengthen appellate rules and practices.

The Project will focus on improving three critical components of a juvenile defense delivery system: *access* to counsel for youth, *independence* in the selection and oversight of counsel, and *quality* of representation.

Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack said, “This is a real game changer for juvenile indigent defense in Michigan. It will expand a successful formula for private assigned appellate counsel and could lay the foundation for further reform.” MAACS Administrator Brad Hall added, “It’s very exciting to be involved in something like this from the start. The grant will allow us to help a lot of youth while planting seeds for something much bigger.”

The Juvenile Defense Project plans to hire a Project Director and launch operations in early 2022. For further information or to learn about partnership opportunities, contact MAACS Administrator Brad Hall.