

**APPELLATE DEFENDER COMMISSION MEETING  
MINUTES**

JANUARY 15, 2026  
SADO DETROIT  
12:00 P.M.

Commissioners: Judith Gracey, Conor Dugan, JoAnn Lank, Honorable Michael Hatty, Brandy Robinson and Darryl Woods

SADO/MAACS: Director Marilena David, Deputy Director Public Counsel Division Jessica Zimbelman, Direct Appeals Managing Attorney Angeles Meneses, Juvenile Lifer Unit Managing Attorney Jacqueline Ouvry, CDRC Manager Kathy Swedlow, Deputy Director Private Counsel Division/MAACS Administrator Keeley Blanchard, and Commission Secretary MariaRosa Palmer

Guests: SADO Staff: Wendy Dealca, Mark Cox, Amelia Crosby, Tabitha Harris, Angie Jackson, Emma Lawton, Patricia Maceroni, Morgan Miller, Alannah O'Rourke, Mckenna Thayer and Bryan Vance.

**WELCOME**

Chair Judith Gracey called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Marilena David also welcomed everyone and asked for introductions of the those in attendance.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Several individuals spoke on the recent SADO decision to shift the Wrongful Conviction Unit to the Direct Appeals Unit.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2025**

*Commissioner Robinson moved to approve the minutes of September 17, 2025, seconded by Commissioner Woods. Carried.*

## UPDATES:

Budget and Hiring: Marilena David shared an update on the budget for Fiscal Year 2026. The approved budget for SADO included the Collective Bargaining Agreement salary increases, a 2.3 million one-time appropriation for the juvenile lifer unit which included authorization to hire 14 limited-term employees. SADO did not receive any budget cuts but also did not receive funding for direct appeal growth.

Ms. David also shared the budget requests for Fiscal Year 2027 which included:

- Collective Bargaining Unit salary increases
- Increase to the MAACCS fund
- Funding to fulfill constitutional right to counsel in direct appeals
- Ongoing funding for the juvenile lifer unit
- Funding to pilot a statewide centralized assignment coordinator for the private counsel division
- Funding for paid interns

Lansing Lease: In September, the Commission approved the Lansing lease with stipulations of a favorable budget. With the FY 2026 budget finalized, SADO was able to move forward with the Lansing lease. The Lansing office is scheduled to move to the new Old Town space in April.

Ms. David also announced promotions for Jacqueline Ouvry as a managing attorney for the Juvenile Lifer Unit and Beth Kuczma as a Mitigation Specialist supervisor. Both are limited term promotions. Ms. David also announced the departure of the MAACS Deputy Administrator, Patricia Maceroni. Ms. Maceroni will join the Federal Defender Office.

Unit Updates: Leadership shared their unit updates:

- SADO Direct Appeals: Angeles Menseses shared direct appeals case highlights
- Juvenile Lifer Unit: Jessica Zimbelman reported the unit will begin a caseload study with the National Center for State Courts.
- MAACS: Keeley Blanchard highlighted the 6.500 grant project. This two-year grant will provide MAACS with an attorney and an investigator for 6.500 cases. The attorney will also conduct training on motions for relief from judgment and serve as a support system for attorneys assigned in these cases.

**Action Item**

**Proposed Changes to MAACS Attorney Fee and Reimbursement Policy**

Ms. Blanchard provided the Commission with a summary of changes needed to the MAACS fee and reimbursement policy. The proposed changes are as follows:

- Removal of the misdemeanor appellate rate.
- Transition to monthly billing
- Compensation for mandatory onboarding training

Ms. Blanchard requested the Commission approve the changes effective immediately.

***Commissioner Dugan moved to approve the changes to MAACS Attorney Fee and Reimbursement Policy effective immediately, seconded by Commissioner Woods. Carried.***

**Announcements**

Ms. David announced ImeIme Umana was recently appointed to the Michigan Criminal Jury Instruction Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 1:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

MariaRosa J. Palmer  
SADO

APPELLATE DEFENDER COMMISSION

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
Judith S. Gracey, Chair