



PRESS RELEASE
November 1, 2023

Contact: Mallory Trachtenberg
mtrachtenberg@usccr.gov

**Maine Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Issues Report:
*The Right to Criminal Legal Defense in Maine***

The Maine Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has released a [report](#) following a series of public meetings on the right to criminal legal defense in Maine. The Committee specifically examined whether certain laws, policies, or practices in Maine restrict the right to criminal legal defense as guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Maine state law, with an emphasis on disparities based on race, color, disability status, national origin, age, religion, sex, and/or familial status.

In response to concerns raised by those who shared testimony with the Committee, the Committee made recommendations directed to federal, state, and local entities to provide support for indigent legal defense services in Maine. Specific recommendations are detailed in the report and include a request for the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate whether Maine is providing effective and meaningful representation to indigent clients, along with requests to the Maine Legislature and Governor Mills to develop a hybrid public defender system that includes dedicated public defenders and private attorneys that have appropriate funding, training, supervision, and monitoring to promote parity between defense counsel and prosecutors so that indigent defendants receive high quality representation.

The Committee is deeply concerned [by worsening conditions for indigent defendants in Maine](#), and notes that the ongoing indigent legal representation issues in Maine will not be solved until Maine commits to providing adequate funding for meaningful and effective legal services to poor defendants.

Committee Chair Samantha Le said, “The Maine Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is honored to submit its report on the right to criminal legal defense in Maine. We sincerely thank the speakers who took the time to share their experiences, expertise, and knowledge as we undertook this study. We hope the findings and recommendations found in our report drive meaningful change for individuals in need of indigent legal defense services in Maine.”

###

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).