



# Wisconsin State Public Defender

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## **Statement from State Public Defender Kelli Thompson in honor of the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright***

The fundamental right to counsel was affirmed and strengthened 50 years ago today when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright*. This landmark decision required states to provide attorneys to indigent defendants charged with crimes. *Gideon* and subsequent decisions eventually led Wisconsin to create an independent, executive-branch state agency, the Office of the State Public Defender, to ensure that our state meets this constitutional requirement.

The occasion of this anniversary is generating much media coverage nationwide. Because not all states share the strong traditions and commitment of Wisconsin, much of this coverage focuses on the unfulfilled promise of the *Gideon* decision. Wisconsin's indigent defense program is held up as one of the country's model programs; therefore, although every state and every program can look to improve in fulfilling the right to counsel, we have more to celebrate than to regret in reflecting on this anniversary. So, on this day that we honor the *Gideon* decision, Wisconsin can stand proudly on its commitment to this fundamental constitutional right.

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