

***Defending Gideon* Event Toolkit**

The enclosed toolkit contains everything you need to organize and successfully run a screening and discussion about *Defending Gideon*, a 30-minute film about the landmark right to counsel Supreme Court decision in *Gideon vs. Wainwright*. *Defending Gideon* highlights the importance of a system that guarantees representation for all and the dire consequences when that system fails. Weaving the story of this iconic case with contemporary portraits of legal injustice, the film *Defending Gideon* examines how states across the nation are failing in their constitutional obligation to guarantee the right to counsel as articulated in *Gideon*, with underfunded public defenders who carry overwhelming caseloads and, in turn, defendants who don't receive quality representation.

Hosting a screening of *Defending Gideon* will help build awareness among target audiences in your community about this critical issue and what we can do together to build a system that provides justice for the rich and poor alike.

The toolkit includes:

- [Guidance](#) to identify and invite local speakers and a template speaker invitation;
- A [template event invitation](#) to circulate to your network;
- [Talking points](#)
- A tailored [discussion guide](#);
- Suggested [follow-up activities](#) for event attendees; and
- A [sign-up sheet](#) to collect contact info from event attendees.

The film features interviews with four of the leading voices involved in the case: Abe Krash, a member of Clarence Earl Gideon's legal team on his appeal to the Supreme Court; Bruce Jacob, who represented the state of Florida but is now a leading advocate for reform; former Vice President Walter Mondale, who as Minnesota's attorney general, he organized an influential amicus brief supporting Gideon from 22 other state attorneys general; and the late Anthony Lewis, author of the book "Gideon's Trumpet." The film is narrated by actor Martin Sheen, best known for his role as President Josiah Bartlet in the critically-acclaimed television show, "The West Wing."

Guidance to Identify and Invite Local Speakers

Following are questions to consider when identifying potential speakers:

- **Who is your audience?**
 - Identifying the audience for your event will help you to tailor the presentation for maximum impact.
 - If your audience consists of public defenders or others who are active in the indigent defense system in your area, the focus of your event may be to incite greater excitement and activism among a group already dedicated to reform.
 - If your audience is comprised of those who are traditionally skeptical about or unfamiliar with indigent defense reform, the focus of your event may be to educate and persuade the audience to acknowledge the crisis.
 - Make sure your message suits your audience.

- **Do you have the right perspectives?**
 - Depending on the format of the event, you will want to include unique, yet complementary perspectives.
 - Consider inviting a public defender, policymaker, local prosecutor, advocate, law enforcement official or exoneree.
 - In addition to professional diversity, consider ideological, partisan, racial and gender diversity.
 - If hosting a panel discussion, be sure to have a strong moderator and include no more than three to four speakers.

- **Will the speaker(s) draw a crowd?**
 - Typically, it's helpful to have at least one panelist who people in the community will know and who can help draw a critical mass or specific constituency to your event.
 - Legal professionals (whether prosecutors, defenders, law students, or private practitioners) may be interested in hearing from the chief justice or judge of your state's highest court or other members of the judiciary.
 - Non-legal audiences may be interested in hearing from their members of Congress, local lawmakers or other prominent members of the community.

- **Do you need help?**
 - Consider co-sponsoring the event with an unlikely ally (perhaps an organization that represents the interests of law enforcement, prosecutors or the judiciary).
 - If you need help brainstorming ideas for panelists, please feel free to contact The Constitution Project at info@constitutionproject.org. The Constitution Project has experience bringing new voices to the criminal justice reform discussion, and would be happy to help developing ideas for potential panelists.

TEMPLATE SPEAKER INVITE

Dear **NAME**,

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Gideon v. Wainwright* which guaranteed the right to counsel for criminal defendants in state courts who can't afford to pay an attorney. To commemorate the anniversary, **ORGANIZATION** is hosting a screening of *Defending Gideon*, a 30-minute film that highlights the importance of a system that guarantees representation for all and the dire consequences when that system fails.

Weaving the story of this iconic case with contemporary portraits of legal injustice, the film *Defending Gideon* examines how states across the nation are failing in their constitutional obligation to guarantee the right to counsel, with underfunded public defenders who carry overwhelming caseloads.

Following the screening, **ORGANIZATION** will have a panel discussion about the film, the state of our public defense [indigent defense] system, and the opportunities to improve the system to better achieve equal justice for all.

As **XXXXXX**, we would like you to join the panel and offer your perspective on the issue.

You would be joined on the panel by **NAMES OF OTHER PANELISTS**.

Thank you for considering this invitation and we hope you will be able to join us to discuss this critical issue.

If you have any questions, please contact me at **XXXXXX**.

Thanks in advance,
NAME

Film Premiere: *Defending Gideon*

Everyone deserves justice in the courtroom

Please join **ORGANIZAION** on **DATE** for a screening and post-film discussion about *Defending Gideon*, a short film about the landmark *Gideon vs. Wainwright* Supreme Court decision. On the 50th anniversary of *Gideon*, the film highlights the importance of a public defense system that guarantees representation for all and the dire consequences when that system fails.

Narrated by Martin Sheen, the film weaves the story of this iconic case with contemporary portraits of legal injustice. *Defending Gideon* examines how states across the nation are failing in their constitutional obligation to guarantee the right to counsel, with underfunded public defenders who carry overwhelming caseloads and, in turn, defendants who don't receive quality representation.

Following the screening, a panel including **PANELIST NAMES OR TITLES** from **CITY** will discuss the reforms needed to ensure everyone receives justice in the courtroom.

*Please RSVP by emailing **NAME** at **EMAIL**.*

When: **MONTH DAY, 2013 | XX:XX a.m./p.m. – XX:XX a.m./p.m.**

Where: **ADDRESS**

Who: **SPEAKER NAME – TITLE, AFFILIATION.**

BIO.

SPEAKER NAME – TITLE, AFFILIATION.

BIO.

SPEAKER NAME – TITLE, AFFILIATION.

BIO.

~ Refreshments will be served ~

TEMPLATE EVENT EMAIL

Dear NAME,

On DAY OF WEEK, MONTH DATE, we will be hosting a screening of *Defending Gideon*, a new film released on the 50th anniversary of the landmark Gideon v. Wainwright Supreme Court decision. The film, narrated by Martin Sheen, provides critical context for how our public defense system was created.

Following the screening, a panel will discuss the issues still facing our public defense system and the reforms that are needed to ensure everyone receives justice in the courtroom.

We very much hope you can join us. If you're interested in attending, please RSVP to NAME at EMAIL.

The full event invitation is below.

Best,
NAME

Talking Points

Below are talking points that can be used when promoting your screening and in any follow-up efforts to encourage participants to get involved. Please note that these are just a starting point. We encourage you to use personal stories and local examples wherever possible.

If you would like additional data and/or talking points related to your specific jurisdiction, please contact phoebe@spitfirestrategies.com.

Everyone deserves justice in the courtroom and justice is only possible with effective counsel.

Our Constitution grants the same rights to every American, rich or poor. The Sixth Amendment guarantees due process to anyone accused of a crime, including “the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.”

Public defenders struggle under staggering case loads, long hours and low pay that make it incredibly challenging to ensure everyone gets a fair hearing and a fair result.

Fifty years ago in *Gideon vs. Wainwright*, the U.S. Supreme Court insisted that a qualified defense attorney would be assigned to every person who needs one. Thousands of Americans are denied this right in courtrooms every day. Many people who have been exonerated after false convictions received inadequate representation.

The Constitution Project has produced a 30-minute film to commemorate *Gideon’s* 50th anniversary. The Constitution Project’s film highlights the days and years following the *Gideon* decision, providing critical context for how our public defense system was created.

The film also examines how the promise of *Gideon* has gone unfulfilled, with underfunded public defenders who are overwhelmed by caseloads and defendants who never receive quality representation.

On the 50th anniversary of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, make sure that qualified defense counsel is in place in every American courtroom, in every case necessary. **[INSERT SPECIFIC JURISDICTION ASK]**

Your chief defender is **XX**; contact him or her and find out what reforms are needed where you live.

Demand that the federal government hold states accountable for delivering on the right to counsel. Ask the Department of Justice to:

- Establish comparable federal funding for state public defense and prosecution functions within the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program and other criminal justice grants;
- Guarantee public defense a seat at the table in SAA decision making related to federal grants;
- Require states to track essential data on public defense as part of their grant reporting requirements; and
- Support changes to federal law that ask states to establish public defense systems independent of executive or judicial control, and empower the Department of Justice to sue states that fail to meet their Sixth Amendment obligation to provide effective counsel.

With a strong public defense system that adequately supports public defenders, we can be confident that all defendants will have fair trials and effective counsel so justice can be served.

Go to www.Gideonat50.org to learn more.

Discussion Guide

Depending on the size of the panel, each speaker should have 5-10 minutes to speak. They should give their reaction to the film, their personal perspective on the public defense system, personal stories about the issue and/or how its failures impact the community.

To spark some discussion, consider asking one or more of the following questions:

1. How is it that 50 years after Gideon we are still so far from fulfilling its promise and what are the greatest challenges we face in getting there?
2. Who are the key decision makers that can affect change and what can be done to incentivize them to make Gideon's promise a reality?
3. Given the prevalence of plea bargaining in modern justice (roughly 95% of conviction are the result of plea deals), what can be done to make sure defendants have access to counsel at this critical early stage, especially in misdemeanor cases where a defendant may meet with counsel for a few short minutes, if at all, before accepting a plea?
4. How common is it that indigent defendants receive representation during early pretrial stages, such as bail hearings? What must be done to ensure representation at this critical stage?
5. What do you see as the most important reforms that should be made at the state or federal level to improve the quality of our public defense system?
6. Public defenders understand that many of their clients are falling through the cracks every day. They can't change the system overnight. That has to be discouraging. As a public defender, how do you keep them from quitting?
7. As a prosecutor (or judge or law enforcement official) is it your experience that having adequately resourced public defenders would help in more effectively, and ultimately more efficiently, achieving justice?
8. What can people like those of us gathered in this room do to help?

Suggested Follow-up Activities for Audience

The panel may suggest actions the audience can take. If not, or in addition to, the host could suggest the following:

- Contact The Constitution Project at info@constitutionproject.org or other national organizations that work on right to counsel issues to find out how you can get more involved.
- Your chief defender is **XX**; contact him or her and find out what reforms are needed where you live.
- Join the campaign at www.Gideonat50.org.

