



THE ANDREA TAYLOR SENTENCING ADVOCACY WORKSHOP

Chicago, IL
July 16 – 18, 2026

DRAFT AGENDA

Thursday, July 16, 2026

- 7:30 – 8:30 a.m.** **Registration – Continental Breakfast**
Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)
- 8:30 – 8:55 a.m.** **Welcoming Remarks and Introduction to Workshop**
Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)
Hon. Sara L. Ellis, *Judicial Conference Committee on Defender Services & District Court Judge, Northern District of Illinois, Chicago, IL*
John Murphy (Invited), *Executive Director, Federal Defender Program for the Northern District of Illinois, Chicago, IL*
Cynthia Giacchetti, *CJA Panel Representative, Northern District of Illinois, Chicago, IL*
George Couture, *Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, DC*
- 8:55 – 9:55 a.m.** **PLENARY SESSION: Fact-Busting the Case**
Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)
TBD
- This session will concentrate on the elements of fact-busting, using a mock case, to demonstrate techniques for mining the facts of a case in a manner that maximizes the potential of developing a persuasive sentencing theory.
- 9:55 – 10:00 a.m.** **Refreshment Break – *Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)***

- 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. WORKSHOP SESSION I: Fact-Busting the Case**
Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to fact-bust their own cases as a basis for developing persuasive sentencing theories and themes.
- Small groups assignments will be posted at the registration desk.**
- 12:00 – 1:15 p.m. Lunch – On Your Own**
- 1:15 – 2:30 p.m. PLENARY SESSIONS: Importance of Investigating Mitigation – *Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)***
Dana Harrison, *Non-Capital Mitigation Specialist, Federal Public Defender for the Eastern District of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR*
Rena’ Ross, *Chief Investigator, Middle District of Alabama Federal Defenders Program, Inc., Montgomery, AL*
- This session will discuss critical components of an effective mitigation investigation, including getting to know your client and interviewing considerations, with a focus on cultural competency concerns. This session will also provide an overview of the importance of records in developing mitigation evidence. Records are inherently credible because objective, neutral professionals created them long before the client faced criminal charges. They reveal sensitive information that clients and their family members are reluctant to disclose – and sometimes information that the client and their family members know nothing about.
- 2:30 – 2:45 p.m. Refreshment Break – *Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)***
- 2:45 – 4:15 p.m. WORKSHOP SESSION II: Interviewing for Mitigation/Records Collection**
- Attendees will divide into small breakout groups to practice their mitigation interviewing skills and identify records needed in their cases.
- 4:15 – 4:30 p.m. Break**

4:30 – 5:30 p.m. **PLENARY SESSION: Developing Persuasive Theories and Themes/Storytelling**
Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)
Fredilyn Sison, *CJA Panel Attorney, Asheville, NC*

Having a theory for sentencing and supporting themes is critical to your organization of the case and forms the basis of your sentencing story. This session will define a theory and theme, and will address how to develop theories and themes and weave them into your story of mitigation for sentencing. It will also discuss the elements of storytelling and how to effectively use storytelling to make a compelling argument at sentencing.

5:30 p.m. **Adjourn for the Day**

Friday, July 17, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 a.m. **Continental Breakfast & Check-In**
Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)

8:30 – 11:00 a.m. **WORKSHOP SESSION III: Theories and Themes/Storytelling**

Attendees will divide into small breakout groups where Group Leaders will facilitate the process of applying theories, themes, and storytelling techniques to the facts of each attendee's own case.

11:00 – 11:15 a.m. **Refreshment Break – *Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)***

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. **WORKSHOP SESSION III: Theories and Themes/Storytelling (cont.)**

12:30 – 1:45 p.m. **Lunch – On Your Own**

1:45 – 2:45 p.m. **PLENARY SESSION: Persuasive Writing**
Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)
Fredilyn Sison, *CJA Panel Attorney, Asheville, NC*

This session will provide persuasive writing techniques to advance the sentencing theory using the facts of the mock case.

2:45 – 3:00 p.m. **Refreshment Break – *Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)***

3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

WORKSHOP SESSION IV: Persuasive Writing

Attendees will divide into small breakout groups and apply storytelling and persuasive writing techniques to the facts of their own cases. Each attendee will write the first two to three paragraphs of their sentencing memorandum, in a persuasive fact-based manner. Participants will receive feedback on their work and rewrite their memorandum based on feedback received.

5:00 p.m.

Adjourn for the Day

Saturday, July 18, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 a.m.

Continental Breakfast & Check-In

Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)

8:30 – 9:30 a.m.

PLENARY SESSION: Using More Than Words to Persuade

Nora Gruber, *Mitigation Specialist, Portland, OR*

Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)

At sentencing, a picture is worth at least a thousand words, and can bring life and emotion to your client's story. This session will look beyond the written word and examine ways to include powerful and persuasive images into your sentencing presentations.

9:30 – 10:30 a.m.

PLENARY SESSION: Persuasive Sentencing Hearings

Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)

Amy H. Rubin, *Managing Attorney, Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington and Idaho, Spokane, WA*

This session will discuss how to persuasively tell the client's story at the sentencing hearing. It will examine factors to consider in making decisions about what to present and how to conduct the hearing.

10:30 – 10:45 a.m.

Refreshment Break – *Waldorf Foyer (3rd Floor)*

WORKSHOP SESSION V: Persuasive Sentencing Hearings

10:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

Attendees will divide into small breakout groups where they will discuss how each participant anticipates how they will conduct the sentencing hearing in their own case. Emphasis will be placed on the ideas developed in the plenary.

12:45 p.m.

Closing Remarks/Adjournment

Waldorf Room (3rd Floor)

Myra Cause, Attorney Advisor, Training Division, Defender Services Office, Washington, DC