



DEFENDER SERVICES OFFICE TRAINING DIVISION

**NON-CAPITAL SENTENCING
MITIGATION SKILLS WORKSHOP**

Atlanta, Georgia

May 7-9, 2026

AGENDA

Thursday, May 7, 2026

- 7:30 – 8:45 a.m.** **Check-in & Continental Breakfast**
- 8:45 – 9:00 a.m.** **Welcoming Remarks and Introduction to Workshop**
Craig Crawford, *Attorney Advisor, Training Division, Defender Services Office, Washington, DC*
- 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.** **Plenary Session 1: Storytelling: A Framework for Mitigation**
Akin Adepaju, *Chief, Content Branch, Training Division, Defender Services Office, Washington, DC*
- At sentencing, every client’s story matters and how we tell that story can mean the difference between success and failure. This session focuses on effective storytelling techniques and its integration into persuasive sentencing advocacy to unlock compassion, empathy, and mercy.
- 10:00 – 10:15 a.m.** **Refreshment Break**

10:15 – 11:15 a.m. **Plenary Session 2: Effective Interviewing for Mitigation**
Vickie Piontkowski, *Mitigation Investigator, Insight Mitigation, LLC, Pittsburgh, PA*
Tracy Hayes, *Assistant Federal Public Defender, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Connecticut, New Haven, CT*
Susan Lin, *Partner, Kairys, Rudovsky, Messing, Feinberg & Lin, Philadelphia, PA*

How do I uncover and develop the mitigating factors that will allow me to tell the client’s story in a persuasive manner? Interviewing. This session will focus on developing an effective relationship with your client and discuss numerous interviewing techniques that will allow you to obtain mitigating information from the client and other important people in your client’s life.

11:15 – 11:30 a.m. **Refreshment Break**

11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. **Workshop Session 1: Interviewing Skills**

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to practice their interviewing skills using their own cases and playing the part of their respective clients.

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

1:45 – 3:45 p.m. **Workshop Session 1: Interviewing Skills (*continued*)**

3:45 – 4:00 p.m. **Refreshment Break**

4:00 – 5:00 p.m. **Plenary Session 3: Wait Wait . . . Don’t (Just) Tell Me. Show Me! The Importance of Sentencing Mitigation Videos**
Marcos Barbery, *Mitigation Specialist, Federal Defender Program for the Northern District of Illinois, Chicago, IL*

Good sentencing videos tell an important and powerful story – one that embodies the dynamic potential of human beings to suffer, err, grow, and change. Through the use of visual images, text and sound, sentencing videos present our clients as complex people who care about other people (who care about them too) and are therefore worthy of the sentencing courts’ empathy, not just sympathy.

5:00 p.m. **Adjourn for the Day**

Friday, May 8, 2026

7:30 – 8:45 a.m. Check-in & Continental Breakfast

8:45 – 9:45 a.m. Plenary Session 4: Locating and Analyzing Records for Mitigation Evidence

Vickie Piontkowski, *Mitigation Investigator, Insight Mitigation, LLC, Pittsburgh, PA*

This session will provide an overview of the importance of records in developing mitigation evidence. Records are inherently credible because they were created by objective, neutral professionals 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. After this session we will break up into small groups to decipher and decode some records from a mock case.

9:45 – 10:00 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Workshop Session 2: Locating and Analyzing Records

Participants will meet with their small group facilitators to review the types of records and documents that are important to developing mitigation evidence. Participants will identify mitigation themes and potential mental health issues, hypotheses, questions, and brainstorm investigative follow-up tasks.

12:00 – 1:15 p.m. Lunch – On Your Own

1:15 – 2:15 p.m. Plenary Session 5: Writing the Story: Pen to Paper

Fredilyn Sison, *CJA Panel Attorney, Western District of North Carolina, Asheville, NC*

This session will present the skills of writing an effective story and how to use persuasive techniques to tell our clients' mitigation stories.

2:15 – 2:30 p.m. Refreshment Break

2:30 – 5:00 p.m. Workshop Session 3: Writing Skills

Participants meet with their small group facilitators to write part of a Mitigation Report or Sentencing Memo based on the facts of the case brought by participants.

5:00 p.m. Adjourn for the Day

Saturday, May 9, 2026

7:30 – 8:45 a.m. Check-in & Continental Breakfast

8:45 – 9:45 a.m. Plenary Session 6: Developing a Treatment Plan
Vivianne Guevara, Social Work Program Coordinator, Stanford Law School Mills Legal Clinic, Stanford, CA

This session will focus on the need to include a treatment plan that addresses the underlying issues often associated with criminal behavior and it will explore the development and use of community resources to influence sentencing outcomes. This session will include an example of a formal treatment plan presented to the courts that includes a restorative justice aspect.

9:45 – 10:00 a.m. Refreshment Break

10:00 – 11:45 a.m. Workshop Session 4: Treatment Plans and Sentences that Meet the Needs of the Client

Participants meet with their small group facilitators to fashion appropriate sentence requests and treatment plans that meet the client's identified needs.

11:45 a.m. Closing Remarks and Program Adjournment
Akin Adepoju, Chief, Content Branch, Training Division, Defender Services Office, Washington, DC

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