



FUNDAMENTALS OF FEDERAL CRIMINAL DEFENSE SEMINAR

Hilton Houston Post Oak
2001 Post Oak Blvd.
Houston, Texas
February 5-6, 2026

DRAFT AGENDA

All times listed are in Central Standard Time (CST)
All meeting rooms are on the first floor unless indicated otherwise
LSR = Live Streamed & Recorded Session

Thursday, February 5, 2026

- 7:30 – 8:30 a.m.** **Registration & Continental Breakfast | Ballroom Foyer**
- 8:30 – 8:45 a.m.** **Introduction & Welcoming Remarks | Ballroom | LSR**
Philip Gallagher, *Federal Defender, Federal Public Defender for the Southern District of Texas, Houston, TX*
David Adler, *CJA Panel Representative, Southern District of Texas, Bellaire, TX*
George Couture, *Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*
- 8:45 – 9:45 a.m.** **Winning Release at Initial Appearance Hearings**
Ballroom | LSR (Joint Winning Strategies presentation)
Alison Siegler, *Lillian E. Kraemer Clinical Professor in Public Interest Law, Director of the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic, University of Chicago Law School, Chicago, IL*
- When we win pretrial release, our clients get lower sentences and have a better shot at trial. But Professor Siegler's *Freedom Denied* study revealed that the Bail Reform Act is routinely misinterpreted or ignored at initial appearance hearings and detention hearings, and our clients are detained unlawfully. This session provides concrete tools to keep your client out of jail and combat unlawful practices at initial appearance. It also trains you to identify cases where the law does not even allow the judge to hold a detention hearing, let alone lock your client in jail.

- 9:45 – 10:00 a.m.** **Break**
- 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.** **The Essential Role of Investigation in CJA Cases**
BLVD Ballroom
Brian Mendelsohn, *Partner, The Mendelsohn Ertel Law Group, Atlanta, GA*
- As cases continue to grow complex with more discovery and information regarding the guilt phase as well as the sentencing phase, the services of a trained and dedicated investigator can be invaluable. Hear from a CJA panel member about the road map towards a successful investigation in all phases of a CJA case. Learn how the investigator can assist throughout the life cycle of a case, including quickly locating and interviewing witnesses, obtaining information from digital and paper records and seeking out information that can be important factors for the court to consider at sentencing. The discussion will include information about how to obtain funding for investigative and other expert services.
- 11:00 – 11:15 a.m.** **Break with refreshments provided | Ballroom Foyer**
- 11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.** **Getting the Most Out of Plea Agreements, Cooperation, and Navigating the Dangers of a Proffer | BLVD Ballroom**
Millie Dunn, *Assistant Federal Defender, Federal Defender Program, Inc., Northern District of Georgia, Atlanta, GA*
- With an overwhelming percentage of clients entering pleas, this session will take a hard look at how to get the most out of deals with the government. Additionally, like it or not, many of our clients intelligently decide cooperation is in their best interests. Unfortunately, proffer sessions can quickly devolve into train wrecks with clients getting no benefit and all the added risk we lose sleep over. This session explores common benefits and dangers associated with cooperation while addressing the many land mines just waiting for your client in the proffer room.
- 12:15 – 1:30 p.m.** **Lunch (*on your own*)**

- 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.** **Pretrial Motions: Stuff to Know to Get the Discovery You Need | BLVD Ballroom**
Anthony M. Solis, *A Professional Law Corporation, Calabasas, CA*
- Tired of simply begging the federal prosecutor for the discovery and materials you need? This session will explore the advantages to taking a proactive, rather than a passive, approach to using multiple pretrial motions in combination with third-party subpoenas to get more of the discovery and evidence you need. Learn from an experienced trial lawyer and CJA panel representative about other avenues, in addition to Rule 16, to obtain discoverable evidence that might be helpful if considered while mounting a defense to any federal criminal prosecution.
- 2:30 – 2:45 p.m.** **Break**
- 2:45 – 3:45 p.m.** **From Presentence to Release – Avoiding BOP Pitfalls
BLVD Ballroom**
Shannon Race, *Prisonology, Expert on BOP Policy, Programs, and Strategy, Fort Worth, TX*
- This session will provide practical tips if your client faces federal imprisonment. It will include factors to consider for your client to receive the earliest feasible release date.
- 3:45 – 4:00 p.m.** **Break with refreshments provided | Ballroom Foyer**
- 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.** **Trending Fourth Amendment Issues in Digital Technology and Data Collection Methods
Ballroom | LSR (Joint Winning Strategies presentation)**
Sidney Thaxter, *Senior Litigator, NACDL Fourth Amendment Center, Washington, DC*
- The Fourth Amendment has entered the digital age. New surveillance technologies and programs — from GPS tracking devices to automated license plate readers to bulk data collection — have upended traditional law enforcement practices and created new challenges for defense lawyers. This session will highlight substantive areas of concern related to new technological and legal changes that impact Fourth Amendment protections in criminal cases.
- 5:00 p.m.** **Adjourn for the Day**

Friday, February 6, 2026

- 7:30 – 8:30 a.m.** **Registration & Continental Breakfast | [Ballroom Foyer](#)**
- 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.** **Winning Release at Detention Hearings**
[Ballroom](#) | [LSR \(Joint Winning Strategies presentation\)](#)
Alison Siegler, Lillian E. Kraemer Clinical Professor in Public Interest Law, Director of the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic, University of Chicago Law School, Chicago, IL
- After this session, you will understand the Bail Reform Act (BRA) better than anyone in the courtroom—including the judge. This session provides tools for fighting detention, beating the presumptions, advocating for non-citizen clients, filing written bond motions, and winning release.
- 9:30 – 9:45 a.m.** **Break**
- 9:45 – 10:45 a.m.** **Sentencing Fundamentals: The Legal Framework**
[BLVD Ballroom](#)
Norma Aguilar, Training Director, Federal Defenders of San Diego, Inc., San Diego, CA
- Each and every one of us representing individuals in federal court must understand sentencing. To be effective sentencing advocates, we must know our clients, our cases, and the legal framework that shapes and governs sentencing. This session focuses on the fundamentals of sentencing law, from the Constitution to the statutes, to the guidelines. Attendees will be introduced to 18 U.S.C. § 3553 and other relevant statutes. We also will tour the guidelines manual, with an eye towards understanding its basic structure and the theories on which it operates. A solid grasp of these basics will reveal there is both room and need for creative sentencing advocacy. It takes understanding this legal framework, where it is rigid and where it bends, to effectively advocate for the best possible outcomes for our clients.
- 10:45 – 11:00 a.m.** **Break with refreshments provided | [Ballroom Foyer](#)**

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Dirty Test, No Shows: The Basics of Supervised Release Violations | [BLVD Ballroom](#)

Jen Uyeda, *Training Chief, Federal Public Defender for the Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA*

This nuts-and-bolts session will walk you through the basics of a supervised release violation petition to prepare you in the event your client tests dirty, catches a new case, or doesn't show up for testing. Together, we'll go through the relevant law, the documents in the petition, sentencing guidelines, options, issues to flag, and sentencing considerations.

12:00 p.m.

Closing Remarks — Adjournment Fundamentals

[BLVD Ballroom](#)

Sara Peloquin, *Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, San Diego, CA*

The [Winning Strategies Seminar](#) continues after the Fundamentals program ends. Fundamentals Seminar attendees are welcome and encouraged to join the remainder of the [Winning Strategies Seminar](#), which resumes at 1:15 p.m.

12:00 – 1:15 p.m.

Lunch (*on your own*)

1:15 p.m.

[See Winning Strategies Seminar Agenda](#)