



**PERSIST: WOMEN IN FEDERAL CRIMINAL DEFENSE**  
Defender Services Office Training Division

**Virtual Program**  
**June 23-24, 2026**  
2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. ET

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**EVENT DESCRIPTION**

Women are a powerful force within the federal defense community: from serving as receptionists, paralegals and investigators to mitigation specialists and attorneys—women play key roles in every aspect of clients' cases. Regardless of their role, women fiercely support and defend indigent clients across this country, while endeavoring to persist through the rigors of defense work. PERSIST aims to provide a space where advocates can build community, re-focus their career priorities and goals, and access tools needed to persist—both in their service to clients and long-term career goals.

PERSIST is open to heads of offices, administrative officers, attorneys, investigators, legal assistants, paralegals, and other defense professionals working under the Criminal Justice Act. PERSIST will be held virtually on June 23-24, 2026. Participants will gather online to attend plenaries and concurrent breakout sessions. PERSIST will also provide a forum for confronting the difficult realities women in federal defense face and inspire women to persist in this work. Throughout the program, attendees will focus on strengthening the group's collective resilience and achieving positive outcomes for their clients and careers.

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**DRAFT AGENDA**

**June 23, 2026**

**Day 1**

2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

**Welcoming Remarks**

*Myra Cause, Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

**PLENARY: Justice, Justice Thou Shalt Pursue**

*Amanda L. Tyler, Thomas David & Judith Swope Clark Professor of Constitutional Law, University of California, Berkeley School of Law, Berkeley, CA*

The passing of Justice Ginsburg in September 2020, was met with a public outpouring of grief. The country lost a hero and national

Please note: all times are Eastern Time

treasure whose incredible life and legacy made the United States a more just society. Professor Amanda Tyler, a former Ginsburg clerk, will discuss her collaboration with Justice Ginsburg to produce a written collection weaving together the Justice's life story, notable briefs and oral arguments, her last speeches and her favorite opinions that she wrote as a Supreme Court Justice, many in dissent.

3:15 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Break

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. **Concurrent Breakout Sessions** provide attendees with tools to thrive in their career and persist beyond the challenges of federal criminal defense work (*all sessions repeat on Day 2*):

1. **Make Your Money Persist: Pay Scale Information for FDOs' Different Roles**

Rhonda Bowman, Administrative Officer, *Western District of Virginia, Roanoke, VA*

Lisa Peters, *Federal Public Defender, Eastern District of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR*

Dianne Stone, Administrative Assistant, *Federal Defenders of New York, Brooklyn, NY*

How is my salary determined? What are the rules governing salary increases? This session is designed to demystify the compensation tables that determine your salary, title, vacation time, and possible raises.

2. **Persisting Through Workplace Conflict: Employment Dispute Resolution and How it Works**

Megan Hoffman, *First Assistant, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC*

Bridget Kennedy, *Capital Habeas Unit, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Southern District of Ohio, Columbus, OH*

Most of the common workplace protection laws do not apply to employees of the federal court system. This includes Federal Defender Offices (FDOs), but not Community Defender Organizations (CDOs). If you work at an FDO, your federal circuit court has an Employment Dispute Resolution plan to protect employees from discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and abusive

workplace conduct. This session will provide the basics of what to expect from your circuit's EDR plan.

3. **Caregivers Have to Persist Too: How Caregivers Can Ask for Support at Work**

Michelle Eidell, *Investigator, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland, Greenbelt, MD*

Trish Slater, *Chief Investigator, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland, Baltimore, MD*

Juggling our clients' needs, the demands of the job, and raising a family or caring for an elderly parent or other loved one is a struggle. This session is intended to empower you to get the support you need.

4. **Persisting with Purpose: Combating Imposter Syndrome & Being Ambitious in a Healthy Way**

Margarita Gonzales, *Administrative Officer, Federal Defenders of San Diego Inc., San Diego, CA*

Armillia Staley-Ngomo, *Appellate and Post-Conviction Attorney, Federal Defenders of San Diego Inc., San Diego, CA*

There can be many opportunities to advance your career and grow your expertise by working on special projects or programs. It can be tempting to think that someone else is more qualified, but this session aims to provide you with practice tips to help you push through the negative self-talk and reach higher.

5. **Persisting in Private Practice: A Tool-Kit for Solo CJA Practice**

Alison 'Tex' Clark, *CJA Panel Lawyer, Portland, OR*

Sandra Saberman, *CJA Mitigation Specialist, Chicago, IL*

Striking out on your own can be daunting, but it is also empowering. This session is designed to provide a how-to approach for those starting out in private practice as well as pro-tips for veteran practitioners. This session is not just for lawyers, all are welcome.

4:30 p.m. – 4:40 p.m. Break

4:40 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. **PLENARY: How to Have a Difficult Conversation About Gender and Race at Work**

LaTorya Blackwell, *Chief Investigator, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC*

Conversations about gender and race are difficult and challenging because they are deeply emotional, and trigger strongly held beliefs about identity and fairness. When we avoid conversations about these topics, it's often because of fear: fear of discomfort, or of damaging important relationships; fear of being misunderstood, "canceled," ostracized. But there is great risk in failing to have these conversations respectfully which can have profound consequences throughout the workplace, leading to issues with morale, group cohesion and in serious cases, employee retention. This session will provide greater insight into the challenges and opportunities presented by these difficult conversations, and how to engage in it. By openly discussing gender and race, you can become a more empathetic and effective defense professional, better equipped to understand and represent your clients.

6:00 p.m. Adjourn for the Day

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**June 24, 2025**

**Day 2**

2:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. **MINI-PLENARY: Re-Grounding and Tapping into Your Own Resources**

Rosemarie Maliekel, *Wellness Coach and former Assistant Federal Defender, Truckee, CA*

Take a moment to re-focus and revitalize yourself by tapping into grounding techniques. This session will help you to identify your own unique resources that can support your resilience as you persist in your practice.

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. **PLENARY: Closed Mouths Don't Get Fed--How to Take Control of Your Advancement**

Andrea George, *Executive Director, Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington & Idaho, Spokane, WA*

Sara Peloquin, *Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

Kelly Scribner, *Research and Writing Attorney, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV*  
Callie Steele, *Chief Trial Deputy, Santa Barbara County Public*

*Defender's Office, Santa Barbara, CA*

Are you looking to take on a greater role in your office? Transition to management? Do you have a desire to take on more complex cases? Want to request a higher salary? Asking for greater opportunity is both exciting and sometimes daunting. This roundtable discussion is designed to provide insight and inspiration from women who have done it all in federal criminal defense and beyond.

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4:50 p.m. – 5:50 p.m.     **PLENARY: Women on the Frontlines: Built to Persist**  
Cecillia Wang, *National Legal Director, American Civil Liberties Union*  
Jennifer Uyeda, *Chief of Training, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA*

On April 1, 2026, Cecilia Wang argued before the Supreme Court in defense of birthright citizenship in *Trump v. Barbara*. Before her current work on the frontlines fighting the most consequential legal battles of our time, Cecilia Wang was an AFD and CJA lawyer. We will conclude PERSIST with a discussion about her professional trajectory, the experiences that shaped her as an advocate, and the challenges she’s faced.

5:50 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.     **Closing Remarks**  
Elizabeth Luck, *Chief, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

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**Preliminary List of Faculty, DSOTD Staff & Facilitators**

LaTorya Blackwell, *Chief Investigator, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC*

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Megan Hoffman, *First Assistant, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC*

Bridget Kennedy, *Capital Habeas Unit, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Southern District of Ohio, Columbus, OH*

Desiree Lassiter, *Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

Elizabeth Luck, *Chief, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

Rosemarie Maliekel, *Wellness Coach and former Assistant Federal Defender, Truckee, CA*

Joanne Meighoo, *Meeting Manager, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

Sara Peloquin, *Attorney Advisor, Defender Services Office Training Division, Washington, D.C.*

Lisa Peters, *Federal Public Defender, Eastern District of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR*

Shiloh Puello, *Meeting Coordinator, Defender Services Office Training Division,*

*Washington, D.C.*

*Sandra Saberman, CJA Mitigation Specialist, Chicago, IL*

*Kelly Scribner, Research and Writing Attorney, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV*

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