

with practical tools and techniques for verbal de-escalation.

NATIONAL DEFENDER INVESTIGATOR ASSOCIATION 2025 REGIONAL CONFERENCE **Baltimore**, **MD**



"Defend with Purpose: Charm City Champions"

2025.07.07 – DRAFT AGENDA (Session Topics/Dates/Times are Subject to Change)

TUESDAY, September 2 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm **REGISTRATION (Maryland Suites Foyer)** 8:00 am - 9:00 am **REGISTRATION and COFFEE BAR (Harborview)** WEDNESDAY, September 3 9:00 am – 9:15 am WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS 9:15 am - 10:30 am PLENARY How to be an Effective and Ethical Investigator (Working Title) Marquise Findley-Smith, Assistant Federal Public Defender, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland, Baltimore, MD Luna Garzón-Montano, Assistant Deputy Public Defender, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Newark, NJ Nate Mensah, Director of the Superior Court Program, Arnold & Porter LLP Washington, DC Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis Experienced trial attorneys share their perspective on how to thoroughly investigate a case and get them the information they need to zealously and effectively represent our clients. The presenters will offer guidance on everything from how to conduct the initial case meetings, to appropriate and ethical conduct while working in the community, and beyond. The presenters will share practical advice regarding the 'do's and don'ts,' including their own experiences with investigation in both the pre-trial and post-conviction spaces. The presenters will continue to share real-world instructions for ways to maximize the impact of our work in the 101 Workshop Session that will immediately follow. 10:30 am - 10:45 am **Networking Break, Exhibits** 10:45 am - 12:00 pm **CONCURRENT SESSIONS Understanding Youth Behavior and Using Defending Veterans in Criminal Cases: A** Social Media Related / Title TBD Session 1 Positive Language in Cases (Working Title) **Deeper Dive** Jennifer Merrigan, Attorney, Phillips Black, Philadelphia, Jimmonique Rodgers, Director of Operations, The Gault Art Cody, Esq., Captain U.S. Navy (Ret.), Director, PA Carolyn Mehrtens, Capital Defense Investigator, Military Center, Washington, DC Center for Veteran Criminal Advocacy, Ridgewood, NJ Commissions Defense Organization, Washington, DC Room Room Room Session Description Pending Military Veterans undergo an experience far removed from the vast majority of those who sit in judgment of them in the Session Description Pending criminal justice system. The military experience, particularly if it involves combat, indelibly shapes the veteran and often has significant causal or mitigating implications. At core, as mandated by Porter v. McCollum, 558 US 30 (2009), the defense team's role and obligation in a veteran's case is to investigate and tell that vet's story -- to translate this uncommon experience into a human narrative that not only engenders the comprehension of a prosecutor, judge, jury but also evokes their compassion. This practical instruction will assist defense team members by exploring the veteran experience, the "typical" veteran, lawyer-veteran client interaction, acquiring and interpreting military records, interview techniques, and a discussion of an archetypical veteran mitigation brief/sentencing hearing. While covering the basics of veteran representation, it will provide lessons learned from recent veteran criminal cases Investigation 101 Workshop One: Understanding Defense Theories and How They Shape Our Work Marquise Findley-Smith, Assistant Federal Public Defender, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland, Baltimore, MD Luna Garzón-Montano, Assistant Deputy Public Defender, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Newark, NJ Nate Mensah, Director of the Superior Court Program, Arnold & Porter LLP Washington, DC Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis New Session Format: 101 Workshop Sessions are geared towards newer investigators, but will highlight best practices and anyone is welcome to attend! In the first workshop, attendees will review a mock fact pattern and discuss possible defense theories. There will then be a discussion of how to create an investigative to-do list, with the presenters advising on questions they would want asked - both of witnesses and the overall case itself - and will explain what is most helpful to them, as they prepare for trial. 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm LUNCH BREAK 1:15 pm – 2:30 pm **CONCURRENT SESSIONS** Social Media Related / Title TBD Session 2 **Verbal De-Escalation Organizing Investigations** Joshua Jannotti. Chief Investigator. Division of Mental Kaylyn Christian, Director of Mitigation, Atlantic Center for Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Capital Representation, Philadelphia, PA Health Advocacy, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA Defender, Trenton, NJ Room Room Room Official Session Description Pending Session Description Pending This session is designed to provide defense team members

Whether engaging with a distraught witness, a hostile client, or a stressed colleague, effective de-escalation can enhance credibility, preserve professional integrity, and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome.	Plans to cover master documents, keeping information organized and accessible across the team, including both non-capital and capital cases.
As Chief Investigator of the Division of Mental Health Advocacy, and chair of the NJ OPD's Verbal De-Escalation Training Committee, the presenter has spent time collaborating with teammates across several practice areas to develop a training to enhance a defense team member's ability to use effective communication to reduce tension, defuse anger and build rapport. The goal is to transform a potentially volatile encounter into a productive exchange.	

Investigation 101 Workshop Two: Identification Procedures & Interviewing Preparation

Presenter Group TBD Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis

New Session Format: 101 Workshop Sessions are geared towards newer investigators, but will highlight best practices and anyone is welcome to attend!

In the second workshop, attendees will learn about proper identification procedures, discuss and role play potential witness scenarios, and prepare for a witness interview. Interview preparation topics will include background research, drafting questions, rapport building techniques, what to bring (or not bring) with you into the community, and more!

2:30 pm – 2:45 pm	Networking Break, Exhibits	
2:45 pm – 4:00 pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
Investigations Concerning Spanish-Speaking Clients and Witnesses in an Anti-Immigrant Climate	Scene Investigation (Working Title) Jacqueline Cadman, Partner, Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP, Baltimore, MD	Decarceration Investigation: Exploring the Roles of Investigation as a Tool to Fight Mass Incarceration
Bruni Marrero, Director of Investigative Services, The Legal Aid Society, New York, NY	Sean Gordon, Managing Partner, Gordon Chiara LLP, Washington, DC <mark>Room</mark>	Olinda Moyd, Director of Decarceration and Re-Entry Clinic, American University, Washington College of Law, Washington, DC



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Room	Session Description Pending	Room		
Session Description Pending		Official Session Description Pending		
		Plans to cover the importance of investigation after a person goes to prison to include support for various types of cases to include prisoner's rights (conditions cases), resentencing motions and court hearings, parole hearings, and reentry options (designing release plans to present to the court), focus on how critical an investigation can be to getting folks back to court or other avenues to earn their freedom.		
1	01s Workshop Three: Interviewing / Statement Taki	ng		
	Presenter Group visory Investigator, Military Commissions Defense Organizatio Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis			
	ons are geared towards newer investigators, but will highlight bes ctively document witness interviews, to include the use of written			
4:00 pm – 4:15 pm	Networking Break, Exhibits			
4:15 pm – 5:30 pm	PLENARY			
	Letters from Sing Sing			
Dan Slepian, Senior Investigative Producer, NBC News, NY Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis				
In December of 2002, NBC News producer Dan Slepian got a letter from a New York state prison. It was from a man serving 25 years to life for murder. And it ended with a desperate plea: look into my case. Jon-Adrian "JJ" Velazquez had been convicted of killing a retired New York City police officer, but he insisted he didn't do it. Dan was skeptical. Prosecutors said five eyewitnesses had sworn JJ was the killer. Could five people be wrong? So, Dan began to dig. As detailed in the award-winning podcast, <u>Letters from Sing Sing</u> , and in the book, <i>The Sing</i> Sing Files: One Journalist, Six Innocent Men, and a Twenty-Year Fight for Justice, what he discovered went far beyond just JJ's case. The film, <i>The Sing Sing Chronicles</i> , from MSNBC, recently won best documentary at the 2025 News & Documentary Emmy Awards!				
Notw	orking Reception – Pisces (15 th	Eleer)		
	5:30 pm – 7:00 pm			
8:00 am – 9:15 am	COFFEE BAR (Harborview)	THURSDAY, September 4		
9:10 am – 9:15 am	DAY 2 OPENING REMARKS			
9:15 am – 10:30 am	PLENARY			
	ideon Blueprint: Innovating On-Prem Al for Public I tigator, Federal Public Defender's Office, Eastern District of M Constellation CD			
we'll walk through the practical and ethical motivations behind and organizational pitfalls, and integrated the system into re	nises AI system tailored for public defense work. From research a developing "Gideon," our internal AI system. You'll learn how we eal-world defense workflows. We'll cover current capabilities, limi nes look at what it took to build and lead AI innovation in the publi	selected and tuned large language models, navigated technical tations, and where we are headed next. This is a transparent,		
	ies look at what it took to build and lead Al innovation in the publi			
10:30 am – 10:45 am	Networking Break, Exhibits			
10:30 am – 10:45 am 10:45 am – 12:00 pm				
	Networking Break, Exhibits	Mitigation Writing Related Topic/Exercises		
10:45 am – 12:00 pm	Networking Break, Exhibits CONCURRENT SESSIONS	Mitigation Writing Related Topic/Exercises Julie Hyman, Manager of SWIM Advocacy and Engagement, Public Defender Association of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA		
10:45 am – 12:00 pm CV Workshop Corey Thompson, Training Director, Minnesota Public Defenders, Minneapolis, MN	Networking Break, Exhibits CONCURRENT SESSIONS Al Generated Police Reports (Working Title) Robert Theis, Investigator, Federal Public Defender's Office, Eastern District of Missouri. St. Louis, MO	Mitigation Writing Related Topic/Exercises Julie Hyman, Manager of SWIM Advocacy and Engagement, Public Defender Association of		

2:00 pm – 1:15 pm	LUNCH BREAK			
1:15 pm – 2:30 pm CONCURRENT SESSIONS				
Prepare to be Crossed Corey Thompson, Training Director, Minnesota Public Defenders, Minneapolis, MN Room ession Description Pending	Psychology of Interviewing Philip Becnel, Managing Partner, Dinolt Becnel & Wells Investigative Group LLC, Baltimore, MD Room Official Session Description Pending	Cellebrite Reader Hands-On / Cellebrite Capture the Flag (Part I) (Working Title) Eric Hirst, Chief Information Officer, Groom Law Group, Washington, DC Matt Hanna, Supervisory Investigator, Public Defender Service, Washington, DC		
	Plans to cover interviewing techniques, getting foot in the door, so to speak, touching upon behavioral analysis for defense investigators	Cellebrite Team Members Room Session Description Pending		

Daubert, and the Confrontation Clause and also outline defense strategies like discovery motions, cross-examination,



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2:45 pm – 4:00 pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
Strengthen Your Case with a Life History Records Toolkit Katherine Ashton, Co-Director of Mitigation Casework, Advancing Real Change (ARC), Inc., Baltimore, MD Room "Tell me, what will you do with your one wild and precious [hour of the day to collect life history records]? The two principal categories of evidence in any mitigation investigation are witness testimony and written records. Where we all know that client and witness interviews provide meaningful evidence and direction to our investigations, 3rd party contemporaneous written records are the unsung heroes of mitigation. Life history records substantiate our arguments, provide us leads to investigate, and fight back against that pesky 'they're just saying all mushy stuff this now as an excuse' skepticism our client's mitigation case so often faces. Whether you are collecting a ton of records every single time, or you are only finding time to collect 1 record per case, this session aims to help you expand your toolkit for collecting and using life history records. Let's make whatever valuable time you have to spend on records as efficient and effective as possible.	Session Title/Topic Pending Joseph Dean, Litigation Technology Paralegal, Federal Community Defender Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA Room Session Description Pending	Cellebrite Reader Hands-On / Cellebrite Capture the Flag (Part II) (Working Title) Eric Hirst, Chief Information Officer, Groom Law Group, Washington, DC Matt Hanna, Supervisory Investigator, Public Defender Service, Washington, DC Cellebrite Team Members Room Session Description Pending