



NATIONAL DEFENDER INVESTIGATOR ASSOCIATION
2025 REGIONAL CONFERENCE
Baltimore, MD



“Defend with Purpose: Charm City Champions”

2025.08.06 – DRAFT AGENDA (Session Topics/Dates/Times are Subject to Change)

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm		REGISTRATION (Maryland Suites Foyer)		TUESDAY, September 2	
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			
<div>How to be an Effective and Ethical Investigator (Working Title)</div> <div>Marquise Findley-Smith, Assistant Federal Public Defender, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland, Baltimore, MD</div> <div>Luna Garzón-Montano, Assistant Deputy Public Defender, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Newark, NJ</div> <div>Nate Mensah, Director of the Superior Court Program, Arnold & Porter LLP Washington, DC</div> <div>Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis</div> <div>Experienced trial attorneys share their perspective on how to thoroughly investigate a case and get the information they need to zealously and effectively represent our clients. These attorneys 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. They 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. This group of 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.</div>					
10:30 am – 10:45 am		Networking Break, Exhibits			
10:45 am – 12:00 pm		CONCURRENT SESSIONS			
<div>Understanding and Engaging Youth in the Juvenile Legal System Through Positive Language</div> <div>Jimmonique Rodgers, PhD, JD, Director of Operations, The Gault Center, Washington, DC</div> <div>Chesapeake A</div> <div>Every word we choose shapes the relationship we build with young people—either opening doors or quietly closing them. Inadvertently, we may use language laden with bias, disapproval, and negative judgment that can impact youths' perceptions of themselves – especially Black, Latino/a, and Native/Indigenous youth – and of us. In this session, we'll examine how circumstances, language, tone, and approach influence youth behavior and how we can better understand and interpret that behavior. We'll then address how our unexamined language with young people can reinforce negative outcomes—and offer tools for more intentional, affirming communication to build authentic rapport and approach sensitive or trauma-related topics. Together, we'll practice reframing language, explore affirming alternatives, and reflect on how intentional communication supports more accurate information gathering—and ultimately more just outcomes for our clients.</div>		<div>Defending Veterans in Criminal Cases: A Deeper Dive</div> <div>Art Cody, Esq., Captain U.S. Navy (Ret.), Director, Center for Veteran Criminal Advocacy, Ridgewood, NJ</div> <div>Baltimore</div> <div>Military Veterans undergo an experience far removed from the vast majority of those who sit in judgment of them in the criminal justice system. The military experience, particularly if it involves combat, indelibly shapes the veteran and often has significant causal or mitigating implications. At its core, as mandated by <i>Porter v. McCollum</i>, 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, and 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.</div>		<div>The Investigator's Edge: Open Source Intelligence in 2025</div> <div>Joseph Dean, Litigation Technology Paralegal, Federal Community Defender Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA</div> <div>Carolyn Mehrtens, Capital Defense Investigator, Military Commissions Defense Organization, Washington, DC</div> <div>Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Defender, Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA</div> <div>Chesapeake B</div> <div>In the ever-changing digital age, looking for online and social media evidence is essential to any criminal defense investigation. This session will cover the latest techniques and tools to help all defender trial teams confidently navigate digital pursuits for useful information in 2025. Participants will learn the latest search engine hacks, AI tools, advanced social media search strategies and resources to enhance your examinations. Investigators, paralegals and other defense team members will receive practical guides, handouts, and a curated collection of OSINT bookmarks to use in their own cases.</div>	
<div>** New Session Format: 101 Workshop Sessions are geared towards newer investigators, but will highlight best practices and anyone is welcome to attend! **</div> <div>** Investigation 101 Workshop One: Understanding Defense Theories and How They Shape Our Work **</div> <div>Marquise Findley-Smith, Assistant Federal Public Defender, Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland, Baltimore, MD</div> <div>Luna Garzón-Montano, Assistant Deputy Public Defender, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Newark, NJ</div> <div>Nate Mensah, Director of the Superior Court Program, Arnold & Porter LLP Washington, DC</div> <div>Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis</div> <div>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.</div>					
12:00 pm – 1:15 pm		LUNCH BREAK			
1:15 pm – 2:30 pm		CONCURRENT SESSIONS			
<div>Verbal De-Escalation</div> <div>Joshua Jannotti, Chief Investigator, Division of Mental Health Advocacy, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Trenton, NJ</div> <div>Chesapeake A</div> <div>This session is designed to provide defense team members with practical tools and techniques for verbal de-escalation. 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.</div> <div>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.</div>		<div>Organizing Investigations</div> <div>Kaylyn Christian, Director of Mitigation, Atlantic Center for Capital Representation, Philadelphia, PA</div> <div>Baltimore</div> <div>This session will highlight best practices, in both non-capital and capital cases, for organizing ourselves as we work cases as mitigation specialists, fact investigators or paralegals. The presenter will share different work products to use to keep track of records, discovery, witness information, and outstanding requests. This session will also include a discussion on the value of high quality documentation (memos, declarations, affidavits) – which could lead to testimony – and the importance of communicating clearly with the rest of the defense team.</div>		<div>Strategies and Structures for Social Media Investigations</div> <div>Jennifer Merrigan, Attorney, Phillips Black, Philadelphia, PA</div> <div>Carolyn Mehrtens, Capital Defense Investigator, Military Commissions Defense Organization, Washington, DC</div> <div>Chesapeake B</div> <div>Social media contains a treasure trove of facts you never knew you needed and photos you will never unsee. The key is knowing how and where to look, and how to collect and use your findings. This presentation includes strategies for investigators and paralegals on using social media to investigate individuals and evidence in your case, as well as systems and tools for effectively capturing, cataloging and retrieving the information.</div>	
<div>** New Session Format: 101 Workshop Sessions are geared towards newer investigators, but will highlight best practices and anyone is welcome to attend! **</div> <div>** Investigation 101 Workshop Two: Identification Procedures & Interviewing Preparation **</div> <div>Presenter Group TBD</div> <div>Columbia/Frederick/Annapolis</div> <div>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!</div>					
2:30 pm – 2:45 pm		Networking Break, Exhibits			
2:45 pm – 4:00 pm		CONCURRENT SESSIONS			
<div>Investigations Concerning Spanish-Speaking Clients and Witnesses in an Anti-Immigrant Climate</div> <div>Bruni Marrero, Director of Investigative Services, The Legal Aid Society, New York, NY</div>		<div>Decarceration Investigation: Exploring the Roles of Investigation as a Tool to Fight Mass Incarceration</div> <div>Olinda Moyd, Director of Decarceration and Re-Entry Clinic, American University, Washington College of Law, Washington, DC</div>		<div>Crime Scene to Courtroom: Integrating Legal Insight in Defense Investigations</div> <div>Jacqueline Cadman, Partner, Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP, Baltimore, MD</div> <div>Sean Gordon, Managing Partner, Gordon Chiara LLP, Washington, DC</div>	



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2:45 pm – 4:00 pmCONCURRENT SESSIONS		
<p>Strengthen Your Case with a Life History Records Toolkit</p> <p>Katherine Ashton, Co-Director of Mitigation Casework, Advancing Real Change (ARC), Inc., Baltimore, MD</p> <p>Chesapeake A</p> <p>“Tell me, what will you do with your one wild and precious [hour of the day to collect life history records]?”</p> <p>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, third party contemporaneous written records are the unsung heroes of mitigation. Life history records substantiate our arguments, provide leads to investigate, and fight back against that pesky 'they're just saying all this mushy stuff now as an excuse' skepticism our client's mitigation case so often faces. Whether you're collecting a ton of records every time, or you're only able to collect one record per case, this session aims to help you expand your toolkit for collecting and using life history records. Let's make any valuable time you have to spend on records as efficient and effective as possible.</p>	<p>Cellebrite Reader Hands-On / Cellebrite Capture the Flag (Part II) (Working Title)</p> <p>Eric Hirst, Chief Information Officer, Groom Law Group, Washington, DC</p> <p>Matt Hanna, Supervisory Investigator, Public Defender Service, Washington, DC</p> <p>Cellebrite Team Members</p> <p>Constellation CD</p> <p>Session Description Pending</p>	<p>eDiscovery on a Shoestring Budget</p> <p>Joseph Dean, Litigation Technology Paralegal, Federal Community Defender Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA</p> <p>Carolyn Mehrrens, Capital Defense Investigator, Military Commissions Defense Organization, Washington, DC</p> <p>Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Defender, Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA</p> <p>Chesapeake B</p> <p>This session will provide an introduction to free eDiscovery tools that will help you process, triage, and analyze discovery. This session will cover common file types and free tools you can use to review them, allowing you to overcome common discovery processing challenges.</p>