



NATIONAL DEFENDER INVESTIGATOR ASSOCIATION
2026 REGIONAL CONFERENCE
Scottsdale, AZ



“Defend with Purpose: Magnificence in Maricopa”

2026.08.27 – DRAFT AGENDA (Session Topics/Dates/Times are Subject to Change)

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm	REGISTRATION	TUESDAY, September 8
8:00 am – 9:00 am	REGISTRATION and COFFEE BAR (Orangedale CD / Patio)	WEDNESDAY, September 9
9:00 am – 9:15 am	WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS	
9:15 am – 10:30 am	PLENARY	
AI on Trial Brian Chase, Managing Director, Digital Forensics & eDiscovery, ArcherHall, Tucson, AZ Orangedale ABEF This session will focus on the challenges of dealing with AI generated/falsified evidence (photos, videos, audio, etc.) and also talk about the use of AI by law enforcement.		
10:30 am – 10:45 am	Networking Break, Exhibits	
10:45 am – 12:00 pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
Social Media Related –Title Pending Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Defender Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA Orangedale AF Session Description Pending 2 Sessions, likely Intro & Advanced	Interviewing with Emotional Intelligence Lubna Debbini, Investigator, Orange County Associate Defender, Santa Ana, CA Citrus Room Investigations often succeed or fail based on the quality of human interaction. This interactive course equips defense investigators and paralegals with the tools and communication techniques required to navigate high-stakes interviews. Participants will learn to leverage emotional intelligence (EI) to read subtle cues, manage intense interpersonal dynamics, and defuse volatile situations. Through practical frameworks and tactical communication strategies, you will master the art of uncovering pertinent details for the case. Recognize non-verbal behavior, and manage your own emotional triggers during encounters. Craft sophisticated, open-ended lines of questioning that minimize defensiveness. Master the skill of validation without confirmation, and pivot strategies when facing deflective, aggressive, or evasive responses. Build rapid, authentic trust with diverse subjects without compromising investigative boundaries or legal integrity.	Video Evidence and Law Enforcement: Best Practices vs Real World Joshua Cohen, Principal, Fat Pencil Studio, Portland, OR Orangedale BE This session builds on the material covered in the Plenary session to offer insight on specific problems with video evidence collection and strategies for pushing back against unsupported charges. In a world awash with AI generated images and video, defense team members are forced to ask, "How can I be sure this evidence is authentic?" It is possible to answer this question if law enforcement follows best practices for collecting digital media. Unfortunately, this rarely happens. In the real world, law enforcement often relies on unqualified parties to collect and submit video clips of their choosing without verifying that all relevant footage was collected at the native camera resolution, and submitted in its original form without alteration. We'll also cover 3d reconstruction including methods for mapping what can be seen in video footage and visualizing the scene from a different perspective. Repeat Session on Day 2 (1:15pm Breakout)
New Session Format: Paralegal Focused Breakout Room – but all are welcome to attend! Trial Notebooks That Make a Difference Elizabeth Coss, Paralegal, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Brittany Martin, Paralegal, Capital Unit, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Sunset Room This session is designed for legal professionals who want to streamline their trial preparation using organized and efficient trial binders. The essential components of a trial binder, including document organization, effective indexing methods, and the inclusion of key exhibits and evidence will be discussed, as well as helpful tools and software for assembling digital trial notebooks.		
12:00 pm – 1:15 pm	LUNCH BREAK	
1:15 pm – 2:30 pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
Social Media Related –Title Pending Maria Sapene, Chief of Litigation Support, Federal Public Defender Central District of California, Los Angeles, CA Orangedale AF Session Description Pending 2 Sessions, likely Intro & Advanced	Difficult Situations / De-Escalation Jules Gagnepain, Investigator, Federal Public Defender, District of Arizona, Phoenix, AZ Citrus Room Using lived experiences as a Sheriff's Deputy/Hostage Negotiator, this session will cover the behavioral change stairway and how to effectively build rapport, with everyone from a client, to a witness or probation officer, or even someone in an active crisis. In our jobs, we often have to communicate difficult information, which is not always well received. This session will highlight the power of empathy and rapport building, as well as the dos and don'ts of successful de-escalation.	Best Practices: Video Surveillance Acquisition Matt Hanna, Training Director, NDIA, Washington, DC Orangedale BE This session will cover the 101s of acquiring video surveillance footage in the community for your cases, from business entities to private homes. The discussion will include preparation, what to look for on-site, navigating proprietary players and how to work with your office's IT Department to get what is needed downloaded, converted, etc. to use for any presentation in Court.
New Session Format: Paralegal Focused Breakout Room – but all are welcome to attend! Acrobat Pro 101: The Essential PDF Toolkit Elizabeth Coss, Paralegal, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Sunset Room This session covers Adobe Acrobat Pro's tools with a live demonstration. The presentation includes how to create PDF portfolios, redact, bate stamp, edit, secure files, make images readable, as well as covering other tools. This session is beginner friendly, so all skill levels are welcomed.		
2:30 pm – 2:45 pm	Networking Break, Exhibits	
2:45 pm – 4:00 pm	CONCURRENT SESSIONS	
Investigation Essentials: The Nuts and Bolts of a Mitigation Excavation Matt Silverman, Mitigation Specialist/Investigator, Silverman Mitigation, Phoenix, AZ Orangedale AF This session breaks down the practical mechanics of a mitigation investigation that meets the standard of care. Topics will include best practices focused on interview protocols, fieldwork tips for locating people, the do's and don'ts of mitigation investigation, witness and client interview strategies, and secondary document practices (witness lists, chronologies, etc.). Participants will leave with concrete guidance for making initial contact, maintaining witness relationships over the life of a case, and memorializing work product in ways that best serve the client.	Investigating Police Witnesses and Tracking Official Misconduct Summer Farrar, M.S., Director of Partnerships & Outreach, Techtivist, Inc., Kansas City, MO Citrus Room If you're not investigating the police witnesses in your cases, then you could be missing out on critical evidence that changes the story of your case. This session will teach you how to investigate police officers' history and start tracking police misconduct using tools you already have. Attendees will learn how to collect information for pre-trial through post-conviction investigation and impact litigation. This training will also share practical examples of how these tools improve defense practices across the country and how to build participation within your agency. After this session, you'll feel equipped to investigate the police witnesses in your cases and contribute to holding powerful officials accountable.	Best Practices: The Importance of Safety in Investigations Seana Holland, Director of Investigations, Levy Firestone Muse LLP, Washington, DC Orangedale BE In criminal defense investigations, investigator safety is paramount, yet discussions and training are often limited to physical safety alone. This interactive session broadens that conversation to encompass physical, legal, and emotional safety, offering practical strategies for navigating difficult situations in both the field and office, including the emerging challenges posed by AI's growing role in the legal profession. Drawing on more than twenty years of investigative experience in the United States and abroad, the presenter will share proven tips and strategies for conducting safe, effective investigations.
New Session Format: Paralegal Focused Breakout Room – but all are welcome to attend!		



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Out of State Subpoenas, Court Orders, and ROIs: The What, Why, When, and How for Legal Professionals Brittany Martin, Paralegal, Capital Unit, Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, Phoenix, AZ Sunset Room	
Navigating out-of-state subpoenas, court orders, and authorizations for the release of information (ROIs) can be complex and time-consuming. This course provides legal professionals with the knowledge and resources needed to successfully obtain witnesses and records from jurisdictions outside their own. Participants will receive course materials that include sample templates and forms for the documents discussed, providing resources they can immediately apply in their own practice. As the designated point person for out-of-state subpoena requests at the Maricopa County Office of the Public Defender, the presenter regularly assists indigent defense agencies nationwide with obtaining witnesses and records located in Maricopa County. Drawing on real-world experience, she will share practical insights and lessons learned from coordinating interstate legal requests.	
4:00 pm – 4:15 pm	Networking Break, Exhibits
4:15 pm – 5:30 pm PLENARY	
Extradited Innocence: The Case of Javier Lorenzano-Nunez Bill Daniels, Investigator, Maricopa County Office of the Legal Advocate, Phoenix, AZ Jessica Valdivia-Luna, Homicide Attorney, Maricopa County Office of the Legal Advocate, Phoenix, AZ Orangedale ABEF	
Javier is a Mexican national who was kidnapped off the streets of Tijuana, extradited to Maricopa County, and charged with a cold case homicide from 1998. Through extensive investigation, work, and motions, the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office ultimately dismissed the case. Javier is innocent. This session will discuss the egregious misconduct by both the Phoenix Police Department and the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office, what to watch out for in cold case investigations, and what investigation you need to do yourself for an innocent client.	
Networking Reception – Orangedale CD & Patio 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm	

8:00 am – 9:00 am		COFFEE BAR (Orangedale CD / Patio)		THURSDAY, September 10	
9:10 am – 9:15 am		DAY 2 OPENING REMARKS			
9:15 am – 10:30 am		PLENARY			
Representing Clients on the Autism Spectrum Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ Laurie Sperry, Ph.D., BCBA-D, MSc Forensic Psychology/Criminal Investigation, Autism Forensics, LLC, CO Orangedale ABEF Official Session Description Pending – We have all had clients with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It’s a pervasive cognitive and social disability and it is <i>a/ways</i> relevant to culpability and mitigation. If the issue is properly identified, investigated, and explained, it will turn the tide and change the outcome of your case. It may even save a life. In this session, we touch on how to identify ASD, what to do when you think your client is on the spectrum, and the many ways it can – and must be – used as mitigation.					
10:30 am – 10:45 am		Networking Break, Exhibits			
10:45 am – 12:00 pm					
Beyond the Docket: Practical Strategies for Supporting Neurodiverse Clients Laurie Sperry, Ph.D., BCBA-D, MSc Forensic Psychology/Criminal Investigation, Autism Forensics, LLC, CO Orangedale AF Neurodivergent individuals—including those with autism, ADHD, and learning differences—are significantly overrepresented at every stage of the justice system. For legal and correctional professionals, recognizing and effectively responding to neurodivergent traits is critical for ensuring due diligence, accurate mitigation, and successful community re-entry. This highly interactive session moves beyond basic definitions to equip defense team members with actionable accommodations and tools. Participants will analyze real-world case studies, engage in peer-to-peer problem-solving, and leave with a practical toolkit designed to improve client rapport, de-escalate crisis situations, and build legally robust mitigation themes. By the end of this session, participants will be able to: identify common behavioral presentations, adapt interviewing techniques, implement immediate, concrete strategies to help neurodivergent clients successfully navigate court orders, parole conditions, and legal timelines, and formulate persuasive, data-driven mitigation narratives.		Criminal Defense of Noncitizens in Current Times Evelyn Cruz, Clinical Professor of Law, Director, Immigration Clinic, Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ Citrus Room Official Session Description Pending		Location Data – What’s Reliable and What Isn’t Brian Chase, Managing Director, Digital Forensics & eDiscovery, ArcherHall, Tucson, AZ Orangedale BE This session covers sources of location data such as cell site, cellphone, and GPS data, and will explore common claims from law enforcement about reliability, with an eye towards debunking them.	
New Session Format: Mitigation/Visual Advocacy Focused Breakout Room – but all are welcome to attend!					
Story Development (Pre-Production) Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ Sunset Room Abridged version of the 3 Rs and “ABT” method (story development model).					
12:00 pm – 1:15 pm		LUNCH BREAK			
1:15 pm – 2:30 pm					
Testifying Lubna Debbini, Investigator, Orange County Associate Defender, Santa Ana, CA Orangedale AF A defense investigator’s hard work in the field means nothing if it cannot survive the courtroom. Whether you are called to impeach a state witness or enter your own due diligence into evidence, your testimony is the bridge between the investigation and the jury. This course teaches you how to build a foundation for successful testimony long before you take the stand. Participants will learn how intentional fieldwork, meticulous documentation, and bulletproof report writing directly dictate courtroom success. You will master the psychological and tactical skills needed to project credibility, survive aggressive cross-examination, and serve as a reliable partner to the defense attorney under high-stress trial conditions.		Discovery Organization, OneNote & Templates McKayla Moran, Supervisory Investigator, Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, Washington, DC Citrus Room OneNote can be much more than a place to take notes; it can become your go-to tool for organizing cases, managing discovery, and keeping all information needed in one place. This session will cover practical ways to build an organized case file, create reusable templates, and develop workflows that save time and make information easier to find. However, this is not a session solely dedicate to OneNote, as other templates, record trackers, and discovery organization tips and tricks will be discussed. Attendees will leave with ideas they can immediately apply to their own cases.		Video Evidence and Law Enforcement: Best Practices vs Real World Joshua Cohen, Principal, Fat Pencil Studio, Portland, OR Orangedale BE See Session Description from Day 1 (10:45am Breakout). Repeat Session from Day 1	



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New Session Format: Mitigation/Visual Advocacy Focused Breakout Room – but all are welcome to attend! Equipment, Filming, and Interviewing Techniques (Production) Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ Sunset Room Session Description Pending.		
2:30 pm – 2:45 pm Networking Break, Exhibits		
2:45 pm – 4:00 pm CONCURRENT SESSIONS		
Collaborative Mitigation: How the Whole Team Contributes to Developing a Client’s Story Matt Silverman, Mitigation Specialist/Investigator, Silverman Mitigation, Phoenix, AZ Orangedale AF Mitigation investigation is a team discipline, not a solo assignment. This session explores how investigators, mitigation specialists, paralegals, attorneys, and experts function as co-strategists rather than a hierarchy of tasks. Participants will examine how the full defense team, not just the mitigation specialist, builds the client's life history and shapes a persuasive, evidence-grounded narrative for sentencing.	More Than the Worst Moment: Empathy and Self-Care When Working with Individuals Charged with Sex Crimes Lee Anne Brantley, MSW, Investigator, Trial Unit, Federal Defender, Middle District of Alabama, Montgomery, AL Ashley Edwards, LICSW, Investigator, Trial Unit, Federal Defender, Middle District of Alabama, Montgomery, AL Orangedale BE Our presenters play the dual role of investigator and social worker in the civil rights hub of Montgomery. Leaning on this dual role experience, this session will provide strategies for supporting clients who have been charged with sex-related offenses. The session will also explore self-care in response to immediate and long-term secondary trauma and provide participants the opportunity to talk through various case scenarios.	Case Lab Matt Hanna, Training Director, NDIA, Washington, DC Seana Holland, Director of Investigations, Levy Firestone Muse LLP, Washington, DC Citrus Room What to do when you’re stuck on a case, unsure where to look next, or wondering whether you’ve overlooked an investigative avenue? In this interactive session, participants are invited to bring a current case, investigative challenge, unanswered question, or difficult task to the group. Working collaboratively, we’ll brainstorm investigative strategies, identify potential leads and sources of information, explore alternative approaches, and develop practical next steps. Reminder to please be mindful of client/case confidences when sharing information.
New Session Format: Mitigation/Visual Advocacy Focused Breakout Room – but all are welcome to attend! Editing (Post-Production) Doug Passon, President & Creative Director, Doug Passon Law, Scottsdale, AZ Sunset Room Official Session Description Pending		