



PRESS RELEASE
November 15, 2024

Media Contact: Melissa Wojnaroski
(202) 618-4158
mwojnaroski@usccr.gov

Arkansas Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report:

The Right to Counsel in Arkansas

The Arkansas Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights [released a report](#) following a series of public meetings and a collection of public testimony regarding the civil-rights impact of access to counsel for indigent defendants in the state. The report examines the extent to which the right to counsel as provided through the state system of public defenders in Arkansas is sufficient to ensure a constitutionally guaranteed “effective defense” for those who cannot afford it. The report also examines the related impact on persistent disparities throughout the criminal justice system based on race, color, sex, disability, and national origin.

Primary concerns identified in the report include: (1) the role of indigent defense in ensuring public perceptions of trust and legitimacy in the criminal justice system; (2) the impact of current attorney caseloads on the ability of public defenders to provide effective counsel; (3) other constitutional due process concerns resulting from challenges within Arkansas’ public defender system; (4) apparent political challenges that have prevented the Arkansas legislature from effectively addressing long-standing challenges within the state public defense system. The report concludes with a series of policy recommendations to improve access to counsel for indigent defendants in Arkansas and address related civil rights concerns.

Committee Chair Robert Steinbuch said, “I am very proud the hard work of the Committee. We are a diverse group of academics and practitioners, with varied outlooks and experiences. We were able to work collaboratively to produce a report focusing on the need to ensure Arkansans adequate representation. I look forward to the various stakeholders’ opportunity to interact with our report to improve access to counsel for Arkansans.”

All public records from the Committee’s meetings are [available online here](#).

#####

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 state and U.S. territory Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).