

Statement of Christina L. Hunt  
On Behalf of the Federal and Community Defenders  
Public Hearing before the CJA Ad Hoc Committee  
November 17, 2015

My name is Christina L. Hunt. I currently serve as the Executive Director for the Federal Defenders for the Middle District of Georgia, Inc.(FDMGA). I have held that position since October, 2014. Before that, I served as the Interim Director of the organization, appointed in June, 2014. I joined the office in 2010 as the Senior Litigator. Before my work with FDMGA, I held positions as Senior Litigator and Trial Attorney for the Federal Defenders for the Eastern District of Washington and Idaho (FDEWI) for 11 years. Prior to that I was in private practice in Macon, GA, and took a large number of CJA cases in this district. I would like to thank the CJA Ad Hoc Committee for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Federal Public and Community Defenders regarding training.

I have been a member of the Federal Public and Community Defender system for almost 20 years. During my tenure in FDEWI, I was the de facto training director responsible for in-house training as well as our annual CJA panel training, which consisted of a one day seminar conducted by faculty from across the nation, and covered topics such as race diversity, cultural competency, trial skills, and case law updates. I am also a member of the Federal Defender Training Expert Panel, have served on numerous committees planning national DSO trainings, and have taught at other programs covering trial skills and sentencing advocacy, as well as substantive topics. I am on the faculty of the National Criminal Defense College, and have taught trial skills at Mercer Law School and Gonzaga Law School.

Like many members of the Federal Defender organizations, I have been fortunate to attend numerous training programs that have made me a much better advocate for my clients. When I first joined the Federal Defenders after practicing as a CJA attorney for 11 years, I was shocked at the amount of material I did not know that could have benefited my clients. Although I had a successful federal criminal practice and was well respected by the court, I felt as if I had disserved my former clients due to my lack of training, notwithstanding my attendance at national programs put on by NACDL, the DSO, and other state programs.

My largely rural district has five divisions. My office handles cases in all five divisions, although we maintain offices in only two of them. The Middle District of Georgia has not adopted the Model CJA plan; therefore, any person who is a member of the MDGA bar could be appointed to a case. In reality, that does not happen, but there is no formal process in place to become a member of the CJA panel. As a result, the Clerk's office does not maintain a current list of attorneys who are accepting cases in the District and, while my office maintains an informal email list and fields questions from panel lawyers, it is difficult to assess their training levels.

My office has taken several steps to better assist the panel. We implemented a web page with practice-related information, as well as a protected forum in which panel lawyers may ask

questions. Last year, under my tenure, we offered our first annual CJA full day training. In conjunction with the Court, we have decided to form a committee to formalize a CJA plan that will require attendance at a two day “boot camp” on the nuts and bolts of federal practice. It is this office’s goal to provide training in all of the divisions on at least a yearly basis.

Because the panel lawyers are spread throughout the state, we have found that brown bag lunches are ineffective. I do spread information I receive through our mailing list, although I do not believe the list to be complete. Although we have sponsored webinars, we find this to be the most ineffective way to offer training because the attorneys are unable to network with other attendees or interact with the speakers.

During candid discussions with the judges in this district, I have learned that most believe the CJA panel lawyers do not spend enough time with their clients, and are not current on the law. In the future, we plan to address these issues through both seminars and newsletters.

Although the national training opportunities are excellent, very few people from my district attend. For reasons ranging from cost (travel, per diems, hotel expenses, and distance) to inability to leave a small town practice, the lack of attendance is understandable. Additionally, the number of applicants to these programs often exceeds the slots available, and panel attorneys find themselves wait listed.

As an organization, we need to find better and more effective ways to make our programming accessible to the CJA lawyers. I believe that, were the Training Division and DSO a separate entity, more funds could be diverted to deliver training. For example, some trainings are offered only once a year or every other year, but if the Training Division was empowered to negotiate hotel and conference space on its own it could offer more programming and expand its reach to rural areas.

Additionally, we need to establish incentives for the CJA lawyers to attend the programs, and offer scholarships to those in rural areas. To illustrate, the median income for attorneys in Georgia ranges from approximately \$128,000 in the Atlanta area, to barely more than \$67,000 in Macon, GA, and just over \$68,000 in the non-metro Middle Georgia area.<sup>1</sup> Many of the CJA panel lawyers are sole practitioners, so every day spent out of the office attending a remote training imposes a significant burden on their practices. If the trainings were held more frequently, and in more areas, the greater range of options would offer panel attorneys the flexibility they need to avail themselves of training more frequently. And, while I am focusing on my district because I know it best, these problems are not unique to Middle Georgia. They are national issues that need to be addressed. We should attempt to hold national trainings in each of the states to attract more CJA attorneys and hold the costs of attendance down for them.

Thank you for this opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.lawyeredu.org/lawyer-salary.html#georgia>

