

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright*. In that decision, the Court said that the Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives every person charged with a felony the right to be represented by a lawyer. It said that if an accused person cannot afford a lawyer, the State must pay for one.

We call this lawyer a public defender. Public defender programs are essential to our justice system. Of all the people charged with crimes in this country every year, over 80% are represented by a public defender.

We, in Washington, can be proud that we had a law saying the same thing over 100 years before *Gideon*. The *Gideon* decision, like the Washington legislature, recognizes that whether we are rich or poor, in the courts of the United States we all have the same constitutional rights.

Our justice system is an adversarial one, which means that each side must argue its case before a neutral judge and jury. In order for that system to work, lawyers have to fight hard for their clients. Public defenders, while at times overworked and underfunded, do that. Their goal is to protect their client's rights, and to make sure that no person is convicted of a crime unless the prosecutor's evidence is reliable, was gotten fairly, and proves guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Thank you for your public service.