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Community Oriented Defender Network *Statement of Principles*

This Statement of Principles, developed by the Brennan Center in consultation with members of the COD advisory group, is intended to articulate the common goals of COD members. We hope you will find it a useful tool to inspire staff, educate the public, and build the capacity of the COD movement to make a difference for clients, families and communities.

The members of the Community Oriented Defender Network, recognizing that community oriented defense services may take many forms (reflecting local imperatives, unique office priorities, resource constraints, and other factors), embrace the following aspirational goals:

- 1. Create a “client-centered practice”** – We aspire to employ a diverse group of attorneys, investigators, social workers and other advocates who respect their clients’ wishes and goals, and who work together to ensure that the dignity of every client is honored.
- 2. Meet clients’ needs** – We seek to promote the life success of every client by: identifying educational gaps, mental health issues, addiction, and other needs, and linking clients with resources, opportunities, services and providers to meet those needs.
- 3. Partner with the community** – We seek to maintain a local presence within the communities we serve, and to form relationships with community members, community based organizations, and community institutions (e.g., courts, schools, government, health care and employment providers) to improve case outcomes and life outcomes for clients and to strengthen families and communities.
- 4. Address systemic problems** – We aspire to change policies that harm clients, families and communities (e.g., policing practices that produce racial and ethnic disparities in arrest rates).
- 5. Educate the public** – We seek to describe the human impact of the criminal justice system to policymakers, journalists, and others so that the public can better appreciate the cost to individuals, communities, and the nation of “tough on crime” policies.
- 6. Collaborate** - We aim to create partnerships with likely and unlikely allies, including prosecutors, victims, faith-based organizations, and national and state legal aid service organizations to share ideas, promote change, and support mutual efforts.

7. **Provide “holistic” advocacy** – We seek to promote access to civil legal services to resolve clients’ legal concerns in such areas as housing, immigration, family court, and public benefits, occasioned by involvement with the criminal justice system.
8. **Pursue a multidisciplinary approach** – We aspire to rely not only on lawyers but also on social workers, counselors, medical practitioners, investigators and others to address the needs of clients, their families and communities.
9. **Seek necessary support** – We seek essential funding, professionally approved workload limits, and other resources and structures sufficient to enable us to rely on the COD model.
10. **Participate in the COD network** – We are dedicated to sharing research, models, ideas and goals to help advance the COD movement both locally and nationally in order to maximize its benefits for individuals, families and communities.