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The Defender

By John Lozada ● Oct 01, 2026

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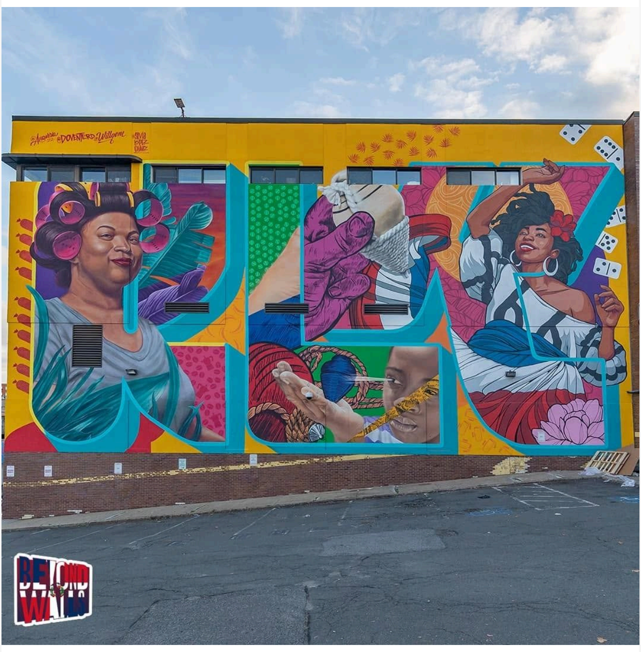
Welcome to our fall edition of *The Defender*, the CPCS newsletter reporting on our work to advance and improve racial justice and equity within our public defender organization.

In honor of Latinx Heritage Month, celebrated from September 15th to October 15th each year, this Defender edition pays tribute to an essential community across Massachusetts through informative photos, brief narratives, and links to help you learn more. It is important that we recognize and learn more about this highly diverse, nuanced and contributing community and its people, whose members we get to work with, learn from and serve. Please read on, find something new to consider and enjoy!

Director’s Note - On the themes of Hope and Respect



Dominican Independence Day mural in Lynn, Massachusetts. The community can be found in the largest numbers in Lawrence, Lowell, Haverhill, Salem, Lynn, Boston and Worcester and Peabody. Learn more about this community and its history in Massachusetts here - https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/dominicans/

Happy fall and Latinx Heritage month!

- To the 2026 incoming class of colleagues joining our cause, welcome and thanks for your commitment to public defense. We hope you will dig in and expand your knowledge and legal training to best leverage racial and cultural differences in support your advocacy for our clients. For those of you waiting on bar results, we know you put in the hard work to prepare and are hoping for your success!
- It is certain that walking the line between legal professionalism while fighting against stereotypes and bias that undermine individual humanity can be challenging and painful.
- However, for the sake of building our agency into the future, your open sharing in our struggle to learn away from bias and toward empathy and respect will distinguish CPCS and help define your career.

Within CPCS, we have grown to a size beyond imagination from where our agency began, and we are working through growing pains, stress and sacrifice, uncertain about when things will stabilize.

- This change is occurring in the middle of a fraught time in America that increases the risk for people to lose jobs, opportunities and economic stability, amounting to threats that will expand poverty in Massachusetts and nationally.
- Nonetheless, as advocates, we do not relent, retreat or fail in our mission to represent clients for justice, zealously and with purpose.

Our commitment honors the sacrifice of heroes who fought to end slavery, fueled the civil rights movement, responded to war and domestic strife, and most critically, gave rise to defining the right to counsel.

- Across CPCS, we contribute by compelling our system of justice to view dignity in our clients and honor their right to due process and fundamental justice, even as the rule of law is under attack.
- We have great hope in you all, good colleagues, for your faith, sense of mission and embrace of what it means to be a public defender in each of our roles for this cause.

After my visits to our offices over these last months, my hope has deepened from seeing how we strive for CPCS to embrace and effectively represent our racially and culturally diverse clientele, who come to us amidst hunger, dependency, mental or physical disabilities, special educational needs, language barriers and limited education. Our clients live with constant pressure and psychic harm from systemic racial and cultural bias, along with the stigma of poverty, factors that engender mistrust and trigger risky decisions that lead them to our law practice.

Whether gained from experience or training, racial and cultural acuity are key to building client trust.

- For a person who has negatively experienced abusive governmental power, is Black or Brown, has a physical, mental or learning disability, speaks a language other than English or comes from a marginalized culture, CPCS advocates present with a level of privilege and can be viewed as yet another “brick in the wall,” despite our best intentions.
- Given our own implicit biases, the limits of time, and the stress in our work, we risk being perceived as unaware or indifferent, and must fight against losing the trust and candor that make all the difference in our work.

On an interpersonal level, it is reassuring to see staff working with each other to call out moments of bias or microaggressions in our office interactions, not to “cancel” colleagues we cannot afford to lose, but to respectfully make clear that certain statements or attitudes are objectionable.

- It has been further reassuring to see the response of people who make these statements or reflect a lack of awareness, owning what they have said and showing the maturity and willingness to stand corrected.
- Candor and respectful responses in these moments are not happening consistently across our agency, but we can and must strive for more of this courage, which benefits our clients, our advocacy and each of us.

Please remember that none of us is perfect or complete in the work to become more aware, empathetic and respectful, starting with me. However, if we try, by learning and sharing, including calling out unwanted conduct and owning our missteps, we can build this organization to be the best public defense agency possible, as we increase our ability to advocate for our clients with deeper insight and integrity.

So, I urge you to kindly read on in this edition of the Defender to learn more about our work, our colleagues, and initiatives that shape CPCS' capacity to support and lead in building hope and achievement. I look forward to visiting our offices in the coming months and to working with you and others to identify, support and work toward enhancing the reputation, capacity and impact of our public defense representation.

Meet our Colleague: Ed Cardenas, Steff Interpreter, Springfield and Holyoke, Public Defender Division

CPCS is working to improve the language access services we provide to limited English-speaking people, making it easier to request translations, requiring that Language Line phone interpreters be certified to interpret legal terminology and hiring staff interpreters. There are six primary languages that our clients speak, and we encounter several dozen more less frequently, including among people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

This work is evolutionary, but one of the big successes has been our transition from piloting interpretation to hiring staff interpreters in certain CPCS offices across Massachusetts. Communicating with the level of care and respect that builds trust can be hard to do with the division that language and culture can create and can lead to the loss of rights and liberty.

One staff interpreter, Ed Cardenas, is distinguishing himself in the Western region in support of Spanish-speaking clients and loved ones, for seeing his role and work beyond interpreting or document translation. Ed has kindly shared thoughts with The Defender on coming to CPCS, connecting with limited English proficient clients or loved ones, and on his embrace of CPCS and our mission through his efforts for our cause.

- Please learn more about Ed's vital perspectives and suggestions for CPCS to improve our connection to clients through caring, cultural competence and the effective use of our language access resources. **Read the full interview here.**

CPCS By the Numbers

Flags identifying Puerto Rico in recent centuries reflect the political and cultural evolution and divide defining the challenge for Puerto Ricans, from identity to politics on the island's status as a Commonwealth, state or independent entity. This video provides a brief background to this iconic image of Puerto Rican culture, pride and political voice that - https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1378643676315949

Within the Defender, we have tried to build community and awareness of CPCS' commitment to diversity by sharing demographic data on our workforce across gender and race.

- Recently, we have received a question about the numbers we are reporting, which have not yet included data on gender identity.
- Therefore, it is important to address the context and validity of data that is collected in the Commonwealth's Human Resources Compensation Management System (HR/CMS), the source for the demographic data we have shared.

The Commonwealth describes HR/CMS as "a records management system serving multiple employee systems, including payroll, Federal W-2, and Group Insurance Commission (GIC). Some of these systems currently require legal name and male/female-only gender markers, and as a result, those values must be included in an employee's profile. This is a legal requirement, however antiquated and flawed, that is connected to Social Security numbers, tax returns, retirement benefits, etc.

Since about 2022, the Commonwealth has tried to address employees' desire to report their identities more accurately (please see the Commonwealth's FAQ on the gender-identity module). Recently, the Commonwealth has allowed reporting on gender identity status. CPCS HR is currently working on this new reporting ability and hopes to have it available this fall.

Reporting on HR/CMS data can be important because it shows trends in what employees are reporting.

- However, it is paramount to understand what the data does and does not show. The data will never be 100% accurate, as it is based on voluntary reporting by employees.
- We cannot and do not mandate that employees disclose their race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, veteran status, ability, and all other protected classes.
- Therefore, we are dependent on employees who wish to volunteer this information. We look forward to being able to report gender identity data soon.

For these reasons, and to allow time to work toward more complete reporting, in this edition of The Defender, we will only share data based on race.

CPCS Staff Demographics based on Race

As of September, 2026, CPCS had 1,014 employees, up from 887 in June, 2026. The report shows a net increase of 127 employees during the quarter.

Our workforce includes 749 white colleagues (73.87%) and 265 colleagues of color (26.13%). These figures provide a snapshot of the workforce as CPCS continues its recruitment efforts.

CPCS Attorneys and Legal Managers and Directors

As of September 19, 2026, CPCS had 699 attorneys and legal managers and directors, up from 597 in June, 2026.

- Of this group, 557 colleagues (79.69%) are white and 142 colleagues (20.31%) are people of color.
- **Within this group:**
  - Black: 47
  - Hispanic/Latinx: 45
  - Asian American and Pacific Islander: 49
  - Native American: 1
- Over the four most recent quarters, the number of attorneys and legal managers and directors of color increased from 105 in December 2025 to 142 in September 2026, a percentage growth of 18.29% to 20.31%. This increase reflects measurable progress in strengthening racial and ethnic representation within CPCS attorney and management roles. Additional analysis and supporting data can be accessed **here**.

Racial Justice Interns - 2026

Veronica Robles
Carmello Scire

Mural in East Boston depicting Veronica Robles, a Mexican immigrant leader on arts and culture and Carmello Scire, an Italian immigrant and entrepreneur committed to community service. Learn more about Ms. Robles' work and the Mexican community in Massachusetts here - https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/immigrant-places/east-boston/celebrating-mexican-culture/

This summer, along with the wave of 2L's and 3L's supporting our representation and trial advocacy work, there was a Racial Justice-focused pool of five interns, some who are in college, recently graduated, or completing their first year of law school. The students worked on projects to help CPCS leverage race and cultural awareness across our practice areas. Here is a snapshot of their accomplishments:

- Data research and analysis on the disproportionate deployment and use of Flock technology and social media surveillance in Springfield and Holyoke, to help develop *Long* equal protection motions
- Issuance of 35 Freedom of Information Act Requests to the Department of Mental Health on their training and other practices toward building racial and cultural awareness among hospital staff, to support MHLD raising race- and culture-focused challenges
- Research and reporting on immigrant-serving organizations to

define the precise services and availability of these organizations

- Review of voluminous data on child placements across the regions of the Commonwealth to identify potential disproportionalities
- Study of best practices to recommend changes in CAFL training to build deeper racial and cultural instruction for new staff
- Inquiry into the refusal by police in Brockton to use body-worn cameras.

Each student learned about judicial bias and researched best practices from other jurisdictions to support research and analysis of potential ways to improve judicial accountability in our Massachusetts courts.

Annually, my office reaches out to managers and supervisors in our agency to identify projects for the Racial Justice student cohort. If you or your team has an idea of this nature, please contact and share your idea with supervisors so they can propose a project for next year's Racial Justice intern team to work on.

Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Working Group - Update

In New Bedford, there is a K'iche' community of 6,000-plus indigenous people from the highlands of Guatemala whose roots are within the Mayan culture. There is also a substantial K'iche' community in other cities and towns, including Lynn. You can learn more about this community and its impact on the United States here: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20250515-the-mayan-languages-spreading-across-the-us

Over the past months, the EID Working Group has met less frequently due to the emphasis on the Racial Equity Assessment and the achievement of the many objectives that were the starting point for this conversation and the efforts undertaken.

- This work is evolving to make racial equity a more central feature in our efforts, from planning and resourcing to action steps, and we will revisit the role of this group going forward.
- Some projects that originated within this group are continuing, including an inquiry into transportation gaps for our clients, the expansion of programming for interns to learn more about CPCS and research into judicial bias and strong response options.
- The EID Working Group has been instrumental on many fronts, contributing to major policy discussions and innovations within CPCS, including talent outreach partners, language access, microaggression guidance, event planning guidance, community engagement, and our racial equity assessment. This group has unflinchingly provided me with critical input and critiques that have helped me shape the work of my office.
- I am grateful to the dozens of colleagues, past and present, who have participated in this work, and for the leadership they have exercised in addressing the issues presented. The standards they have set will guide our strengthening the impact and reach of CPCS' work for racial and cultural awareness and equity.

CPCS Affinity Groups

Oh, the people you can meet out on the street! Here are CPCS colleagues Flo Fuentes and Damaris Morales, Springfield PDD along with Alexa Corali, Springfield CAFL, sharing a warm photo with Gov. Healey during the Springfield Puerto Rican Parade on September 13th. Similar parades, festivals and fiestas patronales are held each year across Latinx communities in Massachusetts, so keep an eye out for next year's events in your area, and join CPCS to connect, enjoy food and dance to great music. Wepa! (Yoo-hoo!!!)

CPCS values colleagues coming together across our roles and locations to connect, share, and build friendships and community, and the opportunity to join or start an affinity group is a great way to make this happen.

- There are active groups among colleagues across Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander, LGBTQ and Genderqueer communities, as well as a Global Impact (immigration matters related) affinity group.
- As part of our Racial Equity Assessment efforts, we are looking at ways to improve the programming and support to these groups to make them stronger and more impactful.

Aligning with the existing groups, there are continuing opportunities for CPCS colleagues to come together across race and ethnicity, women, men, parents, people with disabilities, veterans, religion and age.

- All that is needed is a person willing to convene a conversation, outreach to the Equity & Inclusion Director, and an effort to invite colleagues across our organization to join in.
- The DEI office gladly supports agenda development, structuring a conversation, outreach, and other guidance to help these conversations begin and flourish.
- Attached, please find a current listing of active groups and contact information.

Racial Equity Assessment Update

The history of slavery in Latin-America and intersectionality is largely untold, though these countries became home to ten times more African slaves than were in bondage in the United States. This is an image of Gaspar Yanga, an African of Bantu descent enslaved in Mexico, who led a colony of liberated enslaved Africans (Maroons) to successfully defeat a Spanish colonial attack and establish freedom and self-rule in the 1600's. Please learn more about this early abolitionist and the town named in his honor here: https://aaregistry.org/story/yanga-african-abolitionist-and-rebel-in-mexico

During August, we had a full-day visit with the National Association of Public Defenders' Executive Director, **Lori James.**

- Lori leads the racial equity assessment (REA) consultancy, helping CPCS to become stronger and more impactful in leveraging racial and cultural awareness.
- This visit followed from a discussion she had with SMT members this past spring on preliminary results from the assessment and input from focus groups held last winter.
- Equity & Inclusion Director John Lozada and Chief Counsel Anthony Benedetti met with Lori to discuss progress to date, preliminary results and thoughts on moving forward.
- Lori conducted a conversation with Affinity Group conveners and volunteers who discussed the opportunities, challenges and needs in support of these groups becoming stronger and more impactful.
- The next steps in this work will include a follow-up conversation with all who participated in the REA focus groups, finalizing the preliminary findings, meeting with SMT members and developing a proposal for work going forward.
- There is much more to come from this effort, so please stay tuned!

CPCS Language Access Plan Implementation Update

Every Latinx community Massachusetts pay tribute to their country of origin, its history and quite often, the struggle for independence against foreign rule. The dancers in this image are part of a Colombian Independence Day celebration at the Massachusetts State House, recognizing the country for being the first to declare independence from Spanish rule in the early 1800's. Here is demographic data on the Colombian community in Massachusetts. https://www.neilsberg.com/insights/lists/colombian-population-in-massachusetts-by-city/

CPCS continues to support our work with clients who speak limited English, as referenced above. We continue to receive requests for translations of documents and encourage you to reach out when you need this support in your work with our clients, witnesses and others.

- Recently, in response to the Inspector General's inquiry about CPCS' clients and our representation, we translated a general notice for clients into nine languages. This was a good experience for us to stretch and make an effort to communicate more broadly.
- We have developed and adopted a range of guidance documents that support our work to provide racially and culturally aware language access, which you can find on our internal website. Here is a link to

these language access resources for your consideration and use: Language Access Resources.

- Please make use of the services we have in place and let the E & I Director know if and when you run into an obstacle that goes unresolved so we can help respond.

Closing Thoughts and Opportunities

As a queer community leader of Latinx heritage, Absolute Empress I José / José Julio Sarria (Mama José) (1922-2013) made singular contributions for LGBTQ rights, from activism and charity to politics and as a drag queen. Sarria, of Spanish and Colombian descent, created the first non-profit supporting gay rights, led the fight against police harassment of gay men, was the first out candidate for a supervisor role in San Francisco and founded the International Court System, an organization dedicated to promoting human rights and LGBTQ+ inclusivity across North America. Learn more about this visionary leader here: https://josesarria.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/JoseObituary.pdf

This is an exciting time across CPCS. Good colleagues, whether you are new to this organization or have been here for some time, we hope you take advantage of every opportunity to expand your reach, knowledge and professional expertise in our work.

- Along with the work we do to restore lives and liberty, there are resources across our departments and divisions to help you grow and achieve through both experience and structured training. We support colleagues to attend conferences, training and webinars to improve knowledge and build skills.
- There are opportunities to maximize savings under the SMART Plan, to get out from under debt through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program or to take classes under the Tuition Remission program. We also offer compensated time to volunteer with local organizations.
- Across every region in Massachusetts, there is much to explore in Massachusetts that is not cost-prohibitive, from museums and the arts to the beautiful expanse of our parks and coastline. Free or discount passes are available through our public libraries.
- Within the communities we serve, there are opportunities to make connections, join groups and organizations and enjoy the rich and diverse racial and cultural groups that abound in this state.

By taking advantage of these opportunities, CPCS, we can gain exposure across our diversity, find comfort away from our challenging work and do what is essential for each of us - live, laugh and love out loud.

Please take the time, no matter what role you play, to visualize, dream and continue to explore as part of the journey that brought you here. Your growth and achievement build this agency as they sustain and enhance your experience and life within and beyond our work.

Felicidades (congratulations), CPCS, to our team at Latinx Heritage Month and always, as we move forward together, or pa'lante!, the encouragement exclaimed by Latinx people from across the Caribbean.

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