

## **Criminal Defense Practice Social Worker**

### **Overview**

The Bronx Defenders (BxD) - an innovative, progressive, holistic indigent defense office in the South Bronx - seeks a passionate social worker with a commitment to public defense to join our Criminal Defense Practice.

Founded in 1997, The Bronx Defenders is a public defender nonprofit that has developed a nationally recognized model of representation called holistic defense, which provides people with teams of lawyers, social workers, and advocates to defend them zealously in court as well as to address the underlying drivers and enmeshed penalties of legal system involvement.

Since opening our doors, we have grown into an organization of more than 400 staff members defending nearly 20,000 New Yorkers each year in criminal, family, civil, and immigration proceedings who face incarceration, family separation, eviction, and deportation, among other devastating consequences.

Today we are reimagining the role of public defense even further, using community organizing and engagement, legislative advocacy, and impact litigation to partner with the communities we represent to bring about long-lasting systemic change.

We also share our model and lessons learned with current and future public defenders. We run two legal clinics at NYC law schools and train public defenders from one end of the country to the next on how to move to a holistic model of representation.

### **Criminal Defense Practice**

The Bronx is one of the most aggressively policed boroughs in New York City. As a result, we represent thousands of people each year, nearly 40% of whom are charged with low-level offenses such as shoplifting, traffic offenses, and drug possession. As part of our holistic approach, we spend time getting to know the people we represent and gaining a deeper understanding of their lives and needs. With that understanding, we advocate for people by thoroughly investigating their cases, raising novel legal arguments, using creative tools of persuasion and storytelling, and addressing needs that go beyond the scope of their cases.

### **SOCIAL WORK**

Effectively fighting for people facing legal charges requires knowing and understanding their goals and needs beyond those related to a single case or legal matter. Our Social Work Practice provides an understanding of people's lives and the challenges that are connected to their involvement in the various legal systems. The expertise of our Masters-level social workers and non-legal advocates helps people secure positive case outcomes and address the issues that drove them into the legal system in the first place.

### **Responsibilities**

Strategizing with lawyers and other advocates, CDP Social Workers work to identify and address the issues that contribute to the ensnarement of the people we defend in the

criminal legal system and mitigate the enmeshed consequences that may arise out of their contact with the system. They do this by conducting oral advocacy, authoring mitigation reports, coordinating with treatment programs and social service providers, and supporting the people we represent as they navigate the criminal legal system.

- Collaborate with lawyers and other advocates on holistic defense teams to identify and achieve the legal goals of the people we represent
- Inform the people we represent about the criminal court process and assist them in overcoming barriers while navigating it
- Interview and assess the people we represent to identify strengths, resources, and needs
- Conduct supportive counseling, crisis intervention, and case management for the people we represent throughout the pendency of their legal cases
- Provide support to the people we represent during court appearances and at community-based programs
- Maintain consistent contact with the people we represent, including regular visits to NYC jail facilities, and provide support and advocacy for connection to medical care, mental health services, and jail-based programming
- Advocate for the people we represent in Bronx Criminal and Supreme Court, in incarceratory settings, and with community-based programs
- Engage in oral advocacy with judges, prosecutors, and other court and program staff
- Assist with review of behavioral health, medical, education, and other records
- Prepare mitigation reports and other forms of persuasive written work product arguing for reduced sentencing - incorporating content from psychosocial interviews, interviews with collateral sources, healthcare records, and social science research
- Prepare the people we represent for court-related assessments
- Liase with external behavioral health experts to conduct forensic evaluations and interpret these evaluations as well as other
- Cultivate relationships with community programs and providers in jail facilities to increase access to care and support for the people we represent
- Maintain case records in Bronx Defenders' informational case management system

## Qualifications

To be eligible, candidates must have:

- M.S.W. from an accredited School of Social

Work Applicants must demonstrate:

- Passion for holistic public defense and racial justice
- Commitment to directly defending and advocating for people ensnared in the

criminal legal system

- Experience working in and with racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically marginalized communities targeted by carceral systems
- Ability to effectively and respectfully communicate, collaborate, and connect with people with various backgrounds, identities, and experiences
- Ability to work well both independently and collaboratively with lawyers, non-lawyers, and external service providers
- Commitment to fierce advocacy and willingness to strategically challenge authority in defense of the people we represent
- Strong analytical skills and capacity to employ non-legal resources while advocating in legal cases for the people we defend
- Knowledge of substance use disorder, domestic violence, parenting, mental health and related systems
- Effective verbal and written advocacy skills
- Interviewing, research, and writing skills necessary to compile persuasive mitigation reports
- Ability to multitask, maintain order and meet deadlines in a fast-paced, high-stakes environment
- Meticulous attention to detail
- Ability to think critically and creatively in fast-paced settings, finding innovative solutions to unique obstacles
- Ability to exercise good judgment, discretion, and confidentiality with sensitive matters
- Ability to receive constructive feedback, demonstrate introspection, and shift behavior accordingly
- Commitment to raising one's cultural consciousness and challenging oppressive practices on an interpersonal and institutional level
- Spanish fluency is preferred but not required

This is an in-person position subject to hybrid work requirements.

Salary is commensurate with experience. For candidates with 1-10 years of directly relevant experience, the salary range for this position would be approximately \$87,177 - \$114,577. Full-time employees are also eligible for a comprehensive benefits package including but not limited to medical, dental and vision coverage; a 403(b) plan with employer contribution; a generous vacation, sick leave, and parental leave policy; and a professional development fund. More specific information about salary and benefits will be provided when and if an offer is extended.

Approximately 70% of The Bronx Defenders' staff, including attorneys and non-attorneys, are represented by UAW Local 2325 - Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (AFL-CIO). This position is within the bargaining unit.

This position is exempt. By law, nonexempt employees are compensated hourly based on their annual rate and therefore are entitled to overtime, whereas exempt employees are not.

[To apply, upload your resume and cover letter in one document and apply online.](#)

***The Bronx Defenders is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to maintaining a workplace that embraces staff with a diversity of backgrounds,***

*identities, and experiences. We acknowledge the ways in which systemic oppression and injustice can undermine access to professional opportunities and are committed to conducting hiring and promotion processes that are equitable and accessible to those commonly excluded from the workforce. We do not discriminate against and in fact specifically encourage applicants from marginalized communities to apply, including those who identify as Black, Indigenous, people of color, queer, transgender, gender non-conforming, disabled, neurodivergent, and those directly impacted by criminal, civil, family, and immigration legal systems. We value lived as well as professional experience and particularly welcome applications from the Bronx community that we serve.*