

Family Defense Practice Social Worker

Overview

The Bronx Defenders (BxD) - an innovative, progressive, holistic indigent defense office in the South Bronx - seeks a passionate Master's level Social Worker with a commitment to public defense to fill a position as a social worker in our Family Defense Practice and work with parents fighting allegations of child abuse and neglect in Bronx County Family Court.

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.

Family Defense Practice

As residents of the most heavily disinvested borough in the city, families in the Bronx experience the highest rates of family policing and parent-child separation. We serve as the primary institutional provider defending parents and caretakers against the painful and unnecessary removals of their children in the Bronx. Together, our attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates provide the legal defense and support necessary to keep families together and interrupt generational cycles of family court involvement.

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 Master's-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

The Bronx Defenders is seeking a thoughtful and dedicated social worker to work in our Family Defense Practice. Social workers are integral to the representation of parents from poor communities charged with abuse/neglect of their children. Our Family Defense Practice social workers collaborate on interdisciplinary teams of lawyers and advocates and assist in the development of litigation strategy while connecting parents with the necessary services and support to advance their legal goals, support reunification with their children, and prevent Administration for Children's Services (ACS) surveillance of their families. Responsibilities can be found below.

- Collaborate with clients, lawyers and advocates on holistic defense teams to identify and achieve the stated legal goals of the people we represent
- Advocate for clients in Bronx Family Court, Criminal Court, Child Protection Services (CPS), and with community-based programs
- Inform clients about the Family Court process and assist them in overcoming barriers while navigating the system
- Interview and assess clients to identify strengths, resources, and needs
- Conduct supportive counseling, crisis intervention, and case management throughout the pendency of legal cases
- Provide clients with support during court appearances and at community-based programs
- Maintain consistent contact with clients, including regular visits to NYC jail facilities, homes, and court appearances
- Support and advocate for connection to medical care, mental health services, and jail-based programming
- Advocate for parents at Child Safety Conferences and Family Team Conferences
- Engage in oral advocacy with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), prosecutors, and other court and program staff
- Assist with review of behavioral, medical, education, and other records
- Prepare clients for court-related assessments
- Collaborate with external behavioral health experts to interpret external assessments
- Maintain case records in Bronx Defenders' information case management system
- Cultivate relationships with community programs and social services and benefits providers, and provide case management support and advocacy

Qualifications

To be eligible, candidates must have:

- M.S.W. from an accredited School of Social Work
- At least one year of experience working on behalf of parents navigating the family regulation system

Candidates must demonstrate:

- Commitment to directly defending parents accused of abuse and neglect by organizations such as the Administration for Children's Service (ACS) and Child Protective Services (CPS)
- Experience working in and with racially, ethnically and socioeconomically marginalized communities targeted by carceral systems
- Understanding of how systemic oppression affects marginalized communities and their experience in the criminal legal system
- Ability to effectively and respectfully communicate, collaborate and connect with people with various backgrounds, identities and experiences
- Ability to work well independently as well as collaboratively within an interdisciplinary team of lawyers and non-lawyers, and external service providers
- Commitment to fierce advocacy, and willingness to strategically challenge authority in defense of the people we represent
- Effective written and verbal advocacy skills
- Knowledge of substance use disorder, domestic violence, parenting, and mental health systems
- Ability to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with external partners and service providers
- Strong analytical skills and capacity to employ non-legal resources while advocating in legal cases
- 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 receive constructive feedback, demonstrate introspection and shift behavior accordingly
- Ability to exercise excellent judgment, discretion, and confidentiality with sensitive matters

Preferred but not required:

- Experience working with and on behalf of parents navigating the family regulation system
- Spanish language proficiency, validated objectively
- Seminar in Field Instruction (SIFI) Certification

Candidates in this position must also be available to work flexible hours, including nights and/or weekends when urgent needs arise.

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 to \$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. 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, non-exempt 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.