THE EFFECTS OF HOLISTIC DEFENSE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES

TRADITIONAL INDIGENT DEFENSE MODEL

Traditionally, public defenders focus on criminal case advocacy. A new model of holistic public defense seeks to resolve cases more effectively and reduce recidivism by also addressing underlying challenges and needs that may lead to criminal activity. It provides an interdisciplinary service that includes a criminal defense lawyer and advocates such as social workers, housing advocates, investigators, and civil attorneys.

HOLISTIC DEFENSE MODEL

KEY TAKEAWAYS

First large-scale evaluation of impacts of holistic representation on conviction, sentencing, and recidivism.

WHY STUDY THE BRONX?

Holistic defense exists side-by-side with traditional defense

Counsel assignment based on rotating court shift, creating a natural experiment

Detailed administrative data covering 590,000 cases from 2000–07 and 2012–14 involving diverse set of crimes and defendants

Holistic defense reduces the likelihood of a custodial sentence by 16% and expected sentence length by 24%, without increasing future crime.

Over study period, holistic defense averted days of custodial punishment

1.1 Million

3,200 fewer people incarcerated each year if all NYC defendants had comparable holistic defense

IS THIS A BIG DEAL?

Taxpayer savings $165 million VS. Holistic defender costs $95 million

BOTTOM LINE

Strengthening indigent defense can help address mass incarceration without compromising public safety

For the full research, visit http://www.law.upenn.edu/live/files/8282-holisticdefensev201