METROPOLITAN
PUBLIC DEFENDER

2025 Annual Report

Courageous, client-centered advocacy.

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Letter from the Executive Director

Every day we are reminded that public defenders and community-based resources are essential in our country and in our state.

Metropolitan Public Defender's lawyers, legal assistants, case managers, investigators, office assistants and other professional non-legal staff work extremely hard every single day to defend and protect our clients' rights and advocate for their success in our communities.

We strive to provide resilient, compassionate and effective representation for every client we have the privilege to represent. We recruit, train and mentor the next generation of public defenders.

We help keep families together. We advocate for children to receive supportive services. Our advocacy leads to innocent people having their charges dismissed or vindicated at trial. Our advocacy keeps people housed and employed.

Pairing legal representation with case management, civil legal support, and wraparound services is the next step. It stabilizes a family, keeps someone housed, keeps a parent connected to their children, and helps break a cycle that too often repeats. Research confirms what we see firsthand: holistic defense reduces jail and prison time and improves long-term client outcomes, without increasing risk to public safety. That evidence is why we prioritize seeking external funding for case managers, civil legal partnerships, and wraparound services. Public defender offices are not only a constitutional guarantee, we are critical infrastructure for public safety and community stability.

On behalf of MPD, I want to thank all of our community partners and supporters that allow us to help people and strengthen our communities. Partnership and collaboration are integral in making progress. Our ability to provide holistic defense services requires your support. To make a contribution visit MPDLaw.com/donate.

This report provides an overview of our work, our role and our results. I am extremely proud of our Team at MPD, and I am grateful, humbled and honored to be a part of this dedicated organization.

With gratitude,

Carl Macpherson
Executive Director

Overview

Metropolitan Public Defender's mission is to provide courageous, client-centered advocacy.

Established as a non-profit law firm in 1971, MPD is the largest single provider of trial-level public defense services in the state of Oregon, with offices in both Multnomah (Portland) and Washington (Hillsboro) counties.

Under contracts with the State of Oregon, through the Oregon Public Defense Commission (OPDC) MPD represents clients in criminal cases ranging from misdemeanors to capital murder, juvenile delinquency and dependency, and mental health and treatment specialty courts. MPD is also dedicated to building a holistic defense model in which MPD is a community-based resource. Through contracts with Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and others, MPD's Community Law Department provides a broad array of civil and immigration legal services to low-income individuals for the purpose of improving outcomes such as long-term stability.

MPD's dedicated, client-centered staff is comprised of over 237 attorneys and support staff including investigators, mitigation specialists, legal assistants, social workers, case managers, office assistants, data integrity specialists, and executive administrators.

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Community Law Department Director

David Utter
Adult Criminal Department Director, Washington County

Megan Wahl
Grants and Development Manager

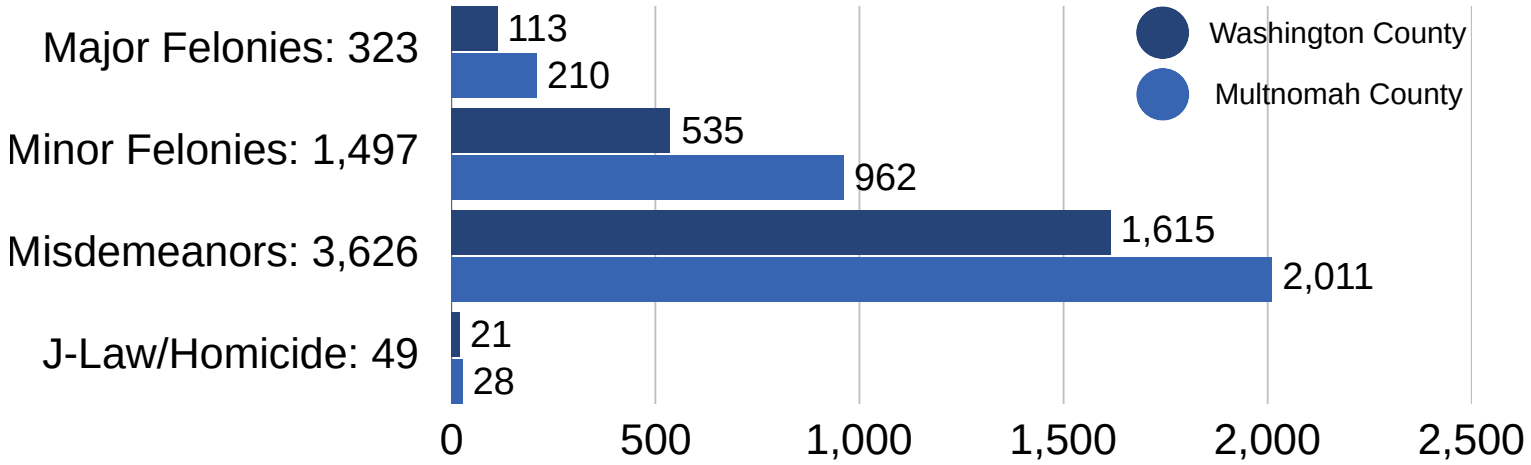
Departments & 2025 Outcomes

In 2025, attorneys and support staff across all MPD departments provided courageous, client-centered advocacy to each client. The following data showcases the organization’s impact across the state of Oregon in 2025.

Adult Criminal Department

Funded primarily by Oregon Public Defense Commission (OPDC), MPD's Adult Criminal Department represents clients in all types of cases including misdemeanors, felonies, and mental health and treatment specialty courts in Multnomah and Washington Counties. The department works to provide zealous representation at every stage of the criminal process, from arraignment through sentencing, advocating for outcomes that account for the full humanity and circumstances of each client.

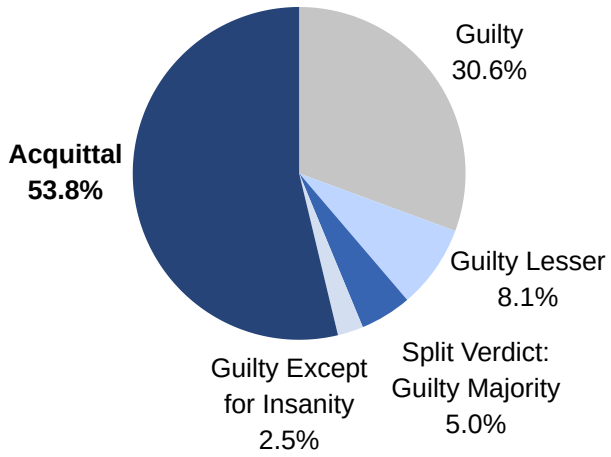
5,495 cases appointed*



5,568 cases closed*

*excludes probation violations and speciality court cases

Trial Outcomes (160)



24%
OF CASES DISMISSED**
(1,322)

**excludes cases dismissed due to plea negotiation

Adult Criminal Department: Student Engagement

MPD hosts law students from across the country as interns and through its Public Defense Practicum in partnership with Lewis & Clark Law School. These programs recognize that expanding access to quality public defense is both a workforce and a justice issue. By welcoming students from diverse backgrounds and institutions, the organization broadens the pipeline of future public defenders while ensuring that more clients receive meaningful representation.

Internship Program

In 2025, MPD hosted **19 interns: 6 Research and Writing Students and 13 Certified Law Students**. These students came from law schools across country including Cornell University, Georgetown University, Lewis & Clark University, New York University, University of California Berkeley, University of Idaho, University of Oregon, Vanderbilt University, and Willamette University.

Public Defense Practicum

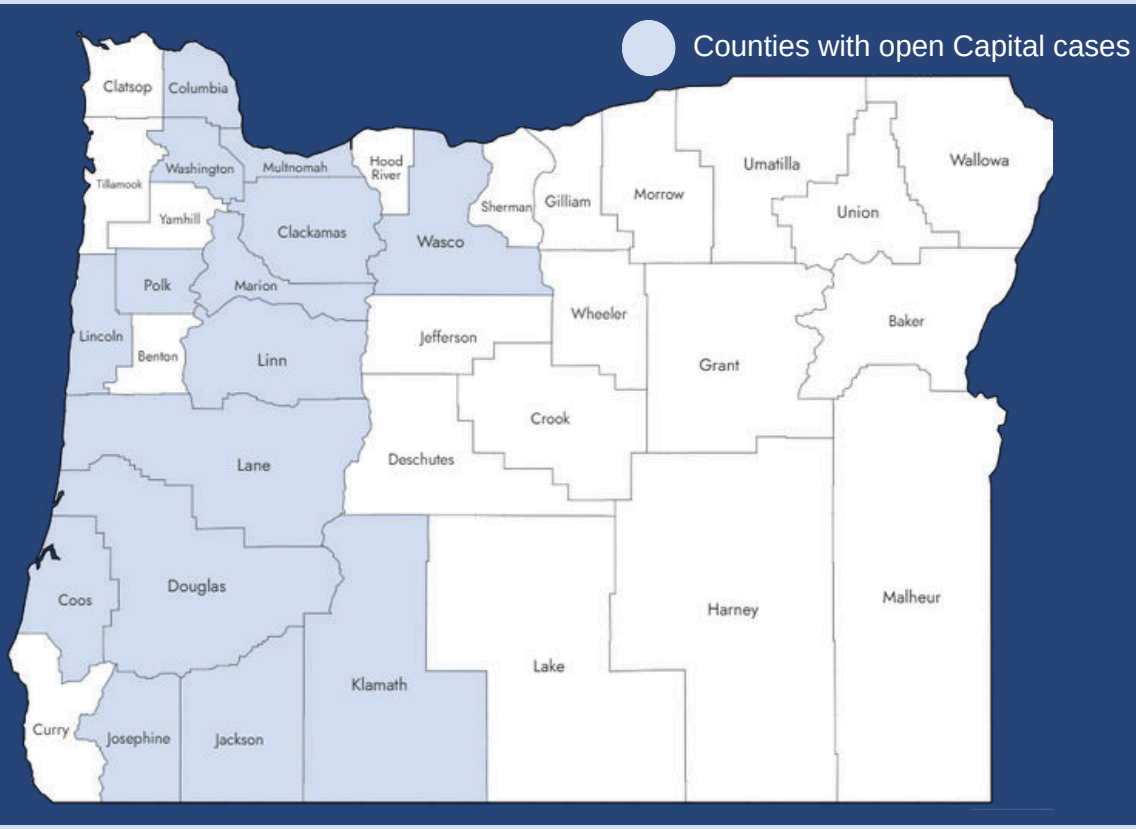
MPD partnered with Lewis & Clark Law School in 2025 to host the Public Defense Practicum, a law school clinic. The program provided **22 students** with academic credit while they gained hands-on experience providing legal services to clients on the unrepresented list under the supervision of licensed attorneys.

22
STUDENTS REPRESENTED
252
CASES OFF THE UNREPRESENTED LIST

Capital Department

MPD's Capital Department, funded through OPDC, focuses exclusively on homicide cases, including aggravated murder and death penalty cases. The dedicated, client-centered team of ten attorneys, five mitigation specialists, two fact investigators, and one team administrator uses unique and creative methods to navigate cases with long timelines. This includes a robust writing practice, producing clear and persuasive motions and narratives to protect clients' rights. The Capital Department is the only team of its kind in the state, producing results that ensure clients' rights are respected and their dignity is preserved.

38 open homicide cases including 2 death penalty-eligible cases

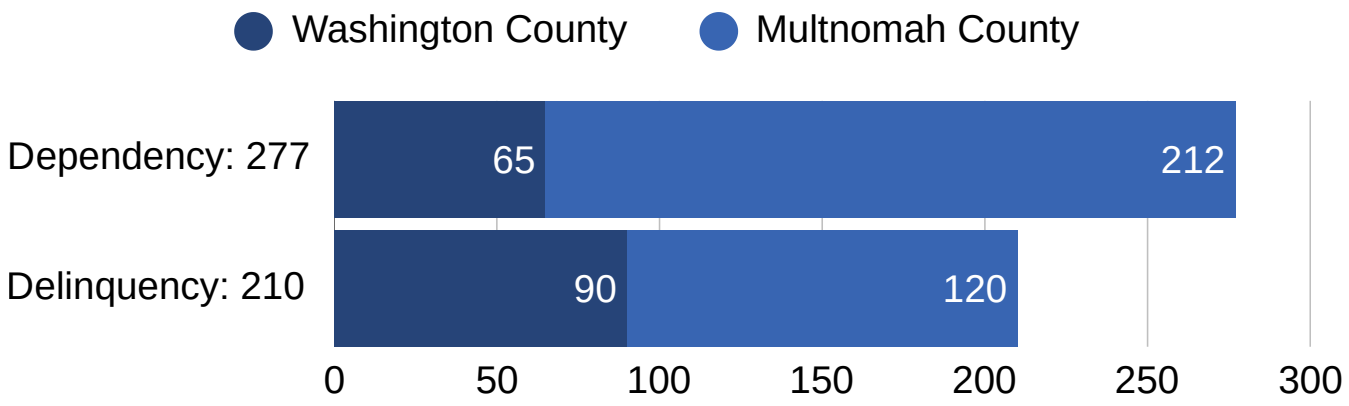


15 Oregon counties

Parent | Child Advocacy Department

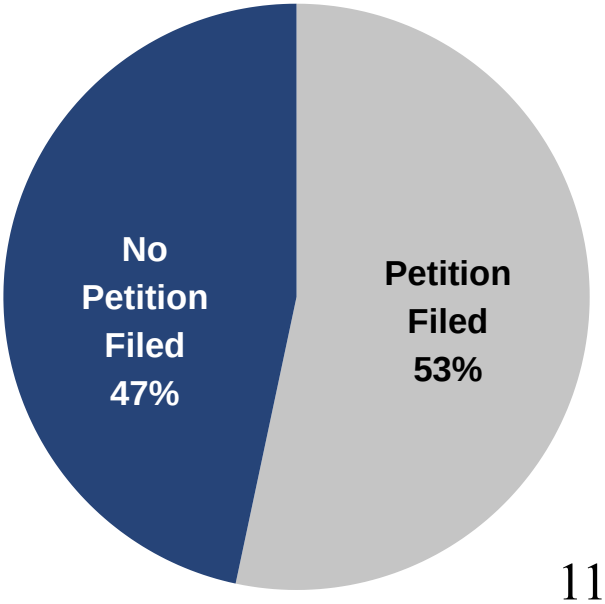
MPD's Multnomah and Washington County Parent | Child Advocacy Departments (PCAD) advocate for parents and children in dependency cases in an effort to keep families together and to limit government and court involvement in families' lives. The teams also defend youth in delinquency cases and advocate for youth who become wards of the court because of delinquent behavior. PCAD is funded by OPDC.

487 juvenile cases closed



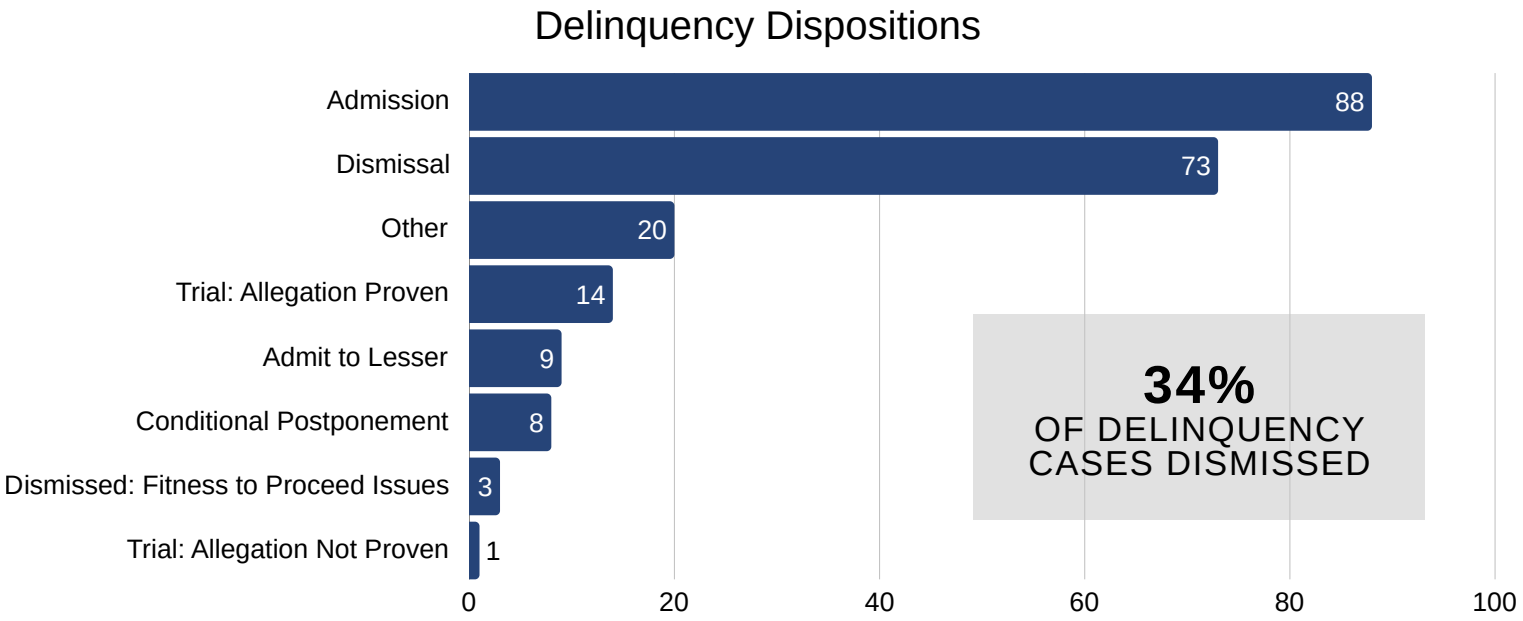
15 juvenile pre-petition cases closed

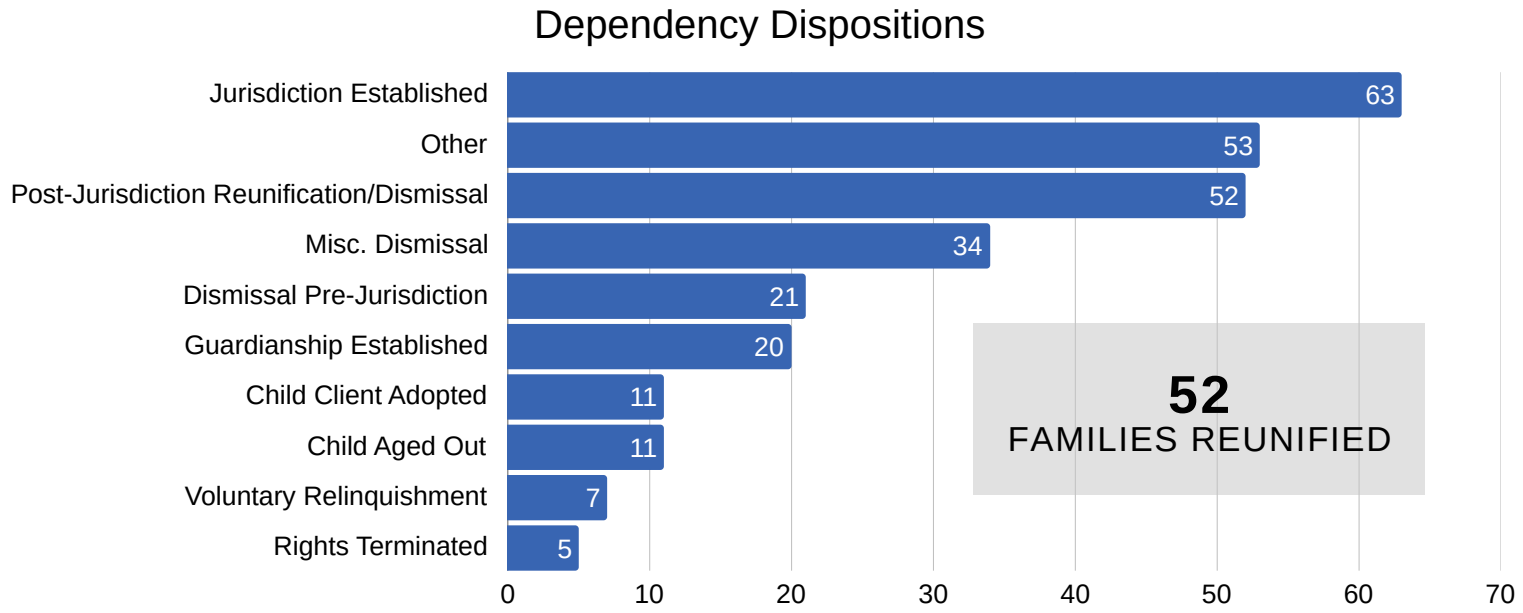
Multnomah County PCAD legal teams work to address underlying challenges faced by families during Child Protective Services investigations through pre-petition representation. This early advocacy helps prevent unnecessary court involvement and supports family preservation where poverty-related issues are often mistaken for neglect, especially for families with limited means that cannot afford representation.



Parent | Child Advocacy Department

The graphs below detail the outcomes of delinquency and dependency cases closed in 2025. In delinquency cases, dispositions reflect the range of resolutions secured for youth clients, including dismissals and other court-ordered outcomes. In dependency cases, dispositions capture the range of results achieved for parent and child clients, including reunification, guardianship, and case dismissals. Together, these outcomes reflect the teams' commitment to minimizing court involvement and achieving the best resolution possible for every client.

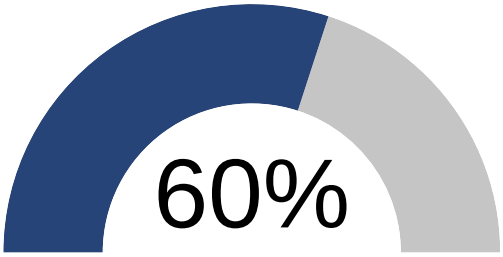




Community Law Department

MPD's Community Law Department provides civil and immigration legal services, focusing on barrier reduction work for people involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the criminal, housing, and/or immigration legal systems. The department takes a holistic approach to representation, recognizing that stable housing, immigration status, and access to employment are often deeply intertwined with a client's involvement in the legal system. The team works to reduce the likelihood of future system involvement and support long-term stability for clients and their families. CLD is primarily funded by Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and a variety of community organizations.

3,304 cases opened for **3,060** clients

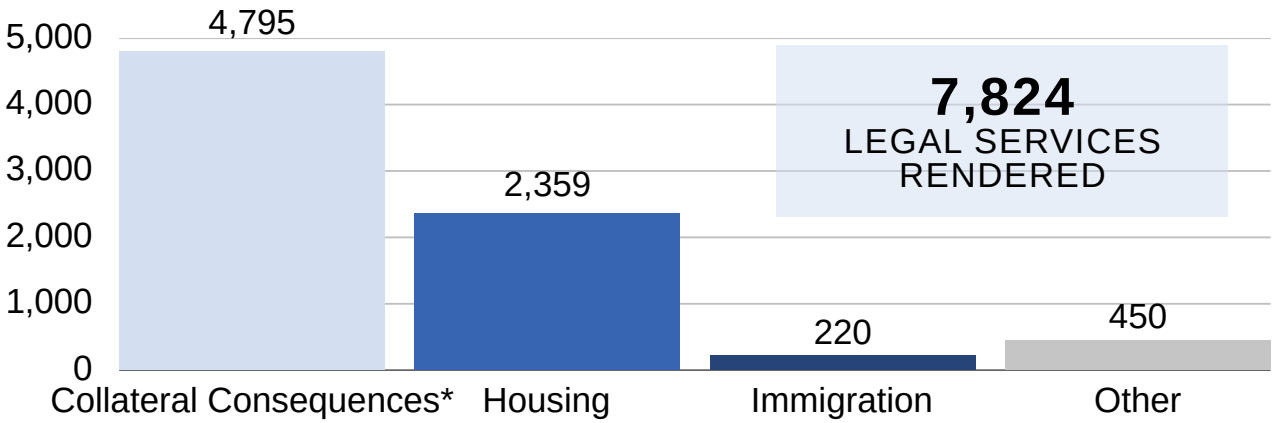


of clients identify as BIPOC

22
FUNDING SOURCES

55
REFERRING COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

$2,894,540.55 in debt waived for clients



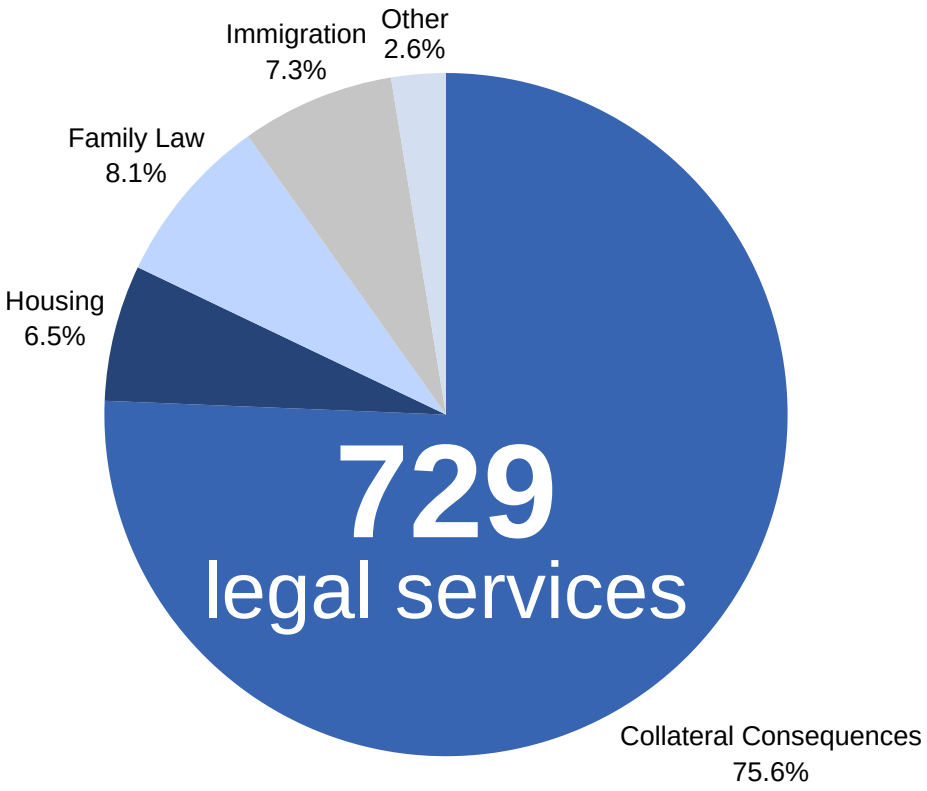
7,824
LEGAL SERVICES RENDERED

*sanctions, restrictions, or disqualifications that attach to a person because of the person's criminal history. E.g., barriers to housing, employment, education, or public assistance

MPD's Holistic Defense Program

In March 2025, MPD launched a program to provide civil and immigration legal services to MPD criminal and dependency clients, seeking to provide holistic defense services that address not only an individual's court-appointed case, but also the collateral consequences of that case and any other civil or immigration legal matters that may impact them. This program is funded directly by MPD. The data below represents the first ten months of this program. Without these services, individuals impacted by the criminal, immigration, delinquency, and dependency legal systems face a suite of barriers, sanctions, and restrictions that would prevent them from securing employment, education, housing, and other necessities for ensuring long-term stability.

344 clients served



$76,869.22 in debt waived for clients as a result of legal services

Legal Support Services

MPD's Legal Support Services teams provide essential assistance to attorneys and the organization as a whole, helping to ensure that all clients receive the highest quality representation possible.

Investigations Team

The Investigations Team supports all trial sections of MPD, including Adult Criminal, Capital, and Juvenile Dependency/Delinquency, by providing thorough and professional investigative services such as locating witnesses, conducting interviews, collecting digital evidence and police records, preparing exhibits for trials, and testifying in court to their findings.

Data Integrity Team

The Data Integrity Team ensures the accuracy, security, and consistency of client records, electronic evidence, and case management systems for all criminal and juvenile cases from arraignment to case closure. The team also reports all caseload information to the Oregon Public Defense Commission on a monthly basis to fulfill contract requirements.

Legal Assistance Team

The Legal Assistance Team provides essential, non-attorney support for all cases including managing discovery, maintaining regular client communication including initial intake interviews, aiding in trial preparation, and assisting with administrative and mitigation services to reduce legal barriers for clients.

Case Management Teams

The Case Management Teams bridge the gap between legal representation and social services to reduce instances of re-arrest by addressing the root cause of involvement with the criminal, juvenile, or housing legal systems.

Case Management Teams

MPD's Case Management teams serve clients across all departments. A key part of MPD's holistic defense efforts, case managers work alongside attorneys at every stage of representation, connecting clients to resources such as housing, mental health treatment, substance use services, and benefits navigation. Their work reflects the organization's commitment to addressing the full scope of a client's needs — not just the legal matter at hand — with the understanding that lasting stability requires support both inside and outside the courtroom.

UNDER A CONTRACT WITH THE CITY OF PORTLAND, A CASE MANAGER WITH THE COMMUNITY LAW DEPARTMENT PROVIDED
59 CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES
TO
54 CLIENTS
OVER SIX MONTHS IN 2025.

WASHINGTON COUNTY CASE MANAGERS TOOK ON
172 CLIENTS
AND PROVIDED OVER
850 SERVICES
IN 2025.

PARENT | CHILD ADVOCACY CASE MANAGERS SERVED
101 CLIENTS
IN 2025, REPRESENTING
38%
OF THE DEPARTMENT'S TOTAL CLIENT POPULATION.

THROUGH THE MULTNOMAH COUNTY JUSTICE REINVESTMENT PROGRAM, CASE MANAGERS CLOSED
115 CASES
IN 2025 WITH
55.7%
OF CLIENTS RELEASED PRE-TRIAL.

CASE MANAGERS FUNDED THROUGH MULTNOMAH COUNTY WORKED ON
387 CASES
WITH
49% OF CLIENTS
RECEIVING INTENSIVE MITIGATION SUPPORT.

2025 Highlights

The following are examples of how MPD staff made an impact across our community in 2025.

MPD Washington County Director, David Utter, **secured a favorable disposition for Logan, a juvenile client** facing up to five years in a youth correctional facility. MPD retained a national expert in juvenile delinquency treatment to work with the youth client, his family, and other supportive adults and developed a success plan that will increase the client's chances for a successful transition to adulthood. As a result of this novel approach to dispositions, the judge allowed MPD's client to move back home where he is now attending school, working as a mechanic, and spending quality time with his family.

Carl Macpherson, MPD's Executive Director, argued in front of the Oregon Supreme Court and was **granted a writ of mandamus** ordering the Washington County Circuit Court to vacate an order requiring MPD to disclose records to the District Attorney regarding cases that its attorneys are handling for its indigent clients. View the opinion here.

MPD piloted a **12-week Investigative Internship for College Students** in 2025 with four students learning to be investigators under the supervision of seasoned staff. The program was modeled after a highly successful program of a similar nature at Public Defender Services for the District of Columbia and will continue in 2026, fostering in a new generation of investigators and introducing undergraduate students to the public defense field.

MPD's holistic defense attorney assisted Susie, an MPD criminal client, by expunging a case that had been dismissed immediately before trial. Within a month of the dismissal the attorney filed for expungement, sent certified copies of the expungement to the client to facilitate future immigration-related motions, and referred Susie for an immigration consultation within the Community Law team. This story showcases the value of **a holistic defense team that can secure dismissal, expunge, and provide immigration support all in-house.**

**clients' identifying information has been removed to protect privacy.*

2025 Highlights

The following are examples of how MPD staff made an impact across our community in 2025.

Through a contract with Multnomah County's Homeless Services Department, a Community Law attorney removed a number of barriers stemming from Jordan's criminal record. Following referral from a community-based organization, the Community Law attorney conducted an analysis that found Jordan owed several thousand dollars from a prior eviction case.

Through zealous advocacy, the attorney was able to settle Jordan's debt, vacate and dismiss the eviction, and expunge the case from his record. The attorney also expunged Jordan's criminal record and filed motions to waive traffic fines that had resulted in a hold on his license. Simultaneously, the attorney helped to appeal a rental application denial and file a modification of parenting time to allow Jordan more time with his children.

After a year of working together, Jordan not only secured permanent housing but experienced full access to his rights to employment, education, and family time.

An MPD case manager was connected with Violet during her incarceration, where they drafted a release plan together. On the day of the release hearing, the case manager presented and explained the plan to the judge, ultimately securing Violet's freedom.

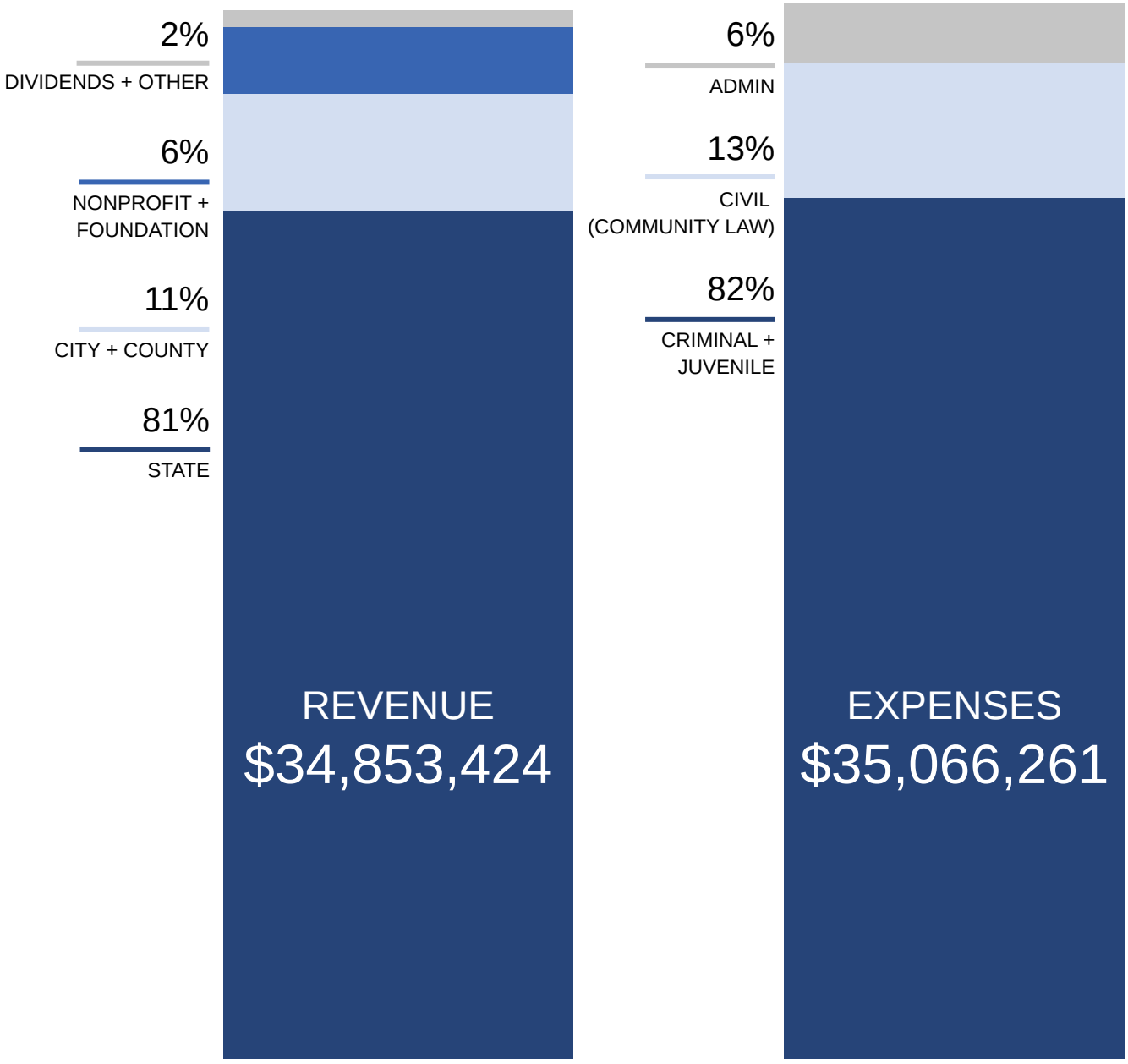
The case manager met Violet at the jail on the morning of her release, providing her with a cell phone to assist her in staying connected to her attorney and other services. Throughout the day, the case manager accompanied Violet to ensure that all conditions of her release were met: securing an ankle monitor and checking into a treatment facility to secure housing.

The case manager could have stopped there - Violet was housed and in treatment - but instead, they continued to follow up with client to ensure she was staying on track and making progress towards her goals. Today, Violet has secured her own residence, maintained her sobriety, connected with Veterans benefits, and sought employment, showcasing **the value of case management support to clients who routinely experience intertwining cycles of poverty and criminalization.**

**clients' identifying information has been removed to protect privacy.*

Financial Snapshot

In calendar year 2025, MPD had a total revenue of $34.8 million and operating expenses of $35 million. MPD's primary source of revenue is state contracts, which support Adult Criminal, Capital, and Parent, Child & Youth legal representation and support services. City, County, Nonprofit, and Foundation revenue sources support primarily civil and immigration legal service provision. MPD's holistic defense work is supported through the organization's investment earnings.



Thank you to our partners and funders.

MPD is proud to provide holistic, client-centered representation and support services to its clients. In 2026, MPD looks to continue to improve and expand its services to better meet community needs.

Get involved in MPD's mission to provide courageous, client-centered advocacy:

DONATE TO SUPPORT HOLISTIC DEFENSE

WORK WITH US

INTERN WITH US

APPLY FOR A FELLOWSHIP

METROPOLITAN PUBLIC DEFENDER

Courageous, client-centered advocacy.

Contact Us

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