

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

March 1, 2013

The Honorable Eric Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Attorney General Holder:

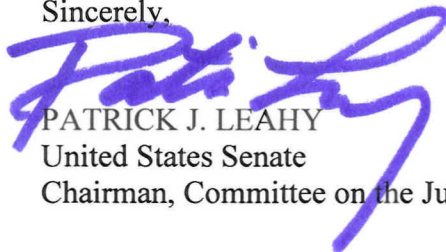
This year we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of *Gideon v. Wainwright* and in doing so affirm a fundamental principle of our democratic society, that no person, regardless of economic status, should face prosecution without the assistance of a lawyer. It is worth celebrating our commitment to the extraordinary idea that in a free society, the government that seeks to convict someone must also assume the cost of providing an effective defense.

The anniversary of *Gideon* is a time to reflect on how far we have come in ensuring equal justice for all Americans. I commend you and the men and women at the Department of Justice who recognize the importance of quality public defense to a fair justice system. I appreciate your hard work and efforts to breathe new life into *Gideon's* promise.

But we must also recognize that, fifty years after this historic decision, too many states still lack adequate programs for providing effective representation, resulting too often in wrongful convictions and miscarriages of justice. The unfortunate fact is that in some parts of the country, it is better to be rich and guilty than poor and innocent because the rich will have competent counsel, but those who have little often find their lives placed in the hands of underpaid court-appointed lawyers who are inexperienced, inept, uninterested, or worse.

As a country, we must do better to protect the rights of all our citizens and provide qualified defense counsel to the poor and disadvantaged. I look forward to continuing to work with you and the Department of Justice to ensure that it does not take another fifty years to deliver on this basic constitutional guarantee.

Sincerely,



PATRICK J. LEAHY
United States Senate
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary