



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TRIAL LAWYERS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Decarceration Initiative Selected as the 2026 Emil Gumpert Award Recipient

\$150,000 grant will support legal representation and release planning services for individuals eligible for sentence review under Maryland Law

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA (June 18, 2026) – The American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL) has selected the Decarceration Initiative, a partnership of the Association for the Public Defender of Maryland (APDM) and the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD), as the 2026 Emil Gumpert Award Recipient. The award, the highest honor conferred by ACTL on a single organization annually, recognizes programs whose principal purpose is to maintain and improve the administration of justice. The Award includes a \$150,000 grant funded by the Foundation of the American College of Trial Lawyers.

“The College and our Foundation are delighted to present the Emil Gumpert Award to the Decarceration Initiative, a partnership of the Association for the Public Defender of Maryland and the Maryland Office of the Public Defender,” said ACTL President John Day. “Their work to support the intensive investigation and litigation required for Second Look Act motions, and their training of pro bono attorneys ensures that more individuals can be represented. This fits squarely within our mission to strengthen the quality of trial advocacy and increase access to justice, and we are proud to support this worthy project.”

The Decarceration Initiative is a public-private partnership between MOPD and APDM to ensure high quality representation and release planning for incarcerated individuals eligible for sentence review under the Juvenile Restoration Act and the Second Look Act. Neither law includes any funding for representation or an explicit right to counsel.

“We are honored to receive the Emil Gumpert Award from the American College of Trial Lawyers, but we are even more excited about what this recognition makes possible. Maryland's prisons still hold people sentenced as young adults decades ago who have spent years demonstrating growth, accountability, and rehabilitation. Second Look reforms created a path for those individuals to return to court, but the law provides neither a right to counsel nor funding for representation. A legal pathway means little if no one is there to help navigate it,” said Natasha M. Dartigue, Maryland State Public Defender.



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Added Alexandra Strubing Paradise, Board Chair, Association for the Public Defender of Maryland, "Our partnership was built to close that gap. We hope this recognition encourages more attorneys to take on this work because meaningful access to justice requires more than an opportunity to be heard. It requires someone to stand beside you and make sure your voice is heard."



About The American College of Trial Lawyers

The American College of Trial Lawyers comprises the best of the trial bar from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico and is widely considered to be the premier professional trial organization in North America. Founded in 1950, the College is an invitation only fellowship. The College thoroughly investigates each nominee for admission and selects only those who have demonstrated the very highest standards of trial advocacy, ethical conduct, integrity, professionalism and collegiality. The College maintains and seeks to improve the standards of trial practice, professionalism, ethics, and the administration of justice through education and public statements on important legal issues relating to its mission. The College strongly supports the independence of the judiciary, trial by jury, respect for the rule of law, access to justice, and fair and just representation of all parties to legal proceedings.

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