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July 23, 2009

**WELCOME to the 2009 Community Oriented Defender Conference (“The COD Conference”).** I am thrilled that you have been able to join us and I am looking forward to two full days of robust conversation about strengthening the COD model and relying on it to improve the lives of clients, families and communities.

At this year’s meeting we will continue our ongoing conversation about confronting unwarranted racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system, following up on last year’s COD conference. With experienced social scientists, we will discuss best ways to collect and use data on racial and ethnic disparities in the system. We will also discuss the distinct concerns of clients from immigrant populations. And, we will have the privilege of hearing from Bryan Stevenson, renowned capital defender and racial justice and human rights champion, whose talk will focus on how public defenders and traditional civil rights advocacy groups can support and inspire each other to action.

We will also spend time at the meeting discussing ways to promote, support and protect community oriented defense work in this time of severe budget shortfalls. First, we will explore the use of “performance measurements” as a tool for persuading policymakers and funders about the value of COD programs. In subsequent sessions, we will focus on using a variety of advocacy strategies to inspire support from criminal justice stakeholders (including the public), and also discuss how defenders can earn a reputation as a community asset by building stronger partnerships with community-based organizations.

Our conference includes a visit to the Bronx Treatment Court, where Judge Laura Safer Espinoza, with her court staff, will describe the particular challenges and accomplishments confronted by the treatment court, which has operated successfully since 1991 on a sharply limited budget.

Throughout the conference, we will have a variety of opportunities to informally network and break bread with COD members from around the country. We will have a working lunch on day one of the conference to allow COD members to share accomplishments and challenges of their COD work over the past year. And, that evening we will gather for a conference-sponsored dinner at Baluchi’s, an Indian restaurant in Soho. On day two, after our visit to the Bronx Drug Treatment Court, we will gather at the Court Deli, rumored to serve the best pastrami in the City.

Our conference will conclude with the crafting of a “statement of principles” for the COD Network for use by all of our offices as a tool to help advance the COD movement, inspire our staff members, and build our capacity to make a difference for clients, families and communities.

Again, I welcome you to the conference and look forward to our continuing the momentum of the COD movement.

Onward and upward,

Melanca Clark  
Director, Community Oriented Defender Program