



Experts Brief Congressional Committee On Indigent Defense System "In Crisis"

Sarah Cwiek (2009-12-14)

DETROIT, MI (Michigan Radio) - A panel of judges, legal experts, and elected officials agree that the nation's system for providing indigent defense counsel is "in crisis."

That panel debated solutions at a U.S. House Judiciary Committee briefing held at Wayne State University on Monday.

Panelists said poor funding and a lack of standards leads to overburdened and inadequate public defenders--and innocent people going to prison.

Justin Amash is the Republican Vice Chair of the Michigan House Subcommittee on Indigent Defense. He believes reforming that system should be a bi-partisan issue.

"The most important duty of government is to protect the rights of its citizens," Amash said. "And if we're going to put all these resources toward putting people in prison, we should at least provide some adequate resources to ensure those people are given proper defense."

Amash is a co-sponsor of the Michigan Public Defense Act, which would ensure minimum standards and adequate state funding. A 2008 National Legal Aid and Defenders Association study described Michigan's indigent defense system as one of the nation's worst. © Copyright 2009, [Michigan Radio](#)