

Maryland Office of the Public Defender & Maryland Carey Law Launch New Innocence Project Clinic

Screening and Panel at Carey Law with Distinguished Guests

Second Innocence Clinic Expands Exoneration Work

Baltimore, Md (September 17, 2025) - Today, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender and Maryland Carey Law formally launched the new MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at Maryland Carey Law. The launch was coupled with a screening of *Sixteen Years*, a documentary about Jeffrey Deskovic, who was wrongfully convicted at 17 and exonerated after 16 years in prison, followed by a panel discussion about the new project and the film.

The expanded partnership builds upon the legacy of the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at UBalt Law, which has been operating since 2008. Over the past 17 years, the UBalt Law clinic has obtained relief for 20 clients — including both sentence reductions and exonerations — all involving individuals who maintained their innocence. Collectively, these men and women served hundreds of years in prison for crimes they did not commit. The clinic's work includes high-profile cases such as Adnan Syed and John Huffington, who received an innocence-based pardon in 2023 after serving 32 years, ten of them on death row.

"Wrongful convictions are preventable tragedies that demand urgent, systematic response. MOPD's establishment of a second Innocence Project Clinic, the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic (MOPD IPC) at Md Carey Law, embodies our fundamental commitment to revolutionary change, and stands as proof that justice delayed need not be denied. Jeffrey Deskovic's story, encompassing sixteen years of wrongful imprisonment, lost youth, broken relationships, and unspeakable trauma for a crime he did not commit, provides an unforgettable human face to systemic failures. The MOPD IPC at Md Carey Law affirms our unwavering dedication to the principle that the criminal legal system's strength lies in its courage to acknowledge error, relentlessly pursue truth, and prevent future harm."

— **Natasha M. Dartigue, Maryland Public Defender**

We are delighted to partner with The Office of the Public Defender to advance the cause of justice. Professor Suter is an experienced, talented practitioner, and I am confident our students will learn a great deal under her tutelage.

— **Renée H. Laurent, Dean of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law**

"I'm honored to share scenes from Sixteen Years at the launch of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender's Innocence Project. This event highlights how art and storytelling can fuel advocacy, spark dialogue, invoke change, and support the vital work of the new Clinic at Maryland Carey Law in fighting wrongful convictions."

— **Jia Rizvi, Filmmaker of Sixteen Years**

"I am sharing my story via the documentary and talk back session at the launch event of the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic because there are innocent people in prison right now in Maryland, just as I was wrongfully imprisoned in New York before exoneration. I hope to inspire donors; pro bono work by legal

professionals; donated services; volunteers; as well as to help raise the profile of this important new organization."

—Jeffrey Deskovic, Attorney, Advocate, and Founder of The Deskovic Foundation

"We are thrilled to share scenes from filmmaker Jia Rizvi's Sixteen Years at the launch of the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at Maryland Carey Law. This documentary, tracing Jeffrey Deskovic's journey from wrongfully convicted teenager to exoneree, attorney, and advocate fighting for the innocent, is a vivid reminder that wrongful convictions are not abstract errors—they are human tragedies. His story compels us to elevate the voices of exonerees and harness the power of narrative in the fight for justice."

—Erica J. Suter, Director of the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at Maryland Carey Law

"I'm blessed to be a part of this celebration, because all the hard work is being done in the Innocence project of Maryland and all over the country. We can change how the law deal with life changing events. My biggest joy to be able to see all the positive work that has been getting done and we will always continue to fight for Innocence and the wrongfully accused."

—Bernard Webster, Baltimore County exoneree

With a clinic at each of Maryland's law schools, twice as many individuals challenging wrongful incarceration will be able to receive dedicated legal assistance, and the number of law students engaged in this work will increase. Law students in both clinics will work on real cases for an entire year, gaining hands-on legal training and advocacy skills that often lead to careers in public defense and criminal justice reform. The expansion of MOPD's innocence work represents more than just legal advocacy but an investment in the integrity of the legal system itself, ensuring that the pursuit of truth remains central to how we administer justice.

The new MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at Maryland Carey Law is led by Erica Suter, a leading post-conviction attorney best known for her work on behalf of Adnan Syed. Suter has served as an assistant public defender and director of the MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at UBalt Law since 2021, succeeding Michele Nethercott, who led the clinic from its founding in 2008.

The MOPD Innocence Project Clinic at UBalt Law clinic is led by Assistant Public Defender Rachel Bennett, who joins as the new director. Prior to taking on her new role, Bennett was a senior attorney at the Amica Center for Immigrant Rights. She was previously an assistant public defender for 11 years, most recently as a felony attorney in Baltimore County. Both clinics have begun their fall semester with a brand new class of MOPD Innocence Project student attorneys.