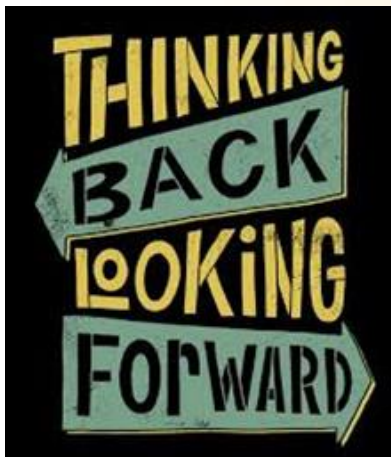




PUBLIC DEFENDER NEWS



Rhonda Schaffer, Director

Wow, 2019 sure flew by! Looking back over the past year, OPD addressed some very significant items.

Communication – According to “wisegeek.com,” organizational communication applies to the interaction between a person and a group, specifically in the workplace.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the communication survey. It was loud and clear that OPD needed to improve in all areas. So, what have we done so far?

- **Directive to Create Communication Feedback Loop** – Information from Management Team meetings and regional office meetings are to be shared by the regional managers with all staff in their office(s). In addition, regional managers are to provide a forum to receive information from staff to share with the Management Team. In this way we’re creating a feedback loop up and down the agency.
- **Microsoft Teams** – Teams is a Microsoft application that allows “teams” to be set up to provide a place for topic-specific chats (in real time), meetings, shared calendars, shared files or videos, and centralized resources (forms, practice documents, etc.), bringing everything together in one spot. Our managers received an overview and brief training on Teams and are actively part of the testing. Currently there are four pilot teams for regional offices and several project-based teams. We expect Teams to be an excellent platform to centralize resources and integrate with our other systems.

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Special points of interest

- Word Tips and Tricks
- Annual Conference Awards
- Holiday Blessings
- Suicide Prevention

Thinking Back, Looking Forward (continued)

- **Operations Dashboards** – Operations Support is also testing Tableau Operations Dashboards with the regional managers. Currently the dashboards provide immediate access to workload and caseload metrics across attorneys, courts and case types, improving managers' ability to make informed decisions in their offices. Although the focus is on regional managers for now, additional dashboard types for other roles within the agency will eventually be developed.

Performance Audit and

Timekeeping- OPD is currently in the middle of a performance audit. This is much different than a financial audit as the auditors will test policies and internal controls to determine the effectiveness

of our business processes. We are working to address the auditors' concerns as they come up, and to stay in front of other issues we know need to be addressed. One issue the auditors focused on recently is our attorney time tracking data and process.

Because time tracking is so important, beginning January 1, 2020 all attorneys are required to enter their case time in JustWare. I know this directive was given in the past, but not all staff are following through. Division administrators, regional managers, and individual employees will be held accountable for staff not completing this requirement. If you have any questions regarding specifics or need training, please contact your regional manager.

Case Weight/Workload – Dan Miller and Peter Ohman will be working with regional staff to develop a working group to review the current case weight/workload system. Dan will chair with a goal of presenting the Management Team with recommendations prior to the end of the fiscal year. Travis Tilleman will let the union know we are beginning work on this issue

Eligibility Determination – The eligibility team continues to try to make the application and

eligibility determination process as efficient as possible but there is still work to do. Filing motions to rescind continues to lag in some regions. **I am requesting that all regional managers respect the process and policy requirements.** OPD policy requires the process to rescind the appointment to move forward if requested financial information is not received. If you have any questions or concerns about eligibility determination, contact Carleen Green or Tyna Wright.



Carleen will be reaching out to regional managers to talk about continued system improvements. She will also be working with the Training Office to include eligibility in upcoming Boot Camp trainings and to develop a webinar for all employees regarding the

importance of the statutory requirements for determining eligibility for public defender services.

Committee/Council News: Peter Ohman has been selected by the Governor to be on the Criminal Justice Oversight Council, Chad Wright is working with the Law and Justice Interim Committee regarding post-conviction relief, and I have been named to the Youth Justice Council.

As an agency we are moving forward with legislative relationships, justice committee engagement, community involvement, system efficiencies, quality data reporting and accountability.

Peter, Dan and Chad recently participated in a leadership training and I was very pleased to hear that Montana has one of the BEST public defender systems in the nation. It takes all of us to be the BEST. Thank you for your dedication and hard work over the last year.

#stayfocused

#opdmtproud

Happy holidays and here's to a successful 2020!

Rhonda

Alisha's Tradition

Nick Aemisegger, Kalispell Regional Deputy Public Defender

The Flathead Beacon recently ran a [story](#) on our own Alisha Backus and her tradition of delivering Christmas cards to everyone in jail.

Alisha started sending cards to the inmates at the Flathead County Jail three years ago, and expanded from there. With help from her co-workers in the Kalispell office, this year nearly 300 of her cards will be delivered to jails in all four counties in Region 1.

The weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are spent adding an inspirational quote to each card. On Christmas Eve, the cards are individually addressed based on the current jail rosters and hand carried to the jails for delivery to the inmates on Christmas morning.

Alisha encourages other OPD offices to adopt her tradition, or to create one of their own. Thanks for caring, Alisha!



Photo by Hunter D'Antuono, Flathead Beacon

OUR MISSION

We provide effective professional legal services with equal access to quality client-centered representation.

OUR VISION

As trained legal professionals we strive to represent our clients in an effective and efficient manner to ensure a more fair and balanced justice system. We are dedicated and committed to improving overall outcomes for our clients and addressing the conditions that led to their involvement with the justice system.



OPD Administrators Attend NAPD Executive Leadership Institute

Dan Miller, Conflict Defender Division Administrator

Peter Ohman, Chad Wright and I had the privilege of attending the National Association for Public Defense Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) in Los Angeles from December 8-11, 2019. The ELI brought together over 100 leaders in public defense from around the country to share ideas relating to the challenges they all face as they strive to deliver quality, client-centered services.

The ELI included plenary sessions featuring a variety of speakers and a wide range of subjects. Among the lecture topics were Client-Centered Leadership, Developing and Sustaining Trust, The Relationship Between Culture and Organizational Values, External Communications, Engaging the Community and The Participatory Defense Model.

ELI attendees were also placed in groups of 8-10 for problem solving sessions where they discussed real life challenges and strategies to deal with the challenges. Small groups included members from all levels of management as well as urban and rural areas. The diversity of the groups truly provided an opportunity to look at the various issues from all angles. Not surprisingly, the greatest challenges faced by the leaders involved caseloads/workloads, time keeping, employee wellness, employee performance measures, and, of course budgets.

The National Association for Public Defense (NAPD) engages all public defense professionals into a clear and focused voice to address the systemic failure to provide the constitutional right to counsel, and to collaborate with diverse partners for solutions that bring meaningful access to justice for poor people.

All OPD employees are members of [NAPD](#) and can access webinars and other training opportunities. For more information, see the NAPD Membership Info Sheet on the [Public Share](#) drive, or contact the Training office.



Don't Fear the Paperless Office!

Theresa Diekhans, Havre Regional Deputy Public Defender

When I first went paperless, I was hesitant and fearful. What would happen if my computer wouldn't connect? What would happen if I didn't have access to Wi-Fi? Where would all my notes go? I like to have a piece of paper I can write on and highlight. I learned quickly that while these were valid concerns, I could handle and address them easily and promptly.



Paperless does not mean paper free. My office just uses less paper. No big bulky file cabinets taking up space. No more files and file boxes piled up for years. No storage fees attached to storing the files. These were positives that I realized quickly when I walked into my office and had so much more space.

So how does paperless work, you ask? It starts with your computer. You want to make sure you have an easily portable, lightweight computer. You also want your own, or the office's own, Wi-Fi that you have Wi-Fi wherever you can get a cellular signal without worrying if a courthouse, office, or conference room you're at has Wi-Fi for you. The last step is to have IT create a VPN, your own virtual private network. Now you're set! Once you log on to your VPN, it's like you're sitting at your desk. Anything you can do on your computer while in your office, you can now do wherever you are: court, a meeting, a conference, without having to use mobile apps.

So how does paperless work, you ask?

Now that you're set up with your equipment, you're ready to start on this new adventure. No more digging through a big bulky paper file or trying to locate that paper file. It is imperative to your paperless success that you and your staff scan everything into JustWare as soon as it comes in. They also need to label the document correctly for easy identification in JustWare. If it's not in JustWare or in your OneDrive, then you do not have it. However, once a document is scanned in and appropriately labeled, it's there for you to open, read, print, email, or do what you need to do with the document no matter where you are at the time. Now for the paper saving... the document that was scanned is now mailed to the client. No more time at the copier making multiple copies.

I know, you're wondering, "But what if I'm in Court and cannot get logged on or connected?" I will not tell you this doesn't happen; it just doesn't happen very often. If I am going into Court for an important hearing, before I leave my office, I open the documents needed and might even print them off. When I am going

Continued next page

HAPPINESS RITUALS

Post-holiday is a great time of year to settle down and focus on some self-care. It might include changes to your diet or exercise program; a journaling, mindfulness, or gratitude practice; or maybe writing haiku. If you need inspiration, have a look at the [Stress Management and Resilience](#) titles from the Montana State Library.

Or, count on neuroscience for some concrete advice on how to be happier.

1. Ask "What am I grateful for?" No answers? Doesn't matter. Just searching helps.
2. Label negative emotions. Give it a name and your brain isn't so bothered by it.
3. Decide. Go for "good enough" instead of "best decision ever made on Earth."
4. Hugs, hugs, hugs. Don't text — touch.

Everything is interconnected. Gratitude improves sleep. Sleep reduces pain. Reduced pain improves your mood. Improved mood reduces anxiety, which improves focus and planning. Focus and planning help with decision making. Decision making further reduces anxiety and improves enjoyment. Enjoyment gives you more to be grateful for, and makes it more likely you'll exercise and be social, which, in turn, will make you happier.

So hug someone you love today. And do not accept little, quick hugs. No, no, no. Tell them your neuroscientist recommended nice long hugs.

--Excerpted from [theweek.com](#).
Read more [here](#).

Don't Fear the Paperless Office! (continued)

to a detention center or a place where I know I cannot hook onto my VPN, I again open the file on my desktop or print off a copy. It just takes a little thought and preparation.

You may ask, well if I'm going to print off a paper copy then why go paperless? First, I have every one of my files handy to me wherever I am: whether in Court, at a meeting, or working at home. Last week I ended up with an impromptu meeting in Chinook with the County Attorney to discuss plea offers, court hearings, and other issues for a multitude of cases. Instead of hauling 10+ paper files, I opened my computer, logged on and there were all my cases. I went to that client's file and had all the information at my fingertips. I have experienced the same when the County Attorney wants a quick discussion about another case after a hearing; I have what I need so we can have a good productive discussion then and there.

Second, as stated above, it is easier for me to find the document, note, or report I'm looking for in my JustWare file than in a paper file. I am not digging through a bunch of paper to find what I need. I open the filing cabinet, go to the correct file, and open it. Fast and easy, with no shuffling or digging while the Judge is waiting for you.

Third, all my notes go right into my client's file. I do this a couple ways. If I am taking notes by hand, I scan them into the file once I get to my office. Or I can open the client's file, go to time tracking and put my notes in right then and there. Now I have my notes when I need them, and they are there for anyone who may be covering for me to see and know the status of the case. There is also the benefit of the date already being in the file so when I need to go back and try to remember when something happened, there it is. Another big plus is that a large part of my JustWare time tracking is being *done* right then. No more going back to the office and trying to remember a day, week or a month later what I did or what cases I worked on.

I am sure there are other concerns out there about going paperless. It is always scary to make a change, and this is a big one. I attest, though, that even with a glitch here and there, I would fight harder going back to an office with only paper files than I did to go paperless. Don't let fear hold you back!

It is easier to find the document, note, or report I'm looking for in JustWare than in a paper file. I open the filing cabinet, go to the correct file, and open it. Fast and easy with no shuffling or digging.

The happiest and most successful people focus on improvement. They love mistakes and flaws, because they see them as opportunities to grow. Learn from these people.

—Blon Lee

Central Services Team Update

Carleen Green, Division Administrator



It's hard to believe the holidays are here. It is amazing how fast time flies by and unfortunately, we get so busy we don't take the time to reach out to others who may be struggling at this time of

year. We don't need to know the details of what our co-workers are struggling with, but we can be sure almost everyone is dealing with something. So, why is it so hard for us to reach out and ask others about their difficulties? Are we afraid of making them feel worse or do we doubt our ability to understand how that person feels?

I am challenging myself to be more aware and to take the time to reach out to people, ask how they are, and really listen. Sometimes I am not the best listener, but I am striving to do better! We all need to know there are others who have had the same types of feelings, struggles and issues we are dealing with and to know someone cares. If we can move past our fears, listen, and make it about them and not us, amazing things can come of it.

Many of us have been affected by the tragedy of suicide. Don't be afraid to ask the question if you think someone might harm themselves. This issue of the newsletter contains information and resources on suicide prevention (see page 11). If we don't educate ourselves, we don't know the signs and we can't help.

Life, the season and the work we do can be very stressful. It's important to find healthy ways to decompress and enjoy life. I hope you are all taking the time to care for yourselves as well as others.

Wishing you all the best in the New Year!



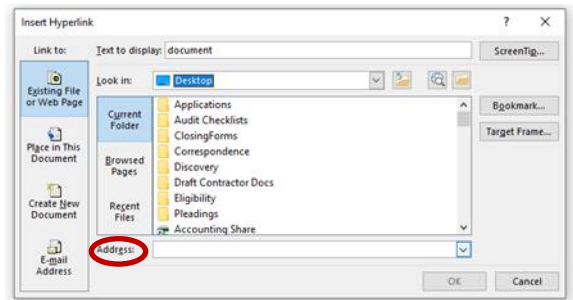
Word Tips and Tricks

INSERTING A HYPERLINK

Open the target page in your browser, click the URL to highlight it, and copy (Control + C). No need to swipe the whole URL.



Highlight one or more words in your document and press Control + K.

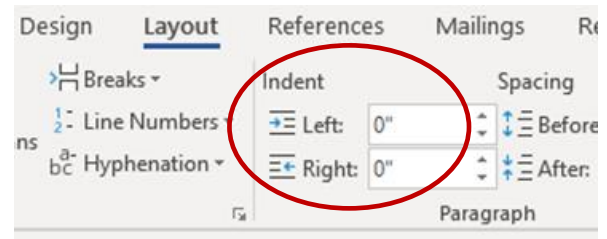


Paste the URL (Control + V) into the address bar and say OK. Voila!

DOUBLE INDENTING A PARAGRAPH

There are multiple ways to double indent paragraphs. Here are two of the easiest.

1. Go to the Layout tab and set Left and Right Indents right there:



OR,

2. If you're familiar with Styles, just find the Quote Style on the ribbon (you might have to scroll), and right click to modify it.

Do you use Styles? Let [Cathy Doyle](#) know if you're Interested in more Styles tips!



Stay Involved During an Appeal

Chad Wright, Appellate Defender Division

Thanks to a recent training opportunity, I got to see Mary Moriarty (one of the wonderful presenters at OPD's annual conference in Butte) speak again. She relayed an experience where she chose not to attend oral argument in the United States Supreme Court even though she was the trial attorney who had teed up the winning issue. *Minnesota v. Dickerson*, 508 U.S. 366 (1993). As a young lawyer,



she made the decision not to attend the oral argument because she felt she had been overlooked during the appellate process. Some public defender offices around the country created a more participatory role between the trial and appeal stages for their lawyers. Montana chose to utilize specialized appeal attorneys. I often field calls where the trial attorney just wants to know what is going on with an appeal. When a conviction, sentence, termination or commitment is reversed, trial attorneys have told me they feel like they are the last to know. To foster more crossover, here are some ways anyone can track an appellate case and utilize the excellent Montana Supreme Court electronic resources:

- E-Filing notices – To track a pending case in real time contact the Clerk of the Montana Supreme Court (444-3858) and request to join the electronic docket as an “Interested Observer.” You will instantly receive notices when anything is filed: motions, orders, briefs, the final opinion, remittitur, etc. You must be a registered e-filer. Here are the directions to register as an attorney: <https://courts.mt.gov/portals/189/efile/instructions/registration.pdf>

- Court Schedules and Filings page: <https://courts.mt.gov/courtlinks>
 - ♦ Central location for specific and general appeal information including the Court's schedule
- Court public dockets – best way to check appeal status
 - ♦ Use Docket Search page first: <https://appecm.mt.gov/PerceptiveJUDDocket/>
 - Provides full docket information: originating court, parties, extensions, etc.
 - The Docket Search page is also a great resource for case information and briefs which the Court has catalogued for the last 40 years.
 - ♦ Use Case Search page second: <https://appecm.mt.gov/PerceptiveJUDSupremeCourt/>
 - Results limited to briefs and opinions.
 - “Recent Decisions” shows Court opinions for the last 30 days.
- Court Daily Orders page: <https://courts.mt.gov/Portals/189/orders/dailyorders.html>
 - ♦ Most current listing of all Court orders, including rulings on extension requests.

You can also contact the Appellate Defender Division. Before assignment, I act as counsel of record. After assignment, it is better to check with the appellate attorney listed on the Court docket.

The lesson Mary imparted from her story is don't let egos get in the way of keeping involved. If you have the time and inclination to track your client's appeal there are plenty of available tools.



Training Docket

Nate McConnell, Training Development Coordinator

As we mark the passing of 2019 to 2020, the Training Office is assessing the work we did this year, adapting best practices and processes we learned along the way, and aspiring to implement a more robust training program in 2020.

Near universal coverage to our attorneys and staff in 2019

For the first time in several years, the Training Office conducted a support staff training. We also held a simultaneous New Public Defender Training with a



modified curriculum. In June, we collaborated with the Western Juvenile Defender Center to bring their annual summit to Montana, which allowed over 40 juvenile defenders to get together. The Annual Conference was expanded to offer over 40 different training sessions, including a full two-day track for investigators; a track for attorneys representing both parents and children in dependency and neglect proceedings; a wellness track; and sessions on litigating mental health issues. We also squeezed in a live-training for our appellate attorneys.

Our webinar presence was not as robust, but we had our biennial legislative update, plus two webinars on recent Montana cases involving major wins in dependent and neglect cases. Earlier this month we hosted a webinar on litigation surrounding the blood vial recall. Despite the slow start, we ended the year strong. Presentation materials for all our 2019 events are located on the [Public Share](#).

Improving processes to increase practice

As part of our assessment of this year, the Training Office is creating improved processes and procedures to allow us to improve the quality and increase the number of our training events, whether in-person or

online, live or recorded. One of the first changes we made was to get pre-approval for continuing legal education credit for all our events. When we send out an announcement for a webinar, you will know the credit has been approved. We're also automating several of our processes to limit administrative time so we can offer more events. Hopefully you won't even notice the changes except in the number and quality of our training events.

We're already running in 2020!

ANNUAL CONFERENCE HEADED TO BILLINGS

In 2020, the Annual Conference will continue to be our marquee event and will be hosted at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center from Wednesday, October 7 to Friday October 9. We took your feedback about the Butte conference to heart and booked a facility where all our people can be under one roof, which is becoming a challenge as we are now over 200 attorneys, investigators, and case managers. We're excited to bring the conference to Billings for the first time since 2012. If you have suggestion for a training topic, track, or speaker, please contact the [Training Office](#).

LIVE WEBINARS

The Training Office will begin offering monthly webinars in January.

- January: *Preserving the Record* (James Reavis, Appellate Defender Division)
- February 13: *Public Defender, Private Communications (Ethics)* (Brent Getty, Training Office)
- March: *Involuntary Commitment Representation* (Michael Trosper, Region 4)

Webinars will be set up at least 6 weeks in advance. If you have an idea for a webinar, or better yet, if you want to volunteer to do a webinar, please contact the [Training Office](#).

LIVE IN-PERSON EVENTS

- April: *New Public Defender Training*, location TBD
- May: *Support Staff Training*, location TBD

The Training Office is excited for the new year. If you have an idea, a question, or a concern, do not hesitate to contact [us](#).

Happy New Year from all of us in the Training Office!

Employee Spotlight

Matt McKittrick, Great Falls Regional Deputy Public Defender

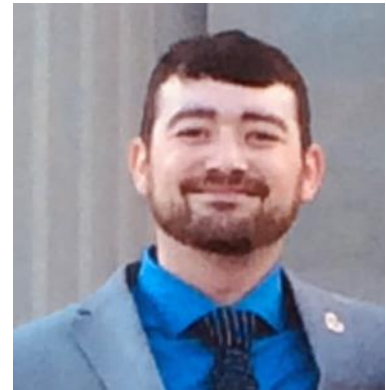


The Office of State Public Defender is fortunate to have Daylon Martin as a member of our organization. Daylon has been an attorney with OPD since September 2017—first with the Havre office, and now working out of the Great Falls office.

In his career with OPD, Daylon has represented clients in Municipal, Justice, and District Courts. His work includes representing clients charged with misdemeanors and felonies, dependency and neglect proceedings, involuntary commitments, guardianships, and juvenile representation. Daylon is in the process of taking on a full time felony case load in Cascade County District Court. While doing that, he has also done an excellent job of mentoring new attorneys in our office to assume his active DN and DJ cases.

Daylon also drafted an MOU with the Cascade County Attorney’s Office to use as a guide for discovery dissemination and dispute resolution in DN cases.

In his personal life, Daylon enjoys rafting, fishing, hunting and spending time with his German Shephard. His work ethic, professionalism, knowledge, and judgment serve our clients well, and demonstrate how we should aspire to practice.



Let’s Stay Upright!

Falling injuries are the most common cause of injury-related emergency room visits, with nearly 8 million cases happening every year. No matter how well snow is cleared from parking lots and sidewalks, there are still going to be some slick spots. Here are some tips to stay on your feet.

Wear shoes or boots with non-slip soles. If you really need those high heels or smooth-soled shoes, carry them and put them on when you arrive. And did you know most OPD offices have Yaktrax cleats available for especially icy days?

Do the Duck Walk. Assume that all wet, dark areas on pavement are slippery. Approach with caution, and duck walk if necessary—extend your arms, bend your knees, place your feet shoulder width apart with toes pointed outward, and take *slow* baby steps.

Avoid vehicle exit/entry problems. Maintain three-point contact with the vehicle and the ground at all times when entering or exiting a vehicle (one hand and two feet or two hands and one foot). Fill a plastic bottle with sand or kitty litter (not salt or ice melt, which take longer to work) and carry it with you to sprinkle on icy ground between the car and your destination.

Pay attention to the task at hand. Cell phones, children, pets, or packages can cause you to become distracted and lose your footing. Be aware that a backpack or other heavy load can impact your balance.

Anticipate a fall. If you do lose your balance, get ready to fall by bending your knees and arms to soften the impact. Protect your head—turn your face to the side if falling forward, tuck your chin to your chest if falling backward. Try to land on muscle (thigh, rear), not bone, and roll with the fall to spread the impact.

While our goal is stay upright, don’t forget to make a report to OPD’s HR office if you are injured on the job, even if you do not receive medical treatment.



STEVE SANFORD

Image from AARP.org

Holiday Blessings

Marsha Parr

After Thanksgiving, a dad from my son's school community (let's call him "Jim") contacted me and asked if I knew of a family in need of a blessing this Holiday Season. I know a family that certainly fits the bill—a hardworking, blue-collar family with four kids, they had not only been hit hard financially this past year, but emotionally as well. I told Jim about the "Mary and Joe Rudolph" family (a pseudonym), with no expectations, but the hope that maybe some holiday good could come their way.



Jim contacted me a couple days later to let me know the Rudolfs had been chosen as part of ten families across five states to be the recipients of a gift from an anonymous third party. I was again excited and hopeful the gift would be something to brighten their spirits through the holidays. Jim didn't know the Rudolfs, so he asked me to arrange a meeting with them so he could pass along the gift.

Arrangements were made, but on the day we were to meet, Mary Rudolph contacted me and asked to cancel the meeting. They had just learned that Joe was going to be laid off for the next few months and they were honestly in no position to see anyone. When I relayed this to Jim, he pressed me to keep the meeting, and told me about the gift being blessed upon this family: a check for \$10,000. After I pulled myself together, I insisted the Rudolfs let us come to their home that evening. They reluctantly agreed, not knowing why Jim and I were coming.

When we arrived, Mary and Joe were welcoming but apprehensive as I had basically forced them to accept me and a stranger into their home without much information or clarity. As Jim started to introduce himself to the family, I looked around at their home. A doublewide trailer they are VERY proud to be buying, everything neat as a pin despite six people and a variety of pets living there, every single space on the walls covered with kid stuff: countless framed school photos, honor roll awards, attendance awards, good community awards, ribbons, baby pictures and a smattering of their children's art. I could see by Mary and Joe's body language that they were concerned and confused about the visit, and frankly just tired. Jim handed them their card containing what I later learned was a check for \$12,000, increased after hearing that Joe was being laid off. Watching the flood of emotions wash over them was overwhelming. First confusion, disbelief, and then realization. You could see the struggle of this past year releasing from them both.

Very few of us will have the privilege of seeing miracles firsthand in our lifetime. This was mine. A family so desperately in need and an anonymous person they will never meet being put together through one random phone call and a single question, "Do you know a family in need?"

I will be eternally grateful that I could be a very, very small part of such an amazing, life-changing blessing for this family. My Gram always used to say "Marsha Lynn, remember that good things happen to good people." She was right.

Marsha

Did You Know?

NAPD Membership

All OPD employees now have membership in the [National Association for Public Defense](#). Contact the Training office for additional information.

2019 MCA

The new MCA is available [online](#), and code books are now ready to purchase on the Legislative Services [website](#). The searchable electronic folio version for your desktop is also available to download from the OPD Software Center (link on your desktop).

Old MCAs Available Online

Looking for a previous version of the Montana Code Annotated? Maybe even one older than OPD? The Montana Legislature has versions going back to 1995 on their [website](#).

Interpreter Services

The State of Montana has a contract with CTS Language Link for interpreter services. OPD employees can access the information on OPD's [intranet](#) site.



Outstanding Employees Honored at Annual Conference

More than a dozen OPD employees were presented with awards at the 2019 Annual Conference in Butte.

Jim Reintsma, Commitment to Clients

Alex Jacobi, Commitment to Public Defense

Morgan Smith, Excellence in Criminal Advocacy

Tom Sly, Investigator of the Year

Liam Gallagher, Public Defender of the Year

Matt Claus, Perseverance

Breana LeCount, Professional Integrity

Alex Pyle, Excellence in Appellate Advocacy

Kelli Sather, Excellence in Civil Advocacy

Sam Martin, Rookie of the Year

April Hoell, Dan Minnis, Clark Ramsay and Brian Haynes, Billings Muni Court Team of the Year

Congratulations, and thank you all for your dedication to public defense.



Liam Gallagher, 2019 Public Defender of the Year

Depression is Treatable. Suicide is Preventable.

Montana remains among the states with the highest suicide rate in the country—more than twice the national average in 2017. Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the US, and the sixth leading cause of death in Montana, giving many Montanans firsthand experience as suicide survivors.

Our challenges are many—we’re sparsely populated with few mental health providers, we have a strong gun culture, high rates of alcohol consumption, and a “cowboy up” mentality. In addition, long dark winters and high altitude have been linked to depression. How do we contend with this statewide health crisis?

One of the best ways to help prevent suicide is to get involved. If you are concerned about a friend or coworker, listen carefully. Let them talk about their feelings and don’t be afraid to mention suicide. If they are suicidal, take them seriously. Don’t ask “why” questions that might make a person defensive. Ask if they have a plan, and be prepared to listen in a non-judgmental way. Never agree to keep a secret and never leave a suicidal person alone. Here are some [examples](#) of how to have these difficult conversations. Finally, take the person to someone who can help, or call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255), or text MT to 741 741, or call 911.

For more information, you can view the State of Montana’s [suicide prevention training](#), check out the myriad resources on the DPHHS [website](#), or contact the Employee Assistance Program at 444-1345, or eap@mt.gov.

Three Steps to Saving a Life

1. Ask the Question
2. Provide hope
3. Take them directly to help

