



# Proposed Minimum Standards – Set 1

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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND  
REGULATORY AFFAIRS – FEBRUARY 2017

Michigan Indigent Defense Commission

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# Minimum Standards for Appointed Counsel under the MIDC Act

## Standard 1 Education and Training of Defense Counsel

The MIDC Act requires adherence to the principle that “[d]efense counsel is required to attend continuing legal education relevant to counsel’s indigent defense clients.” MCL 780.991(2)(e). The United States Supreme Court has held that the constitutional right to counsel guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment includes the right to the effective assistance of counsel. The mere presence of a lawyer at a trial “is not enough to satisfy the constitutional command.” *Strickland v Washington*, 466 US 668, 685; 104 S Ct 2052, 2063; 80 L Ed 2d 674 (1984). Further, the Ninth Principle of The American Bar Association’s Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System provides that a public defense system, in order to provide effective assistance of counsel, must ensure that “Defense counsel is provided with and required to attend continuing legal education.”

The MIDC proposed a minimum standard for the education and training of defense counsel. The version conditionally approved by the Court and submitted by the MIDC is as follows:

**A. Knowledge of the law.** Counsel shall have reasonable knowledge of substantive Michigan and federal law, constitutional law, criminal law, criminal procedure, rules of evidence, ethical rules and local practices. Counsel has a continuing obligation to have reasonable knowledge of the changes and developments in the law. “Reasonable knowledge” as used in this standard means knowledge of which a lawyer competent under MRPC 1.1 would be aware.

**B. Knowledge of scientific evidence and applicable defenses.** Counsel shall have reasonable knowledge of the forensic and scientific issues that can arise in a criminal case, the legal issues concerning defenses to a crime, and be reasonably able to effectively litigate those issues.

**C. Knowledge of technology.** Counsel shall be reasonably able to use office technology commonly used in the legal community, and technology used within the applicable court system. Counsel shall be reasonably able to thoroughly review materials that are provided in an electronic format.

**D. Continuing education.** Counsel shall annually complete continuing legal education courses relevant to the representation of the criminally accused. Counsel shall participate in skills training and educational programs in order to maintain and enhance overall preparation, oral and written advocacy, and litigation and negotiation skills. Lawyers can discharge this obligation for annual continuing legal education by attending local trainings or statewide conferences. Attorneys with fewer than two years of experience practicing criminal defense in Michigan shall participate in one basic skills acquisition class. All attorneys shall annually complete at least twelve hours of continuing legal education. Training shall be funded through compliance plans submitted by the local delivery system or other mechanism that does not place a financial burden on assigned counsel. The MIDC shall collect or direct the collection of data regarding the number of hours of continuing legal education offered to and attended by assigned counsel, shall analyze the quality of the training, and shall ensure that the effectiveness of the training be measurable and validated. A report regarding these data shall be submitted to the Court annually by April 1 for the previous calendar year.

*Comment:*

*The minimum of twelve hours of training represents typical national and some local county requirements, and is accessible in existing programs offered statewide.*

## **Standard 2 Initial Interview**

The MIDC Act requires adherence to the principle that “[d]efense counsel is provided sufficient time and a space where attorney-client confidentiality is safeguarded for meetings with defense counsel’s client.” MCL 780.991(2)(a). United States Supreme Court precedent and American Bar Association Principles recognize that the “lack of time for adequate preparation and the lack of privacy for attorney-client consultation” can preclude “any lawyer from providing effective advice.” See *United States v Morris*, 470 F3d 596, 602 (CA 6, 2006) (citing *United States v Cronin*, 466 US 648; 104 S Ct 2039; 80 L Ed 2d 657 (1984)). Further, the Fourth Principle of The American Bar Association’s Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System provides that a public defense system, in order to provide effective assistance of counsel, must ensure that “Defense counsel is provided sufficient time and a confidential space within which to meet with the client.”

The MIDC proposed a minimum standard for the initial client interview. The version conditionally approved by the Court and submitted by the MIDC is as follows:

**A. Timing and Purpose of the Interview:** Counsel shall conduct a client interview as soon as practicable after appointment to represent the defendant in order to obtain information necessary to provide quality representation at the early stages of the case and to provide the client with information concerning counsel’s representation and the case proceedings. The purpose of the initial interview is to: (1) establish the best possible relationship with the indigent client; (2) review charges; (3) determine whether a motion for pretrial release is appropriate; (4) determine the need to start-up any immediate investigations; (5) determine any immediate mental or physical health needs or need for foreign language interpreter assistance; and (6) advise that clients should not discuss the circumstances of the arrest or allegations with cellmates, law enforcement, family or anybody else without counsel present. Counsel shall conduct subsequent client interviews as needed. Following appointment, counsel shall conduct the initial interview with the client sufficiently before any subsequent court proceeding so as to be prepared for that proceeding. When a client is in local custody, counsel shall conduct an initial client intake interview within three business days after appointment. When a client is not in custody, counsel shall promptly deliver an introductory communication so that the client may follow-up and schedule a meeting. If confidential videoconference facilities are made available for trial attorneys, visits should at least be scheduled within three business days. If an indigent defendant is in the custody of the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) or detained in a different county from where the defendant is charged, counsel should arrange for a confidential client visit in advance of the first pretrial hearing.

**B. Setting of the interview:** All client interviews shall be conducted in a private and confidential setting to the extent reasonably possible. The indigent criminal defense system shall ensure the necessary accommodations for private discussions between counsel and clients in courthouses, lock-ups, jails, prisons, detention centers, and other places where clients must confer with counsel.

**C. Preparation:** Counsel shall obtain copies of any relevant documents which are available, including copies of any charging documents, recommendations and reports concerning pretrial release, and discoverable material.

#### **D. Client status:**

1. Counsel shall evaluate whether the client is capable of participation in his/her representation, understands the charges, and has some basic comprehension of criminal procedure. Counsel has a continuing responsibility to evaluate, and, where appropriate, raise as an issue for the court the client's capacity to stand trial or to enter a plea pursuant to MCR 6.125 and MCL 330.2020. Counsel shall take appropriate action where there are any questions about a client's competency.
2. Where counsel is unable to communicate with the client because of language or communication differences, counsel shall take whatever steps are necessary to fully explain the proceedings in a language or form of communication the client can understand. Steps include seeking the appointment of an interpreter to assist with pretrial preparation, interviews, investigation, and in- court proceedings, or other accommodations pursuant to MCR. 1.111.

#### *Comments:*

1. *The MIDC recognizes that counsel cannot ensure communication prior to court with an out of custody indigent client. For out of custody clients the standard instead requires the attorney to notify clients of the need for a prompt interview.*
2. *The requirement of a meeting within three business days is typical of national requirements (Florida Performance Guidelines suggest 72 hours; in Massachusetts, the Committee for Public Counsel Services Assigned Counsel Manual requires a visit within three business days for custody clients; the Supreme Court of Nevada issued a performance standard requiring an initial interview within 72 hours of appointment).*
3. *Certain indigent criminal defense systems only pay counsel for limited client visits in custody. In these jurisdictions, compliance plans with this standard will need to guarantee funding for multiple visits.*
4. *In certain systems, counsel is not immediately notified of appointments to represent indigent clients. In these jurisdictions, compliance plans must resolve any issues with the failure to provide timely notification.*
5. *Some jurisdictions do not have discovery prepared for trial counsel within three business days. The MIDC expects that this minimum standard can be used to push for local reforms to immediately provide electronic discovery upon appointment.*
6. *The three-business-day requirement is specific to clients in "local" custody because some indigent defendants are in the custody of the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) while other defendants might be in jail in a different county from the charging offense.*
7. *In jurisdictions with a large client population in MDOC custody or rural jurisdictions requiring distant client visits compliance plans might provide for visits through confidential videoconferencing.*
8. *Systems without adequate settings for confidential visits for either in-custody or out-ofcustody clients will need compliance plans to create this space.*
9. *This standard only involves the initial client interview. Other confidential client interviews are expected, as necessary.*

### **Standard 3 Investigation and Experts**

The United States Supreme Court has held: (1) "counsel has a duty to make reasonable investigations or to make a reasonable decision that makes particular investigations unnecessary." *Strickland v Washington*, 466 US 668, 691; 104 S Ct 2052, 2066; 80 L Ed 2d 674 (1984); and (2) "[c]riminal cases will arise where the only reasonable and available defense strategy requires consultation with experts or introduction of expert evidence, whether pretrial, at trial, or both." *Harrington v Richter*, 562 US 86, 106; 131 S Ct 770, 788; 178 L Ed 2d 624 (2011). The MIDC Act authorizes "minimum standards for the local delivery of indigent criminal defense services providing effective assistance of counsel..." MCL 780.985(3).

The MIDC proposed a minimum standard for investigations and experts. The version conditionally approved by the Court and submitted by the MIDC is as follows:

- A. Counsel shall conduct an independent investigation of the charges and offense as promptly as practicable.
- B. When appropriate, counsel shall request funds to retain an investigator to assist with the client's defense. Reasonable requests must be funded.
- C. Counsel shall request the assistance of experts where it is reasonably necessary to prepare the defense and rebut the prosecution's case. Reasonable requests must be funded as required by law.
- D. Counsel has a continuing duty to evaluate a case for appropriate defense investigations or expert assistance. Decisions to limit investigation must take into consideration the client's wishes and the client's version of the facts.

#### *Comments:*

- 1. The MIDC recognizes that counsel can make "a reasonable decision that makes particular investigations unnecessary" after a review of discovery and an interview with the client. Decisions to limit investigation should not be made merely on the basis of discovery or representations made by the government.*
- 2. The MIDC emphasizes that a client's professed desire to plead guilty does not automatically alleviate the need to investigate.*
- 3. Counsel should inform clients of the progress of investigations pertaining to their case.*
- 4. Expected increased costs from an increase in investigations and expert use will be tackled in compliance plans.*

### **Standard 4 Counsel at First Appearance and other Critical Stages**

The MIDC Act provides that standards shall be established to effectuate the following: (1) "All adults, except those appearing with retained counsel or those who have made an informed waiver of counsel, shall be screened for eligibility under this act, and counsel shall be assigned as soon as an indigent adult is determined to be eligible for indigent criminal defense services." MCL 780.991(1)(c); (2) "A preliminary inquiry regarding, and the determination of, the indigency of any defendant shall be made by the court not later than at the defendant's first appearance in court. MCL 780.991(3)(a); (3) ...counsel continuously represents and

personally appears at every court appearance throughout the pendency of the case.” MCL 780.991(2)(d)(emphasis added).

The MIDC proposed a minimum standard on counsel at first appearance and other critical stages. The version conditionally approved by the Court and submitted by the MIDC is as follows:

A. Counsel shall be assigned as soon as the defendant is determined to be eligible for indigent criminal defense services. The indigency determination shall be made and counsel appointed to provide assistance to the defendant as soon as the defendant’s liberty is subject to restriction by a magistrate or judge. Representation includes but is not limited to the arraignment on the complaint and warrant. Where there are case-specific interim bonds set, counsel at arraignment shall be prepared to make a de novo argument regarding an appropriate bond regardless of and, indeed, in the face of, an interim bond set prior to arraignment which has no precedential effect on bond-setting at arraignment. Nothing in this paragraph shall prevent the defendant from making an informed waiver of counsel.

B. All persons determined to be eligible for indigent criminal defense services shall also have appointed counsel at pre-trial proceedings, during plea negotiations and at other critical stages, whether in court or out of court.

*Comments:*

*1. The proposed standard addresses an indigent defendant’s right to counsel at every court appearance and is not addressing vertical representation (same defense counsel continuously represents) which will be the subject of a future minimum standard as described in MCL 780.991(2)(d).*

*2. One of several potential compliance plans for this standard may use an on-duty arraignment attorney to represent defendants. This appointment may be a limited appearance for arraignment only with subsequent appointment of different counsel for future proceedings. In this manner, actual indigency determinations may still be made during the arraignment.*

*3. Among other duties, lawyering at first appearance should consist of an explanation of the criminal justice process, advice on what topics to discuss with the judge, a focus on the potential for pre-trial release, or achieving dispositions outside of the criminal justice system via civil infraction or dismissal. In rare cases, if an attorney has reviewed discovery and has an opportunity for a confidential discussion with her client, there may be a criminal disposition at arraignment.*

*4. The MIDC anticipates creative and cost-effective compliance plans like representation and advocacy through videoconferencing or consolidated arraignment schedules between multiple district courts.*

*5. This standard does not preclude the setting of interim bonds to allow for the release of in-custody defendants. The intent is not to lengthen any jail stays. The MIDC believes that case-specific interim bond determinations should be discouraged. Formal arraignment and the formal setting of bond should be done as quickly as possible.*

*6. Any waiver of the right to counsel must be both unequivocal and knowing, intelligent, and voluntary. People v Anderson, 398 Mich 361; 247 NW2d 857 (1976). The uncounseled defendant must have sufficient information to make an intelligent choice dependent on a range of case-specific factors, including his education or sophistication, the complexity or easily grasped nature of the charge, and the stage of the proceeding.*