2019 Board of Director’s Election

We must receive this form no later than Monday June 5, 2019 at 5pm. This form may be emailed to pdcstaff@pdc.in.gov or mailed to our office at: 309 West Washington Street, Suite 401, Indianapolis, IN 46204. If using regular postal mail, please ensure plenty of time for delivery. Mail-in ballots received after close of business on June 5, 2019 will not be counted. You must be a current IPDC member in order to be eligible to vote.

Voter Information

In order to ensure election integrity, we ask for this information to make sure you are eligible to vote and have not previously voted in this current election.

First Name: ___________________________ Last Name: ___________________________
Attorney ID Number: ______-____________________
Email: ____________________________________________

Are you currently an IPDC member? (circle one)    YES    NO

Please select up to five (5) candidates.

Candidate information contained in following pages.

Julia Stevens
Mark Nicholson
Chris Shema
Robert Hill
Jennifer Sturges
Ashley Spolarich
Julia Stevens  
Marion County Public Defender's Office

As a board member, I would represent the interests of all public defenders in decision making and advocacy. It is my hope that my work on the board would bring attention to the profound skills and passion of Indiana’s public defenders and to advocate for their interests.

I am a graduate of Marian University from which I earned a Bachelor's in Art History. After kicking around the city for a few years, I knew there was more to do with my life than what I was doing. I began law school at The University of Dayton and graduated in 2013 with the Pro Bono Commitment to Community award.

I knew from the day I applied to law school that I was going in order to serve the underserved of my community. I opened Stevens Law Office, LLC in 2015. My mission was to provide reasonably priced legal services to those who could not otherwise afford an attorney. For almost a year, I worked diligently in the breakfast nook of my kitchen trying to help people in anyway I could. It was not, as you might imagine, the easiest way to pay the rent. I was hired by the Marion County Public Defender Agency in the Child in Need of Services and Termination of Parental Rights Division in March of 2016 and from the moment I walked in the door, I knew it was home. I was proud to have been selected to work with so many brilliant attorneys and to be able to spend my days advocating for the most vulnerable in our community.

The position of a public defender is more than a job for me; it is my calling, my life’s work. The mission we serve under is a way of life. To truly believe in our clients and to truly work for the justice they deserve impacts every aspect of my life. As the only parent to my young daughter, my work has guided me in parenting decisions and helped me realize the lessons I want my daughter to know as grows. Living in the community that I serve, my work has guided me to be a better, more empathetic member of that community.

I have spent the last three years in the CHINS/TPR division litigating and advocating and working in the trenches. I believe that with that experience I am able to supply input and special advocacy for public defenders all over the state and particularly those working in juvenile law.
My name is Mark Nicholson and I have been an attorney since 2009. Prior to law school, I was a law clerk at the American Civil Liberties Union in Indiana. While in law school, I worked full-time as a law clerk and bailiff for Marion County Superior Court 2 (civil). In my second year of law school, I was hired at the Indiana State Public Defender's Office and worked there as a law clerk, then as a Deputy State Public Defender.

In 2011, I was hired at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. It was there that I gained valuable trial experience. I was an Assistant Supervisor of the Misdemeanor Division at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. I supervised and trained attorneys and support staff.

In 2018, I started my own practice and currently have a contract as a Deputy Public Defender in Hendricks County's major felony division.

I have attended various IPDC training workshops, including TPI. I was elected to the IPDC board in 2016. Currently I serve on several different committees for IPDC. I am the Chairperson of the Publications and Technology Committee. Also, I was the Board Secretary and now I am the Vice Chairperson of the Board.

I have a desire to help serve our indigent population, especially because I was indigent and received the services of a public defender. I would like to continue to serve on the IPDC Board because I know the training and experience, I have can be used to help with the improvement of indigent services in Indiana.

I believe it is important for attorneys to have actual hands-on training. Information-based training is important; however, the public defenders should be given the hands-on, skill-based training to reinforce and retain the information they have received. This has the potential to increase the quality of criminal defense throughout Indiana and I want to continue to help ensure that is a focus.

Additionally, it is important that public defenders are adequately compensated for their work and there are resources available to help assist them. I will continue to work helping to remind and encourage people that the work you do is invaluable and there should be funds available for you to do your job effectively and financial compensation for your services.

I am willing to listen to people on ways to improve indigent services throughout Indiana and the IPDC. I wish to continue to serve on the IPDC Board to help improve indigent services by listening and learning to what public defenders say they need to help them help their clients.
Chris Shema
Shema Law Firm

I hope to remain on IPDC’s Board of Directors to continue fighting for the underdogs and the downtrodden in the criminal justice system, including not just the people we represent, but also the men and women who fight to protect them. To paraphrase an early mentor, the “justice” system is really the “just us” system. Practically no one speaks on our behalf to the Legislature, the Public Defender Commission or the Supreme Court. Indeed, the Commission believes having one of us on its Board is an inherent conflict of interests. We are bastards barred from the dinner table. I want to change that reality.

Class struggle is in my DNA. I am the grandson of refugees, descended from people who struggled just to survive during the Great Depression. My grandfather mined coal near Shickshinny PA, in a town since hauled away. He died coughing up his lungs, just before my father’s birth. Seventeen years later, to escape life in the coal mines, my father joined the US Navy. He served with distinction for twenty years, seeing combat in WWII and Korea, before retiring shortly after my birth. To his dying day, he taught the values of good work, fair dealing and respect for everyone, regardless of their station in life.

Thanks to him and my mother, I became our family’s first college graduate and then was able to complete law school at William & Mary. Implicit in my parents’ support was the understanding that in return I would remember my origins, never judge a person on wealth or social position and try to make the world a better place. I can honestly say that I have tried to keep my part of that bargain.

Sometimes, in the dark moments that come with this line of work, I wonder if what I do really matters; but then someone will stop and thank me for helping them out of a jam. Sometimes, they’ll introduce their family, tell me how well their children are doing and refresh my belief that our work can make this a better world. That belief not only keeps me going as a PD but motivates me to continue serving on our Board. In truth, Board service is often frustrating; this past year has been particularly challenging. But I believe we have made a difference and I’ve been honored to be part of it.

Four years ago, I thought my perspective as a frontline PD would give needed voice to our membership. During my tenure I’ve advocated for increased compensation, decreased caseloads and structural changes to protect PDs from arbitrary or vindictive reprisals for doing their jobs. I think it is ridiculous and insulting that police officers, and fire fighters have statutory job protection, but we do not. I advocated these positions before the Sixth Amendment Task Force, various Supreme Court Justices and to key members of the Legislature.

I wish I could report more success. While it appears that we will not be successful in achieving our Legislative goals this session, the seeds have been planted and I hope some progress made. On a more positive note, I believe IPDC is doing a much better job with state-wide outreach, as we are providing far more regional training and local case reviews than four years ago. I believe IPDC is moving in the right direction. I’d like to continue with that effort and pledge to represent your interest to the best of my ability, if given the opportunity. Thank you.
My name is Bob Hill, I have been a Public Defender since 1983. I have represented indigent clients at all levels including Juvenile, Misdemeanor and Felony courts. I have successfully represented 25 individuals threatened with, or actually charged with the Death Penalty. I have participated in the Council’s Death Penalty Seminar in both planning and as a presenter. I have been an organizer and trainer at our Trial Practice Institute. I have trained Public Defenders in Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, Colorado, South Carolina, Louisiana, Michigan, Arizona and Texas. I have been active in the Board’s Training Programs both as a Presenter and Planner.

I am the Chief Public Defender for Marion County. Our office has more than 200 Full and Part-Time lawyers defending cases at every level. I am currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Indiana Public Defender Council, having previously served as Chairperson.

As a board member, I would like to pursue four issues.

The first issue is that we should strive to restore our training to its previous stature by continuing more regional training. Our training in the last couple of years has improved a great deal. Training is the number one priority for the Council. I would like to try to make training Free to all fulltime public defenders and at reduced cost to all part-time PD’s. It is important is that we give true meaning to the concept of parity between the Public Defenders and Prosecutors.

The board should strive to obtain nothing less than equal pay, equal budgets and equal access to the justice system. We should not treat ourselves as second class. The concept of substantially equivalent has been removed from not only the Public Defender Commission standards, but from our thought process.

My third issue is that I think the Public Defender Council should work to obtain more funding for the Public Defender Council as well as the Commission.

We should strive to have 100% reimbursement for JD and TPR/Chins cases. I have worked hard to obtain reimbursement for misdemeanors and have worked to obtain a solution to the appellate issues that have been pushed this legislative session.
Jennifer Sturges graduated from IU-McKinney in May 2013 and was admitted to the Indiana Bar in October 2013. She works for the law firm of Rolfes, Garvey, Walker & Robbins located in Greensburg, Indiana.

She accepted her first off-contract PD appointment out of Franklin County that same year and became a contract part-time PD for Decatur County in 2014. She worked the Decatur Co. felony contract until September 2017, when she changed to the juvenile delinquency contract. She continues to serve as the contract PD for JD cases in Decatur County, as well as taking PD felony & misdemeanor conflict appointments in Franklin and Rush Counties.

She was elected to the IPDC Board of Directors for the first time in June of 2017, and has enjoyed participating in the juvenile defense project. If re-elected to the Board, she will continue to serve as a voice for public defense attorneys practicing in smaller rural communities as well as those focusing on juvenile defense. She tries to remain active on Defendnet and encourage other PD’s to take advantage of the training and resources that IPDC can offer – especially for those attorneys that do not have the support of a local PD office.

One of her proudest accomplishments was helping to start Speranza House, a women’s recovery residence located in Greensburg, which opened its doors to its first residents in October 2018.

In addition to serving as Board President for Speranza, Inc., she is also President of the Board of Directors for Legal Aid District Eleven (pro bono district serving Bartholomew, Decatur, Jackson, Jennings, Johnson, Rush, and Shelby Counties). Her other areas of practice include estate, property, and elder law.
Ashley Spolarich  
Tippecanoe County Public Defender's Office

My I have dedicated my career to indigent defense. I obtained my law degree from Indiana University Maurer School of Law in 2011, where I was the leader of the Public Interest Law Foundation. After graduation, I accepted a job at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. There, I worked my way from misdemeanor court to major felony. In 2014, I won the Emery Award, an award given to one attorney per year for their commitment to indigent defense at the Agency.

In December 2016, I transitioned my practice to the Tippecanoe County Public Defender Office. This experience in two jurisdictions, plus my residence in Montgomery County, provides me with an understanding of the challenges facing areas with different populations and varying methods of providing indigent defense.

In 2017, I was elected to serve on the Board of Directors for the Indiana Public Defender Council, and it has been my honor to serve these past two years. For better or worse, the Sixth Amendment Center’s report on the state of indigent defense in Indiana summarized the difficult problems and practical limitations that we currently face. I want to continue being part of the team that works through those challenges in order to best serve our clients.

First, I will work to engage public defenders all over Indiana with the legislative process. I had the honor of testifying in favor of HB 1006 regarding the changes in drug laws in 2014, A comprehensive criminal code revision. These changes have been under attack ever since they went into effect. I was recently appointed to be the Chair of the Policy and Liaison Committee. My goal is to increase statewide involvement in the legislative process, seeing as each jurisdiction has unique needs that must be met in order for their clients to receive the best possible representation. What is important for Marion County may not be the same as Tippecanoe County or Montgomery County.

Second, I want to ensure that we continue increasing the amount of training we provide statewide. IPDC, spearheaded by Diane Black, has steadily increased outreach and training opportunities, traveling to counties all over the State. These training sessions provide our lawyers with reasonably priced opportunities to learn, to collaborate with other attorneys from across the State, and to receive necessary CLE credits at a reasonable cost.

My goal in running for re-election to the Board of Directors is to listen to the needs of our public defenders all over the State of Indiana and be responsive to your issues. Thank you for your time.