

RACHEL BENNETT

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

University of Baltimore, School of Law, MOPD Innocence Project Clinic Baltimore, MD, April 2025 - Present

Director, Innocence Project Clinic

- Supervise law students in representing clients who have maintained their innocence in claims challenge their wrongful convictions in Maryland state courts.
- Teach Innocence Project Clinic seminar in which students explore the systemic factors and causes leading to wrongful conviction and build lawyering skills including client interviewing, investigation, legal writing, and oral advocacy.
- Represent clients in DNA petitions, post conviction proceedings or writs of actual innocence.
- Legislative advocacy to promote criminal justice reform aimed at remedying systemic failures that have led to wrongful conviction in Maryland.

Amica Center for Immigrant Rights, Washington, D.C., March 2024 - Present

Senior Attorney, Detained Adult Program and National Qualified Representative Program

- Represent detained adults in removal proceedings before the Immigration Court.
- Serve as a court-appointed Qualified Representative for noncitizens found incompetent to represent themselves in removal proceedings. Present expert testimony of psychologists and social workers.
- Represent noncitizens serving sentences in Maryland Department of Correction and Federal Bureau of Prisons placed in removal proceedings through the Institutional Hearing Program.
- Serve as a member of the Appeals Squad. Mentor attorneys litigating appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals. Evaluate claims for Petitions for Review to the Fourth Circuit.
- Research and present country conditions evidence and expert testimony, concerning countries including Cambodia, Guatemala, and El Salvador.
- Represent clients in Individual Hearings, including preparing clients for direct and cross examination, obtain witness declarations and supporting evidence, file pre-hearing brief and supporting evidence.
- Motion practice in removal proceedings including, motion to suppress evidence obtained in violation of Fourth Amendment, and motions for procedural safeguards for clients found incompetent.

Maryland Office of the Public Defender, March 2013-March 2024

Circuit Court Division, District 8, Baltimore County (2/2020 - 3/2024)

Assistant Public Defender; Senior Attorney (9/2023 - 3/2024)

- Represented clients in felony cases. Manage caseload of 50 to 70 felony cases. Represent clients in trials, plea agreements and sentencing. Investigate cases, subpoena records, interview witnesses.
- Represent clients in bail review hearing, probation revocation hearings, and preliminary hearings.
- Litigate pretrial motions including, unlawful search and seizure, *Miranda* violations, involuntary statements, disclosure of police misconduct files, discovery of psychiatric and child welfare records, competency to stand trial, exclusion of unreliable forensic evidence, and pretrial detention.
- Consult with expert witnesses to prepare reports and/or present testimony, including emergency room physician, pediatric neurologist, biomechanical engineer, arson expert, forensic psychologists and psychiatrists, social workers, and life sentencing data expert.
- Serve as first chair in life cases leading a team of a district court attorney, social worker, investigator and law clerk.
- Supervise student law clerks and participate in training program.

Post Conviction Defenders, (3/2018 - 2/2020), *Assistant Public Defender*

- Litigate post-conviction claims statewide, including investigating claims, interviewing clients, drafting petitions, and representing clients at hearings. Represent clients in motions for modification and

resentencing hearings.

- Litigate constitutional challenges to life sentences for juvenile offenders.

District 1, Baltimore City, Felony Division (9/2016 – 2/2018); Misdemeanor Jury Trial (9/2014 - 9/2016)

- Represent clients in jury trials, pre-trial motions hearings, and plea negotiations. Independently represented clients in over twenty jury trials. Litigated motions to suppress evidence, pre-trial detention, speedy trial violations, discovery violations, and motions to disclose police misconduct records.

District Court Attorney, District 1, Baltimore City (3/2013 – 9/2014)

- Represented clients at initial trial date in misdemeanor and criminal traffic cases, including conducting bench trials, suppression hearings, bail review hearings, and plea negotiations. Managed caseload of 30 to 50 cases per week.

Bronx Defenders, New York, NY, September 2012-January 2012, *Bridge Fellow*

Researched and drafted pre-trial motions. Observed and assisted attorneys with legal research during jury trials.

Death Penalty Clinic, Berkeley, CA, August 2010-May 2011, January 2012-May 2012

Researched and drafted pre-trial challenge to unreliable forensic arson evidence. Drafted direct appeal brief in capital case in Georgia challenging racial discrimination in jury panel. Participated in extensive pre-trial investigation in capital arson case. Interviewed jurors to develop post-conviction claims.

San Francisco Public Defender's Office, San Francisco, CA, May 2011-August 2011, *Law Clerk, Felony Unit*

Drafted and argued motions and conducted legal research. Prepared cross-examination for preliminary hearings.

East Bay Community Law Center, Berkeley, CA, June 2010-August 2010, *Law Clerk, Income Support Unit*

Policy advocacy challenging restrictions on reproductive rights. Represented clients in administrative hearings.

South Brooklyn Legal Services, Brooklyn, NY, September 2007-June 2009

Paralegal, Employment Law Unit and Re-entry Employment Project

Represented clients at administrative hearings for unemployment benefits. Drafted appeals of hearing decisions. Assisted in litigation regarding employment law claims. Coordinated legal intakes at community organizations.

Project Renewal, Next Step, New York, NY, September 2006-August 2007, *AVODAH fellow*

Provided resume preparation and job retention support to individuals with a history of incarceration or substance abuse. Facilitated job readiness and financial literacy workshops.

PRESENTATIONS:

“Anticipating Immigration Consequences of Post Conviction Proceedings,” Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Post Conviction Defenders, July 21, 2025.

“Padilla in 2025: Defense Counsel’s Obligations in a Shifting Immigration Landscape,” Maryland State Bar Association Legal Summit, June 6, 2025.

“Mental Health in Immigration Proceedings: Understanding the Legal Framework for Mental Health Evaluations in Removal Hearings,” Institute of Law Psychiatry and Public Policy, University of Virginia, December 10, 2024.

“After Dinner Politics, Criminal Justice Reform,” North Baltimore County Democratic Club, February 19, 2021.

“Effective Negotiations in District Court,” Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Gideon’s Promise New Attorney Training.

“Strategies for Working with Body Camera Footage,” Maryland Office of the Public Defender, District 8, Baltimore County, Summer Law Clerk Training.

EDUCATION:

University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, California, Juris Doctor, May 2012

Honors: Best Brief; Elizabeth and Charles Tigar Public Interest Scholarship

Activities: LL.M. Legal Research and Writing Program, Teaching Assistant, August 2011 – May 2012

Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project, Case Supervisor, August 2009 – May 2012

Oberlin College, Ohio, Bachelor of Arts, May 2006

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa; Clyde Holbrook Memorial Prize

Activities: Community-Based Writing Program; Students United for Reproductive Freedom, Chairperson

BAR ADMISSION:

Maryland State Bar, Court of Appeals of Maryland, Admitted December 2013

New York State Bar, First Judicial Department, Admitted February 2013

LANGUAGES: Spanish proficiency