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MEDIA CONTACT

Miriam Krinsky

krinskym@krinsky.la

818-416-5218

FJP Statement on Biden-Harris Administration’s Access to Justice Announcement

[Fair and Just Prosecution](#) Executive Director Miriam Krinsky issued the following statement in response to today’s [Presidential Memorandum](#) from the Biden-Harris administration [reinstating the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable](#) and instructing the Department of Justice to restore and expand its Access to Justice function. In 2010, the Obama administration launched the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)’s Office for Access to Justice (ATJ), with the goal of helping the justice system efficiently deliver outcomes that are fair and accessible to all, irrespective of wealth, race or status. Unfortunately, the office was closed by the Trump administration in 2018. Today’s Presidential Memorandum instructed the DOJ to prepare a “plan to expand its access-to-justice function, including the organizational placement of this function within the Department,” within 120 days. The White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable will similarly fortify access to counsel, convene federal agencies and play a vital role in responding to crises in the civil and criminal legal systems created by this past year’s pandemic.

“I applaud the Biden-Harris administration for taking this critical step toward promoting access to justice for all. Reestablishing the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (LAIR) – and also what we hope will be the prompt reestablishing and fortifying of the Access to Justice office (ATJ) – are important and meaningful strides toward decriminalizing poverty, protecting the rights of the most vulnerable Americans and creating civil and criminal legal systems that communities can trust. We join with organizations that have called for the reestablishment of the ATJ with adequate funding, staffing and clout to advance the mission of improving access to justice in the criminal, civil and immigration legal systems.

The ATJ office provided a vital service and led courts across the country toward greater equity by issuing guidance, promoting interagency collaboration and spurring reform. ATJ also represented the United States in international forums and promoted equal access to justice around the globe. The absence of the ATJ office under the prior administration was sorely felt, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, as millions of Americans faced civil and criminal justice crises in the form of escalating domestic and elder abuse, housing instability, debt collection, insufficient access to benefits and social services and the deadly spread of COVID-19 behind bars.

Equal justice under the law, regardless of wealth or status, is a core principle of our American democracy, and the reestablishment of the LAIR and ATJ and lifting up access to justice issues within both DOJ and the White House is an important step towards ensuring that our justice system lives up to that lofty goal.

I hope that the Department of Justice will swiftly release a comprehensive plan for restoring the ATJ office and expanding its work. I also urge the administration to ensure that key positions – including leadership of ATJ and the Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention – are [swiftly filled](#) with individuals who bring diverse perspectives, expertise and a deep commitment to reform. I look forward to working alongside these new leaders and the inspiring individuals at the helm of DOJ – as well as community and advocacy leaders who are fighting every day for a more fair and equitable legal system – as we all seek to hasten that transformation.”

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Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP's work, visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).