

## **Expanding Impact: Criminal Defense Unit Takes on Felony Cases, Advances Immigration Advocacy, and Promotes Evidence-Based Reform**

On July 1, 2025, the Criminal Defense Unit began handling all C felony cases in the City of Buffalo as part of the expansion plan laid out by County Executive Mark Polancarz. Six internal staff attorneys were recently promoted to handle these complex cases. In addition, the CDU is actively recruiting additional staff attorneys, social workers, supervisors and investigators to join our team.

On June 12, 2025 Wedade Abdallah, presented at the ILS ACP Summit in Albany, New York. Wedade was part of a panel of RIAC attorneys who explained the legal obligations of counsel to obtain immigration advice for non-U.S. born clients. After the presentation, Wedade participated in a breakout session with ACP administrators from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial Districts, to help them establish office protocols for identifying non-citizen clients and ensuring that assigned counsel contacts the RIAC for advice.

Last month, Lauren Siminski, LMSW attended the NATCON25 conference in Philadelphia, PA with our partners from Endeavor Health Services. NATCON is the largest conference in mental health and substance use care. She and our partners presented on "Bridging the Gap: A CCBHC and Legal Aid Partnership," discussing our training program to promote evidence-based interventions, harm reduction principles, and person-centered care in treatment courts.