“Stories from the Front Line”: Jonathan Rapping Examines Public Defense in Today’s Civil Rights Struggle

Gideon’s Promise founder Jonathan Rapping visits Seattle University to discuss public defense and today’s civil rights struggle.



Jonathan Rapping, founder of Gideon's Promise, will be visiting Seattle University in October to talk about "21st Century Defense: Stories from the Front Line of Today's Civil Rights Struggle".

SEATTLE, WA, UNITED STATES, September 14, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Nationally recognized criminal justice innovator Jonathan Rapping will present “21st Century Public Defense: Stories from the Front Line of Today’s Civil Rights Struggle” at Seattle University on Oct. 8.

Presented as part of Seattle University School of Law’s Dean’s Luminaries in Law Lecture and Conversation Series, the program will feature Rapping in conversation with the law school's Associate Professor Paul Holland about Rapping’s work recruiting, developing, and sustaining public defenders committed to equal justice.

The free event will take place from 5 to 6 p.m. PDT in the LeRoux Conference Room, Student Center Room 160, at Seattle University, 901 12th Ave. It is open to the public, and registration is required.

Rapping founded Gideon’s Promise, a nonprofit organization that works to transform the criminal legal system by building a movement of public defenders who provide equal justice for marginalized communities. He served as the organization’s CEO from 2022 to 2024 and remains a member of its board of directors.

His appearance will offer students, faculty members, legal professionals, and community members an opportunity to hear about his national work supporting public defenders and fostering a justice-centered culture within public defense.

The conversation comes at a consequential time for public defense in Washington. The state is implementing new public defender caseload standards adopted by the Washington Supreme Court in June 2025, with a 10-year implementation period that began Jan. 1, 2026. Four lawsuits also are addressing the funding and adequacy of public defense services in the state.

“The College of Arts and Sciences is proud to partner with the School of Law in bringing Jon to campus for this important conversation,” said Monica J. Casper, Dean of Seattle University’s College of Arts and Sciences. “Advocacy for equal justice and the common good are ethics that we teach in the classroom every day, and I’m thrilled that someone of Jon’s stature is coming to campus to share his experience.”

Gideon’s Promise has trained and supported more than 1,500 public defenders and works with systems and individuals across 27 states. Its programs support public defenders throughout their careers, including new attorneys, supervisors, chief defenders, trainers and law students.

“Jon is a quintessential person for others,” said Paul Holland, Associate Dean for Experiential Learning and Associate Professor at Seattle University School of Law. “He saw how draining and unsustainable life as a public defender was for so many people doing this essential work and what that meant for their clients. He decided it was intolerable and he would not simply call this out, he would build, in community, a genuinely compelling alternative. I am sure our students and anyone interested in justice will find inspiration in what he has to say to us.”

Rapping is a Professor of Law and Director of the Criminal Justice Certificate Program at Atlanta’s John Marshall Law School, a visiting Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and Faculty Director of the Center for Criminal Justice Innovation.

His work with public defenders inspired the HBO documentary “Gideon’s Army.” His honors include a MacArthur Fellowship, and he is the author of “Gideon’s Promise: A Public Defender Movement to Transform Criminal Justice,” published by Beacon Press in 2020.

The event is a collaboration among Seattle University School of Law’s Defender Clinic and Seattle University’s College of Arts and Sciences. The law school’s Defender Initiative is a partnering sponsor.

About the Dean’s Luminaries in Law Series

The Dean’s Luminaries in Law Lecture and Conversation Series brings nationally and internationally prominent leaders from law practice, the judiciary, government and the corporate world to Seattle University School of Law to share ideas about the future of law and the legal profession.

About the Defender Initiative

Seattle University School of Law's Defender Initiative is part of the Center for Civil Rights and Critical Justice. The initiative works to improve the provision of public defense services in Washington and nationally through research, advocacy and education.

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