Twitter Thread by Scott Hechinger



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Every single public defender. Every single day.

> Raise your hand if you\u2019ve lost a case despite having the law, facts, quality lawyering, and justice on your side.
>
> — Jon Feinberg (@JonFeinberg) February 13, 2021

Bail arguments, motions, oral arguments, hearings. Judges don't know, follow, or care about the law. Prosecutors are willing to take advantage of it. And mandatory minimums, withheld evidence, & pretrial detention coerces people to plead before trial. When theres a jury. A shot.

But defenders still fight. And still win. Most times wins aren't "Justice." It's power of repetition of argument in front of same judges. Introducing those in power to the people they oppress. Not just a RAP sheet or words on a page. Defenders make it harder to be brutal & cruel.

I worked as a public defender at an office as well resourced as any in the country. Social workers, team of investigators, a reentry team, support staff, specialist attorneys in immigration, housing, education, family. Relatively low caseloads (80-100). And yet still injustice.

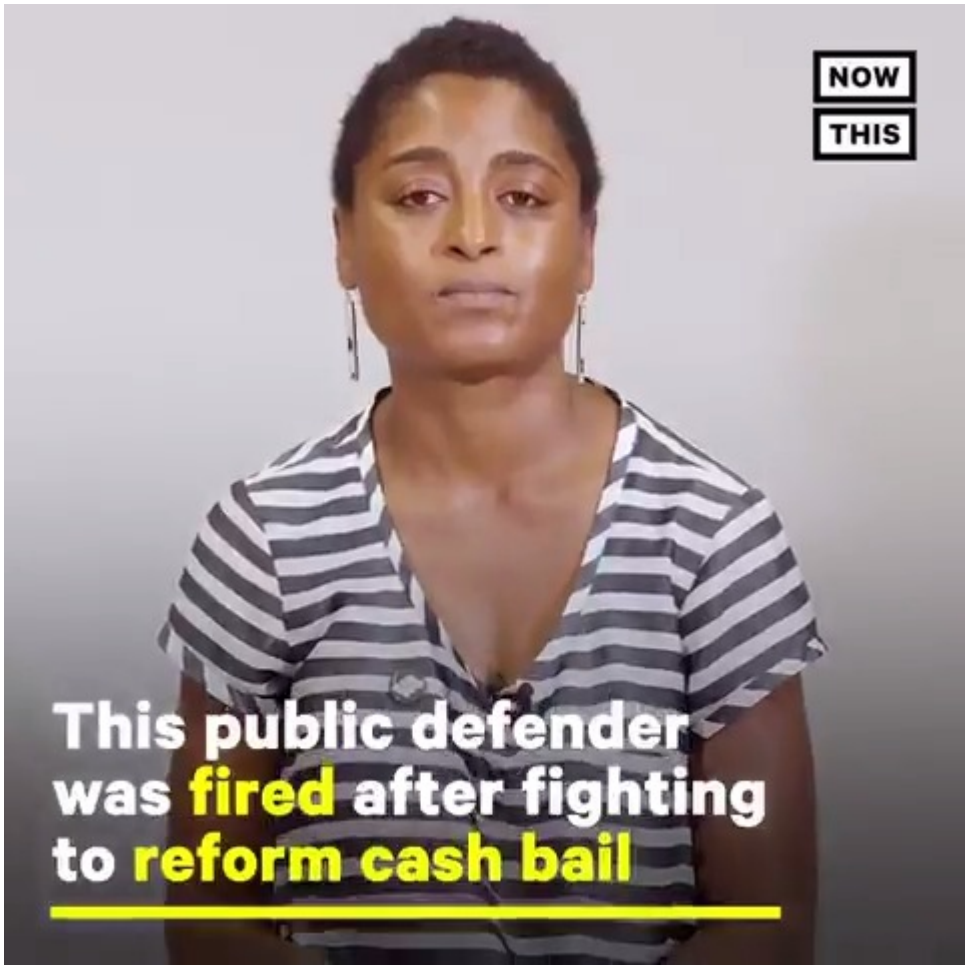
Most think that balancing the scales of justice means more funding for defenders. Thats part of it. Enough a attorneys to actually be at bail hearings. Wrap around services to be able to help people trapped in the system end up better off in their communities. Lower caseloads.

But funding for defense in isolation isn't enough. For one, large swaths of country don't even have public defender offices. Rely on "assigned counsel systems" of private attorneys. Their judge friends give them cases. They so little if any work. End up w/ "results" like this: https://t.co/72FWwNj5tQ

> THREAD: It is with sadness that I tell you about Preston Chaney, who died in the Houston jail of COVID. He was trapped there for 3.5 months because he couldn't pay $100 after being accused of stealing lawn equipment and frozen meat. His story is important. (1)
>
> — Alec Karakatsanis (@equalityAlec) February 6, 2021

Another issue is independence. Public defender offices are often beholden by law to the very governmental bodies that oppress the people they serve. In PA last year, this defender was fired simply for arguing the county's bail practices were

unjust.



Even the most well funded & independent defenders are crushed by the web of laws & practices designed to oppress. Mandatory minimums & other harsh sentencing laws, pretrial human caging, laws allowing prosecutors to withhold evidence undermine the promise of public defense.

Defenders have perspective from seeing everyday how the system is set up to ensure Justice fails. So while fighting for resources & independence & doing everything possible in & out of court, defenders must join w/ the people & communities they serve to fight to end this system.

Proud to be working together with an extraordinary group of advocates & activists & artists & defenders & communities across the country right now to break down barriers of distrust between defender & community, strengthen coalitions, & build new capacity for strategic advocacy.