

2026 FPD SUMMER SEMINAR AGENDA

Course Title: Annual Federal Criminal Practice Seminar
Course Number: 174328423
Dates: Wednesday, July 29, and Thursday, July 30
Address: Center for American & International Law
5201 Democracy Dr
Plano, TX 75024
Presented by: The Office of the Federal Public Defender,
Northern District of Texas

Overview

This FPD's annual seminar will provide attendees with a series of practical lessons geared toward frequently recurring issues here in the Northern District of Texas. How do federal and state sentences interact within the Bureau of Prisons? Will I get sanctioned for using generative AI? And how will new opinions from the Fifth Circuit and Supreme Court affect our daily practice? We will cover all that and more at this year's seminar.

The seminar will take place at the Center for American & International Law. The Center is located at 5201 Democracy Drive, Plano, TX 75024. The Center offers free on-site parking, and we will meet in the Main Auditorium.

We have requested approval from the State Bar of Texas for a total of 12.0 hours of CLE credit. This includes 4.0 hours of ethics credit. We hope you can attend the entire seminar, but if not, the Texas Bar will allow you to report partial credit for the presentations you were able to attend.

Although the seminar is free, advanced registration is required. You may register at the FPD's website (<https://txn.fd.org/>) beginning Monday, June 29. Registration will close on Friday, July 24. We will post the materials (PowerPoints, handouts, *et cetera*) to our website on Monday, July 27.

If you have any questions about the seminar, you may contact Charnese M. Toro at (214) 767-2746 or Charnese_Toro@fd.org. You may also contact T.W. Brown at (817) 978-2753 or Taylor_W_Brown@fd.org.

DAY ONE: WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 2026
CENTER FOR AMERICAN & INTERNATIONAL LAW – MAIN AUDITORIUM

8:00 – 8:30	Early Arrival & Breakfast Buffet Before the seminar begins, please sign in at the front desk and enjoy a complimentary breakfast buffet. On-site parking at the Center for American & International Law is free, and the seminar will take place in the Main Auditorium.
8:30 – 8:45	Mentoring Minute No. One: Finding Mentees (0.25 hours) <i>Presenter: T.W. Brown, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> The seminar will begin with a brief presentation from the FPD's Director of Education & Training. Our office has close relationships with each of the law schools in the DFW Metroplex and has consistently leveraged those relationships to create an intern-to-AFPD pipeline. T.W. Brown will describe how to establish and maintain those relationships.
8:45 – 9:30	From Geofence Warrants to Protective Sweeps and Beyond: A Fourth Amendment Update (0.75 hours) <i>Presenter: Quincy Ferrill, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> In this presentation, Quincy Ferrill will review timely Fifth Circuit and Supreme Court decisions concerning Fourth Amendment issues. This will include discussion of <i>Chatrre v. United States</i>, a Supreme Court case involving the constitutionality of geofence warrants, as well as our office's recent win at the Fifth Circuit in <i>United States v. Johnson</i>, which resulted in suppression of a firearm and a vacated sentence. The presentation will also briefly discuss other Fourth Amendment decisions from the Fifth Circuit within the last year.
9:45 – 10:45	Confidential Source Utilization: Management, Ethics, and Litigation Considerations (1.0 hour – ethics credit) <i>Presenter: Greg Jones, Chief Deputy Investigator</i> This presentation examines the use and management of confidential sources in criminal investigations, including source classifications, recruitment and development practices, documentation requirements, compensation issues, operational safeguards, and ethical limitations placed on investigators and agents. The course will also address common failures in source management, credibility concerns, disclosure risks, and practical litigation considerations that arise in suppression hearings, discovery disputes, and trial preparation. The discussion is intended to provide attorneys and investigators with a practical understanding of confidential source operations and the legal implications surrounding their use.
10:45 – 11:45	Maximizing the Value of a Proffer Session (1.0 hour) <i>Presenter: Devon Sanders, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Dallas)</i> In this presentation, Devon Sanders will discuss the proffer process. Her presentation will highlight relevant rules and guidelines, break down pre-interview preparation, and discuss how to incorporate cooperation into clients' sentencing arguments. The presentation will include tips from FPD investigators about how to help make your client's cooperation as effective as possible.

11:45 – 1:15	Off-site Lunch We will break for a 90-minute lunch at 11:45 am. The Center for American & International Law has helpfully prepared a list of nearby restaurants. You can review this list at the sign-in table.
1:15 – 2:15	The Ethical Dangers of Using Generative AI in Federal Criminal Practice (1.0 hour – ethics credit) <i>Presenter: Matthew Wright, Ass't Federal Public Defenders (Amarillo)</i> These days, it's difficult to perform <i>any</i> task involving a computer or technology without being interrupted by an invitation to utilize some sort of generative AI. Some of the better products are capable of instantly composing a professional-sounding memorandum or brief, complete with citations. Lawyers and judges differ wildly in their willingness to try the technology. In this session, we will discuss the dangers and pitfalls of using generative AI in federal criminal litigation. We will cover issues of confidentiality, privilege, and professional competence. We will discuss just a few of the many stories of lawyers who found themselves in serious trouble after filing briefs or pleadings written by AI, complete with citations to or quotations from imaginary cases. Finally, we will talk about procrastination and the power of temptation.
2:15 – 3:15	Guidelines Commentary & <i>Beaird v. United States</i> (1.0 hour) <i>Presenter: Christy Martin, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Dallas)</i> This fall the Supreme Court will hear arguments in <i>Beaird v. United States</i> and decide whether <i>Stinson v. United States</i>, 508 U. S. 36 (1993), still correctly states the rule for the deference that courts must give the commentary to the Sentencing Guidelines. This presentation will cover (1) the current circuit split on Guidelines commentary deference and how it affects sentencing outcomes, and (2) how the possible outcomes in <i>Beaird</i> might alter commentary deference moving forward.
3:15 – 4:15	Ethical Internships 101 (1.0 hour – ethics credit) <i>Presenter: T.W. Brown, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> The first day of the seminar will conclude with an ethics presentation geared toward interns. Both the Model Rules of Professional Conduct (Rule 5.3) and the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct (Rule 5.03) make lawyers responsible for the actions of “nonlawyer assistants,” a category that includes law-student interns. In this presentation, T.W. Brown will discuss how supervising lawyers can work with interns to ensure the ethical representation of our clients.

DAY TWO: THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2026
CENTER FOR AMERICAN & INTERNATIONAL LAW – MAIN AUDITORIUM

8:00 – 8:30	Early Arrival & Breakfast Buffet Before the second day of the seminar begins, please sign in (again) and enjoy another complimentary breakfast buffet. On-site parking at the Center for American & International Law is free, and the seminar will take place in the Main Auditorium.
8:30 – 8:45	Mentoring Minute No. Two: Supervising Lawyers (0.25 hours) <i>Presenter: Michael Lehmann, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> Supervising lawyers means providing feedback, but providing constructive feedback from one lawyer to another can be awkward. In this presentation, Michael Lehmann, the Branch Chief for the FPD's Fort Worth division, will discuss helpful tips and tricks he's learned during his time in a supervisory position.
8:45 – 9:30	Combatting Career Offender (0.75 hours) <i>Maria Pedraza, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Dallas)</i> Judges in the Northern District of Texas impose within-range sentences for "Career Offenders" under § 4B1.1 of the Guidelines Manual more frequently than judges in any other district in the United States. In this presentation, Maria Pedraza will share tips to on how best to fight career-offender status and will survey variances arguments we can make on behalf of our clients.
9:45 – 10:45	Protecting Every Day of Your Client's Time: Mastering BOP Computations (1.0 hour) <i>Presenter, Gabi Vega, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Dallas)</i> This will be a practitioner-focused presentation that aims to help lawyers secure accurate sentence computations and real concurrency when state and federal matters overlap. The session will cover the governing statutes, key Guideline provision, and foundational legal principles, as well as put that knowledge to the test by utilizing real-world case examples. This session will provide concrete practice tips to better equip you to avoid pitfalls that could lead to unintended double-served time and protect your client's presentence credit in advance of sentencing and beyond.
10:45 – 11:45	Caselaw Update (1.0 hour) <i>Presenter: Loui Itoh, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> The last year has seen many significant criminal-law opinions from the Fifth Circuit and Supreme Court. In this presentation, Loui Itoh will review those opinions with an eye toward their effect on our day-to-day practice in the Northern District of Texas.
11:45 – 1:15	Off-site Lunch We will break for another 90-minute lunch at 11:45 am. The Center for American & International Law has helpfully prepared a list of nearby restaurants. You can review this list at the sign-in table.

1:15 – 2:15	Ethical Considerations in CJA Appointments & Billing (1.0 hour – ethics credit) <i>Presenter: Kim Schaefer, Attorney Advisor for the U.S. District Court (N.D. Tex.)</i> In this presentation, Kim Schaefer will discuss the general ethical obligations undertaken by attorneys who accept appointments under the Criminal Justice Act with a special emphasis on the ethics of billing for time and expenses.
2:15 – 3:15	Trying a Multi-Defendant Federal Case: No I in Team, but No U Either (1.0 hour) <i>Presenters: Christopher Weinbel & Rachel Taft, Ass't Federal Public Defenders (Fort Worth)</i> Multi-defendant trials present unique challenges. Christopher Weinbel and Rachel Taft, two AFDs in the Fort Worth division, recently took part in a lengthy, complex trial involving nine defendants, and in this presentation, will discuss the difficult strategic issues that come up whenever multiple parties go before the same jury. Topics will include (1) strategic calls about when to coordinate with other defendants and when to go your own way; (2) how to handle divergent defense theories; (3) how to respond when a strategic or evidentiary choice by one defendant (intentionally or not) hurts another; and (4) the possibility of spillover prejudice when bad evidence from the government's case in chief is relevant to only some of the charged offenses or offenders.
3:15 – 4:15	On-the-ground Originalism (1.0 hour) <i>Presenter: T.W. Brown, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> Anyone following the Fifth Circuit's authority on the Second Amendment knows that every prosecution nowadays under 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) is an opportunity for creative constitutional advocacy. This year's seminar will conclude with a series of practical tips for finding and using Founding Era sources to bolster motions to dismiss filed in our local district courts.

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

T.W. Brown is an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Texas and works in the Fort Worth division. He graduated from the University of Arkansas School of Law in May 2013 and joined the FPD's office in January 2015. He spent a few years in the trial division and has been in appeals since May 2019. If you have any questions about his presentations (or tips for future CLE topics), you can reach T.W. at Taylor_W_Brown@fd.org.

Quincy Ferrill joined the FPD's office in August 2022. She started out in the Lubbock division as a trial attorney for two years and moved to the Fort Worth division to join the appellate team in August of 2024. She attended Austin College in Sherman, Texas, for her bachelor's degree in English and graduated from Texas Tech School of Law in 2021. Before joining the FPD's office, she was a state public defender in rural New Mexico.

Loui Itoh joined the FPD's Fort Worth office as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in 2019. After working as a trial attorney, she moved to Appeals in 2022. Ms. Itoh received her undergraduate degree from Harvard University and her J.D. from New York University School of Law. After law school, she worked as an Associate at Sidley Austin, LLP, as a law clerk for U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta, and as an Assistant Federal Public Defender at the Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Columbia.

Greg Jones is the Deputy Chief Investigator for the Federal Public Defender's Office in the Northern District of Texas and works in the Fort Worth Division. He retired from the Fort Worth Police Department after 25 years of service with experience in both federal and state enforcement positions. He joined the FPD's Office in July 2023 and works in the trial division. If you have any questions about this presentation, you can reach Greg at Gregory_Jones@fd.org.

Michael Lehmann joined the FPD's Fort Worth division as a trial attorney in 2014 and was named the Branch Supervisor in 2018. He was previously a member of the CJA Panel in private practice, a Dallas County Public Defender, and an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Texas. He earned a degree in Plan II from the University of Texas and a Juris Doctor at University of Colorado School of Law. In his free time, he enjoys watching Minion-related movies with his younger daughter, sharing Harry Potter novels with his older daughter, and laughing through irreverent comedies with his wife.

Christy Martin joined the appeals unit of the FPD's Dallas office in May 2023. After graduating from Temple University School of Law in 1997, she served as a Research and Writing Attorney in the trial unit of the Federal Community Defender Office in Philadelphia until 2008 and then as Assistant Federal Defender in the appeals unit from 2008 to 2023.

Maria A. Pedraza has been an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Federal Defender's Office for the Northern District of Texas since August 2022. Prior to that she was an Assistant Federal Defender in the Federal Community Defender Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania from January 2013 through August 2022. While in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, she was assigned to the Trial Team on a matter in the Eastern District of Missouri on which the Department of Justice was seeking the imposition of the death penalty. She is a graduate of the State University of New York College at Geneseo (B.A. 1997) and Hofstra University School of Law (J.D. 2000). She served as a law clerk in the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, Staff Attorney's Office, from 2000 to 2002. Following her clerkship, she served as a Staff Attorney from 2002 to 2004 in the Manhattan Office of the Criminal Defense Division of the Legal Aid Society. She then worked in private practice at a firm specializing in criminal defense from 2005 to 2010. After that, Maria joined the State of New Jersey Office of the Public Defender as an Assistant Deputy Public Defender until 2013. Maria has also had the privilege of serving as an Adjunct Professor at the Temple University Beasley School of Law teaching a clinical course focusing on Federal criminal law and trial practice. Maria is admitted to practice law in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and the United States District Courts for the Northern District of Texas, the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and the Eastern District of Missouri.

Devon Sanders is an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Texas and works in the Dallas division. She graduated from Boston College Law School in May 2022 and joined the FPD's office in May 2024. Before joining the FPD, she worked as an Assistant Public Defender for the New Hampshire Public Defender. If you have any questions about this presentation, please feel free to reach Devon at Devon_Sanders@fd.org.

Kim Schaefer has worked for the Northern District of Texas since 2010. Since that time, she has assisted the court in CJA-related matters, including attorney appointments, the authorization of service providers, budgeting, and voucher payment processing. Kim is certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Criminal Appellate Law. She earned a B.S. with honors from the University of Houston in 1989 and a J.D. with honors from George Washington University's National Law Center in 1992.

Rachel Taft joined the FPD's office for the Northern District of Texas in 2019. She started out in the Dallas division and now works in Fort Worth as a trial attorney. She attended the University of North of Texas for her bachelor's degree and graduated from Texas A&M School of Law in 2016. Before joining the FPD, she was an Associate with Varghese Summersett in Fort Worth.

Maria Gabriela 'Gabi' Vega is an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Texas where she practices exclusively in the appellate section. Before transitioning to appeals, she served as a trial AFPD from 2017 to 2022. Gabi came to the FPD's office from the Equal Justice Center where she worked on a legal aid project assisting survivors of sexual assault with employment matters and previously practiced complex litigation at Baker Botts after clerking for the Honorable Andrew S. Hanen in the Southern District of Texas. She graduated summa cum laude from The Ohio State University and earned her J.D. from Harvard Law School.

Christopher Weinbel commissioned into the U.S. Army in 2009. He served in units at Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Schweinfurt, Germany; and Fort Bragg, North Carolina. After serving as a Field Artillery Officer, he was selected to serve as a Civil Affairs Officer with U.S. Army Special Operations Command. During his active-duty service, he deployed many times in support of missions like Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom-Andean Ridge, and Operation Enduring Freedom-Caribbean. In 2017, he transferred to the U.S. Army Reserves and attended law school at Texas A&M University School of Law in Fort Worth. Upon graduating, he became an Assistant District Attorney in Collin County where he worked until November 2022. That is when he accepted a job as an Assistant Federal Public Defender with the FPD's Fort Worth division. He currently serves in the reserves as a Lieutenant Colonel and continues to assist clients in the Northern District.

Matthew Wright is the Deputy Chief of the Appeals and Post-Conviction Section at the FPD's office for the Northern District of Texas. He has represented hundreds of clients in district court, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court. He graduated from the University of Arkansas School of Law in 2006.