

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Attorney General Racine Taps Criminal-Justice Expert Seema Gajwani to Coordinate His Efforts on Juvenile Justice Reform

Blocking 'Schoolhouse-to-Jailhouse Pipeline' a Key Part of the Attorney General's Agenda

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Attorney General Karl A. Racine announced today that he has named Seema Gajwani, formerly criminal and juvenile justice program officer for the District-based Public Welfare Foundation, as his Special Counsel on Juvenile Justice Reform.

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is responsible for prosecuting juvenile cases in the District, and the Attorney General promised in his campaign to transform the way the District handles cases involving juvenile suspects and offenders, with the twin goals of maximizing public safety and youth rehabilitation.

“We absolutely must do more to block the schoolhouse-to-jailhouse pipeline in the District, and I want to ensure that our juvenile-justice system is focused on prevention and rehabilitation more than punishment and incarceration,” Attorney General Racine said. **“Seema Gajwani’s long experience in this area will prove a great asset to our efforts to help transform the District’s juvenile-justice system.”**

Ms. Gajwani will analyze the District’s decision-making criteria for charging juveniles, plea bargaining, transferring cases to adult court, recommending sentences and diverting youths from the criminal-justice system. She will also find ways to improve OAG’s data-gathering on juvenile justice, improving the office’s capacity to assess practices and identify areas for change. She will work with other major stakeholders in the juvenile-justice system, including the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, the D.C. Superior Court and its social-service units, the D.C. Public Schools, the U.S. Attorney’s office, and the Executive Office of the Mayor.

At the Public Welfare Foundation since 2007, Ms. Gajwani has overseen a criminal-justice-grant portfolio that allocated \$6 million annually. She pursued funding strategies aimed at reducing incarceration rates using evidenced-based reforms and minimizing commitments of youth to detention facilities.

Prior to that, she served as an attorney with D.C. Public Defender Service, representing indigent juveniles and adults and juvenile clients at school-expulsion and child-welfare hearings. A Ward 6 resident, Ms. Gajwani is a graduate of Northwestern University and the New York University School of Law.

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