

State of



Connecticut

By His Excellency JOHN G. ROWLAND, Governor: an

Official Statement

WHEREAS, Clarence Earl Gideon, a 51 year old drifter with an 8th grade education, was charged with breaking into a Florida poolroom on June 3, 1961 and stealing coins from a cigarette machine; and

WHEREAS, Gideon asserted his innocence and when his request for counsel was denied, he defended himself, was convicted of the felony of breaking and entering with intent to commit a misdemeanor, and sentence to five years in state prison; and

WHEREAS, Gideon submitted a handwritten petition to the United States Supreme Court from his Florida jail cell, arguing that the United States Constitution does not allow for poor people to be convicted and sent to prison without legal representation; and

WHEREAS, on March 18, 1963, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Gideon's trial and conviction without the assistance of counsel was fundamentally unfair and violated the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, at his retrial with the assistance of counsel, Clarence Earl Gideon was acquitted; and

WHEREAS, Connecticut was the first state in the Nation to establish a statewide public defender system in 1917 under the direction of the judges of the Superior Court, and further that Connecticut established the Division of Public Defender Services as a separate and independent state agency in 1975; and

WHEREAS, the mission of the Division is to provide legal representation to any person charged with the commission of a crime who does not have the financial ability to hire an attorney. Public defenders provide legal representation before the Connecticut courts in adult criminal cases, habeas corpus proceedings, extraditions, appeals and juvenile delinquency matters; and

WHEREAS, since establishing the Division of Public Defender Services, Connecticut has worked to insure fairness within Connecticut's criminal justice system by providing quality legal representation to all accused, regardless of their ability afford counsel; and

WHEREAS, in acknowledgement of the importance of the right to counsel as it exists for everyone and the Supreme Court's decision in Gideon to a just society, the State of Connecticut reiterates support for and belief in the right to counsel for all persons accused of a crime regardless of an ability to pay and expresses its continued adherence to and support for equal justice; now

THEREFORE, I, JOHN G. ROWLAND, Governor of the State of Connecticut, do hereby proclaim March 18, 2003 as **GIDEON DAY** in the State of Connecticut. I encourage all of our citizens to recognize the right to counsel as it exists for everyone in Connecticut.



John G. Rowland
Governor