

What does a criminal lawyer do? Where can I practice criminal law?

Criminal lawyers are trial attorneys who either prosecute criminal offenses on behalf of the federal or state government or represent criminal defendants. Criminal lawyers generally specialize in either federal or state criminal law, as the two systems have different crimes, courts, rules of procedure and evidence, and sentencing procedures.

In Maryland, the Attorney General's Office prosecutes certain types of crimes: white collar and insurance fraud, Medicaid fraud, and environmental crimes. The Criminal Appeals Division of the Attorney General's Office handles all appeals of convictions. In each county and the City of Baltimore, there is a State's Attorney's Office which represents the state in all other criminal prosecutions. As criminal defendants have a Constitutional right to counsel, in each jurisdiction there is an Office of the Public Defender, which represents indigent defendants.

Generally, all federal criminal prosecutions are handled by a U.S. Attorney's Office. (The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia prosecutes violations under both federal and the District's laws.) However, the Department of Justice's Criminal Division also prosecutes criminal matters as do the Antitrust, Civil Rights, Environment and Natural Resources, and Tax divisions, often in collaboration with the U.S. Attorney's Office. In each federal jurisdiction, there is an Office of the Federal Public Defender whose attorneys represent indigent defendants accused of federal crimes.

Judge Advocate Corps attorneys prosecute courts' marital and criminal cases under the Uniform Code of Military Justice as well as serve as defense counsel to service members in military courts.

Most criminal defense attorneys are in private practice. They work at both small and large law firms, though most large law firm attorneys specialize in "white collar" federal crimes such as fraud. Some law firms and nonprofits represent indigent criminal defendants *pro bono*. Criminal defense attorneys also represent indigent clients by working in a Public Defender's Office as an Assistant Public Defender.

How can I get a job as a criminal lawyer?

Intern with the State's Attorney's Office, the Department of Justice, or the Office of the Public Defender, especially if you want to become a prosecutor or an Assistant Public Defender. The U.S. Attorney's Office

offers internship opportunities, but it does not hire entry level attorneys. A large number of law firms with criminal defense practices also hire law clerks. Other steps you can take during law school to prepare yourself for a career in criminal law: take all the criminal law related coursework offered by UB, including evidence and criminal procedure; join a Moot Court team; participate in the Criminal Practice Clinic; and join professional associations such as the Maryland Criminal Defense Attorneys' Association and attend their events.

Where can I learn more?

Office of Defender Services – <http://www.fd.org>

Federal Public Defender for the District of Maryland – <http://www.md-fd.org/>

Maryland Attorney General's Office – <http://www.oag.state.md.us/index.htm>

The Maryland Criminal Defense Attorneys' Association – <http://www.mcdaa.org/index.htm>

Maryland Office of the Public Defender – <http://www.opd.state.md.us/>

Maryland State's Attorney's Offices – <http://www.mdsaa.org/marylandstatesattorneys.html>

Maryland State's Attorney's Association – <http://www.mdsaa.org/>

Maryland State Bar Association, Criminal Law and Practice Division –

http://www.msba.org/sec_comm/sections/criminal/council.asp

National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers – <http://www.nacdl.org>

U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division – www.usdoj.gov/criminal/

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