



MODERNIZING PUBLIC DEFENSE: THE IMPACT OF AXON JUSTICE ON BROWARD COUNTY'S EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT



INTRODUCTION: A SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

For the Law Office of the Public Defender, Seventeenth Judicial Circuit, defending the rights of Broward County's indigent clients is more than just a job—it's a mission. With over 100 attorneys, 200 employees and more than 30,000 cases handled annually, the office plays a critical role in the criminal justice system. But behind the scenes, an overwhelming tide of digital evidence, manual processes and outdated workflows was making this mission increasingly difficult.

Public defenders found themselves buried under stacks of DVDs, thumb drives and paper files. The process of obtaining and reviewing evidence was painfully slow. Discovery that should have taken days often stretched into weeks or months, leaving attorneys scrambling to prepare strong defenses while clients sat anxiously in jail, waiting for answers.

It was a system that wasn't built for the demands of modern digital evidence. The office needed a transformation. That transformation came in the form of Axon Justice.

THE CHALLENGE: JUGGLING TIME, EVIDENCE OVERWHELM AND LEGACY TECHNOLOGY

For attorneys like Joseph Dewey, an assistant public defender in the Major Crimes Division, one of the biggest frustrations was the time lost waiting for evidence.

"When we meet clients for the first time, it's usually the day after their arrest and they have questions. They want answers. I may not have those answers right away when all I have is the police report when they were first arrested. The faster I get the evidence or discovery in a case, the faster I'm able to answer their questions," he explained.

In the past, receiving digital evidence was a logistical challenge. Physical CDs and USB drives had to be hand-delivered, signed for and manually uploaded onto office servers. Sometimes if an attorney needed a specific piece of evidence, they had to physically walk over to the State Attorney's Office—only to find that a key piece of discovery was missing, misplaced or in an incompatible format.

Meanwhile, the volume of evidence was skyrocketing. With police departments relying more on body-worn cameras, cell phone extractions and surveillance footage, public defenders found themselves immersed in terabytes of digital files—and without the tools to efficiently manage them.

And beyond the inefficiencies, the stress was mounting. Public defenders, already overloaded with cases, spent more time chasing down discovery than meeting with clients. The outdated workflows were affecting morale and making it harder to retain attorneys who were already stretched thin.



THE SOLUTION: A FASTER, SMARTER WAY TO DEFEND CLIENTS

The implementation of Axon Justice was more than just a technological upgrade—it was a game changer. With Axon Justice, discovery was no longer a frustrating waiting game. Instead of requesting discs or making multiple trips to the prosecutor's office, attorneys could access everything in a centralized digital platform. Evidence that once took weeks to arrive was now available at the click of a button.

"We get digital evidence daily from the prosecutor's office. Back when I first started, we used to have to deliver boxes of discs or thumb drives to the prosecutor's office for them to make copies of all the electronic evidence. Then it would be sent by courier to our office and we would have to sign for it. Now we receive it almost instantly. I can make a phone call, my prosecutor will tell me if they have it or not, and if they have it, they click a couple buttons and I can get it within seconds," said Dewey.

But the benefits weren't just about speed. The real-time collaboration tools allowed public defenders to review evidence alongside prosecutors, in real time and even use timestamps to pinpoint key moments in videos.

"It has helped me specifically, by reviewing the evidence with the client, identifying the issues, calling the prosecutor, having them look at it with me at the same time so they could see the same issue. That has resulted in one of my cases being dismissed, with the prosecutor deciding not to press charges any further in the case," Dewey shared.

Even the way attorneys prepared for trial changed. No longer did they have to sift through hours of footage with no clear direction—Axon Justice's transcription tools allowed them to search for key words, jumping straight to relevant moments.

Dacia Riley-Taylor, general counsel for the office, noted, "You can put in a keyword and the transcript will take you directly to that point in the video. Transcription has been a huge assistance to what we do in the Public Defender's office, because now we don't have to wait to turn it over to a transcribing agency, which could take a couple of days...Being able to do that from the screen with the video as a point of reference has been a tremendous help and a positive impact for the cases that we deal with."

Redaction, another historically time-consuming process, also became seamless. Instead of waiting on IT specialists to redact sensitive information, attorneys could do it themselves in court, in real time.

"Now, I can sit in the courtroom, pull up a video, redact what I need to redact, place it on a thumb drive, enter that into evidence in a matter of a couple minutes, and then show it to the jury without any major delay while I'm in trial," Dewey explained.

THE RESULTS: MORE TIME, STRONGER DEFENSES AND A RENEWED MISSION

The impact of Axon Justice on Broward County's Public Defender's Office has been undeniable.

- Discovery that once took weeks now takes minutes.
- Public defenders can meet with more clients each day, ensuring they get the attention they deserve. "We have to be able to review the discovery, review evidence with the client, with our co-counsel in order to accurately represent that client and serve him to the best that we can. Since we've had [Axon Justice], we've been able to do that for more clients on a daily basis, rather than just talking to two clients a day. I can talk to five and six clients a day and show them everything that I have in their case or what's going on with their case, and answer all the questions that they may have, because again, a lot of them, their life is on the line. They need answers, and I can give it to them faster and better," Dewey added.



- Case resolutions can happen faster, leading to fewer clients sitting in jail waiting for the system to move.

“Axon Justice has transformed our discovery process. Simply, it went from a slow turtle speed to lightning speed in a matter of days. Now we get things so much faster, everything’s so much easier to review, than it was prior to us having it,” said Dewey.

Beyond efficiency, Axon Justice has also improved attorney morale and retention. By reducing administrative burdens, attorneys can now focus on what truly matters—building strong defenses and advocating for their clients.

Dewey noted, “This tool has made my job easier. There are tons of things for us to be worried about on a case, from legal issues, etc. I shouldn’t have to worry about why am I not getting the evidence to help my client, or why is it taking so long? This is a job where we help hundreds and hundreds of people. We need to make it easier to do that for our attorneys. And when attorneys are happy and they have more time to do their job, they’re more likely to stay. I’m not in the recruiting team, but I hope my recruiting team is showing future employees that we have this to make their life and job easier.”

Riley-Taylor echoed that sentiment, emphasizing that today’s legal professionals expect modern, efficient technology to help them manage overwhelming caseloads.

“Axon Justice has helped with retention and morale in our office. Currently, we are seeing a trend that e-platforms, e-services are key to efficiency, and it’s what new employees are looking for. Employees are not looking for the old way to do things. Our administration at the Law Offices of the Public Defender focuses on work-life balance. We want our attorneys understanding the difficult job that they have. We want them to be able to sift through it, sort through it, navigate through it, in the most efficient way as possible... we understand the need for the efficiency and a work-life balance for the attorneys that we hire,” she said.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC DEFENSE

The Law Office of the Public Defender, Seventeenth Judicial Circuit, has always been committed to ensuring justice for the indigent. But with Axon Justice, they can now do it faster, smarter and more effectively than ever before.

For the Public Defender, Gordon Weekes, “Axon has been transformative in the way that we practice law. It’s allowed us to have the ability to be more efficient with our time, to manage our workload, to have a better workflow and how you prepare a case, when you are dealing with a large volume, of cases and a large number of clients. You have to be efficient in your time to make good sound decisions about the defense and preparation of your case. And that’s where Axon shines.”

Dewey echoed the sentiment, “Would I recommend Axon Justice, other agencies? Of course, I would. The time management that Axon Justice gives the attorneys is priceless. That’s one thing that we don’t have is more time in a day. And to be able to have a centralized location for all the discovery, you can make notes with it. Everything is there. It’s so easy to use and so easy to share with clients and co-counsel. Every public defender’s office should have this.”

For Broward County’s public defenders, the shift to Axon Justice wasn’t just about technology—it was about fairness, efficiency and restoring the time and resources needed to fight for justice.

And in a world where digital evidence is only growing, having the right tools isn’t optional anymore—it’s essential.

