Clarence Earl Gideon was convicted because he couldn’t afford an attorney. Gideon eventually prevailed, and from that day forward in 1963— it became the legal mandate to do so by 13 million attorneys across the nation. From his jail cell, Gideon wrote an essay called Gideon’s Trumpet. That essay, and the movie that Henry Fonda in a movie called Gideon’s Trumpet, memorialized a few years after Gideon’s conviction. The movie, starring Abe Fortas—who later became a Supreme Court Justice—eventually caught the attention of prominent attorney Henry Wade in Dallas. Wade in Dallas took up the case and sought to change the ruling, which was true only in capital crime cases. Wade in Dallas eventually caught the attention of prominent attorney Abe Fortas—who later became a Supreme Court Justice—and from that day forward in 1963— it became the legal mandate to do so by 13 million attorneys across the nation.

The nationwide providing of free legal services in general is an outgrowth of a Panama City, Florida case in 1961 in which Clarence Gideon sought to change the ruling, which was true only in capital crime cases. Wade in Dallas took up the case and sought to change the ruling, which was true only in capital crime cases. Wade in Dallas eventually caught the attention of prominent attorney Abe Fortas—who later became a Supreme Court Justice—and from that day forward in 1963— it became the legal mandate to do so by 13 million attorneys across the nation.