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DEFENSE ATTORNEYS HELP PROTECT OUR RIGHTS

The recent letter to the editor by Michael Hill concerning **Jack Swerling** indicates a basic misunderstanding of the role of criminal defense attorneys.

The attorney's role in defending a client charged with a crime is not "to get him off." Instead, it is to protect the client's rights in order to be sure that only those who are guilty are the ones who will actually be convicted. In performing this task, defense attorneys are not indifferent to the suffering of the victims of crime. Instead, experienced attorneys like **Jack Swerling** know more about that suffering than most of us. No one can try criminal cases for years and fail to appreciate and care about the impact of crime.

Criminal defense attorneys are important to society because they guarantee two things. First, they keep the system of rights in place for all of us. As a result, law enforcement officials show these rights greater respect, and we all know that we will have access to competent attorneys if we are ever accused of a crime.

Second, even those who are never accused of a crime benefit from the efforts of criminal defense attorneys. When the state exercises its ultimate coercive power by imprisoning or executing convicted criminals, it acts on behalf of all of us. Such punishment should only be imposed on our behalf if the people punished are granted due process. Without criminal defense attorneys, our society could not guarantee that this right has been granted.

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