



TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

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New Report Documents Advantages for Texas Counties Participating in the Regional Public Defender for Capital Cases

AUSTIN – A new research report issued today by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University details the important benefits available to Texas counties participating in the Regional Public Defender Office for Capital Cases (RPDO). The report, titled *Judgment and Justice: An Evaluation of the Texas Regional Public Defender for Capital Cases*, was commissioned by the TIDC and is available [here](#) on the Commission’s website.

In some parts of the state it can be difficult to find a well-qualified legal team experienced with capital litigation. RPDO member counties pay an annual membership fee which protects against the high costs of defense in capital murder cases and guarantees access to a qualified capital defense team when the need arises.

Among the report’s key findings:

- Because the costs of defense are pre-paid through an annual fee, member counties are willing to appoint a full capital team earlier and in a larger proportion of cases than non-member counties.
- RPDO’s strategic focus on early mitigation investigations is much more likely to result in disposition of the case by plea, thus avoiding costly capital trials.
- Counties that join the RPDO are in immediate conformance with standards of quality for capital defense recommended by the State Bar of Texas *Guidelines and Standards for Texas Capital Counsel*.
- Sentencing outcomes are better for clients with public defenders. Just one in 26 RPDO clients in the matched study sample received a sentence of death. Among private assigned counsel, one in five clients received this worst possible outcome.

TIDC Commissioner and past president of the National Association of Counties Glen Whitley said, “Capital cases have the potential to significantly disrupt county budgets, and particularly for smaller and mid-sized counties, that can cause major fiscal problems. This report shows how innovative regional approaches can provide counties with budget stability and the assurance that appropriate defense is provided.” TIDC Commissioner and Bell County Judge Jon Burrows said, “In order to meet our constitutional obligations to ensure fairness in our courts, counties have to be ready to step up. The RPDO provides counties with the resources they need to weather the capital case storm when it hits: ready access to specialized defense teams when needed and insurance against the financial impact of capital litigation.”

The RPDO was formed through inter-local agreements with participating counties and supported through TIDC discretionary grants. The program is administered by Lubbock County and now has offices throughout the state. Texas counties with populations below 300,000 are eligible to participate. More information is available on the RPDO’s website at: <http://rpdo.org/>.