

TASK FORCE ON INDIGENT DEFENSE

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TASK FORCE HOLDS FINAL MEETING AND AWARDS \$8.1 MILLION IN FUNDS

AUSTIN – Following ten years of work on indigent defense issues, the Texas Task Force on Indigent Defense was called to order for the final time by its Chair, Sharon Keller, Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals. The meeting was well-attended and followed by a reception. As of September 1, the organization will be reorganized and known as the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, following the passage of HB 1754 by the 82nd Legislature.

Approximately \$7 million in awards were based upon county indigent defense expenses and its population. Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley stated during the meeting, “Counties are hurting. Every one of us is trying to balance a budget right now.” He stated that the awarded funds will “help our counties wrap up the end of the year” and provide funds “at the very beginning of the year, which I think will help them as they move forward.”

Bell and **Hidalgo** Counties were each awarded a Discretionary Grant. These grants are competitive in nature and are designed to help a local jurisdiction implement new and innovative programs.

Bell County: Awarded \$233,000 to create a **Mental Health Defense Campaign** that would train attorneys specialized to represent defendants with mental health issues, provide social worker support to those attorneys, and develop specialized case management software.

Hidalgo: Awarded \$243,000 to create a juvenile division in the existing Hidalgo County Public Defender Office. The division will employ two new attorneys and a social worker to assist in case management.

The new programs are set to begin on October 1, 2011.

Six counties were awarded Extraordinary Funding totaling \$650,000. The six counties were **Burleson, Cass, Harrison, Palo Pinto, Ward and Wood**. Counties that demonstrate extraordinary indigent defense expenses that constitute a financial emergency may apply for assistance from the Task Force.

The Task Force has distributed funds since 2002 to help counties meet the statutory and constitutional requirements to provide access to counsel for the poor.