

## **TASK FORCE ON INDIGENT DEFENSE**

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### **TASK FORCE AWARDED \$300,000 TO AID INNOCENCE PROJECTS IN TEXAS**

AUSTIN – This week, the Governor’s Criminal Justice Division (CJD) awarded the Texas Task Force on Indigent Defense a \$300,000 grant to coordinate and support the actual innocence investigations conducted by four Texas innocence projects in sexual assault cases. The grant will also allow the projects to fulfill a recommendation made in August by the Timothy Cole Advisory Panel on Wrongful Convictions to work in a more coordinated manner.

Currently, innocence projects at Texas Southern University, Texas Tech University, the University of Houston, and the University of Texas at Austin receive state funds to conduct investigations in cases where persons may have been wrongfully convicted of crimes. Each project is eligible for reimbursement of up to \$100,000 in expenditures per year through the Task Force. With hundreds of letters received by the projects each month and the expense of post-conviction proceedings, however, those funds can quickly be depleted.

The additional funds granted to the Task Force by CJD will not only serve to increase the overall number of cases the projects can investigate, it will also support the projects as they provide pro bono investigative, DNA testing, and litigation services. Cases will be processed more expeditiously and effectively.

To date, according to the Justice Project, DNA testing has helped to exonerate 40 wrongfully convicted Texans, many of whom received assistance from innocence projects in the state.

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