

TASK FORCE ON INDIGENT DEFENSE

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For Immediate Release
June 9, 2010

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TASK FORCE AWARDS \$2.5 MILLION IN NEW PROGRAMS TO REPRESENT POOR

AUSTIN – The Texas Task Force on Indigent Defense today approved over \$2.5 million in new funding to Texas counties to improve their indigent defense systems. Programs in Dickens and Lubbock Counties will provide direct representation to the poor in rural counties, and improvements to indigent defense processes will be made through programs in Taylor, Bell, and Dallas Counties. The new programs are set to begin on October 1, 2010.

The burden to provide the legal representation to the poor required by Texas law and Constitution has historically been left completely to the counties. Since 2001, through the Task Force’s discretionary grant and other programs, however, counties have been able to receive state funds to help offset those costs. Task Force Member and Tarrant County Judge B. Glen Whitley stated, “The Task Force is appreciative of the hard work demonstrated by the counties in their discretionary grant applications. I believe the grants we voted to fund today will continue to capitalize on this work and provide cost-effective indigent defense processes and provision of services in Texas counties.”

The specific programs approved for funding today are:

Bell County was awarded \$397,150 to build a web-based core solution that tracks the county’s compliance with the Fair Defense Act from time of arrest through payment of Attorney Fee Vouchers.

Dickens County was awarded \$566,701 for the Caprock Public Defender Office. Dickens County will host an initiative to improve the region’s delivery of indigent defense services by establishing a public defender office that will provide quality representation to defendants who cannot afford to retain counsel.

Lubbock County was awarded \$1,570,483 to expand the Regional Public Defender for Capital Cases, currently operational in the 7th and 9th Administrative Judicial Regions, to the 4th, 5th, and 6th Judicial Regions. The expanded program will provide direct client representation to 140 counties in West and South Texas.

Taylor County was awarded \$41,498 to purchase equipment to develop a multi-county video teleconferencing system with Callahan and Jones Counties. Taylor County 104th

District Judge Lee Hamilton stated, “The grant will help Taylor continue to provide better legal representation for indigent defendants, especially in those in jail.”

Dallas County was also awarded \$256,773 for videoconferencing. These funds will allow the county to immediately begin to resolve issues between city jails and Dallas County Jail through the expansion of existing videoconferencing connectivity.

Three other programs, including the Harris County Public Defender Office and mental health initiatives in Tarrant and Montgomery Counties, were granted extensions and will be taken up by the Task Force later this summer.

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