



## TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

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**For Immediate Release**  
June 13, 2014

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### COMMISSION AWARDS \$5.3 MILLION TO TEXAS COUNTIES TO FOSTER IMPROVEMENT OF INDIGENT DEFENSE

#### **Travis County will implement new independent management of appointed counsel**

Austin -- The Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) awarded new and continuing discretionary grants today totaling \$5.3 million to support innovations in Texas counties to improve legal defense for the poor. The Commission's most significant new grant of \$717,516 was awarded to **Travis County** to implement a new program for managing the appointment of private attorneys assigned to protect the rights of indigent defendants. The program, known as managed assigned counsel, or MAC, will introduce new oversight, quality control and professional development for private attorneys representing poor defendants. Travis County will be the first urban jurisdiction in Texas to have 100% of indigent defense appointments handled through an independent management authority. In addition to more effectively ensuring the quality of legal services provided, the program also enhances the independence of indigent defense appointments from judges, a key recommendation of the American Bar Association.

"Through their effective collaboration and commitment to a high-quality justice system, Travis County judges, court administrators and attorneys have forged a plan with great potential for elevating the delivery of indigent defense services," said TIDC Executive Director Jim Bethke. "Their program provides greater independence, support and accountability that will benefit the county's entire criminal justice system."

**Edwards County** was also awarded a new grant of \$22,809 today to provide videoconferencing technology to support indigent defense services.

The Commission also approved \$4.6 million in continued funding for 13 multi-year grant programs, including the Regional Public Defender for Capital Cases (RPDO), which serves **155 counties** across the state. The RPDO, headquartered in and administered by **Lubbock County**, began in west Texas in 2008 and provides representation to defendants in death penalty cases. Since its inception the program has incrementally expanded to offer services statewide to counties with a population under 300,000 through inter-local agreements with Lubbock County. "Assembling a qualified capital defense team can be a challenge for many small counties," said Judge Sharon Keller, TIDC Chair. "We recognize the importance of the RPDO in providing coverage to counties that would otherwise be overwhelmed by the demands of capital cases."

Additional continued funding was also awarded today for:

- 6 specialized programs for indigent defendants with mental illness in **Bell, Coryell, Colin, Montgomery, Kaufman and Wichita Counties**;
- Defense resource for immigration-related issues in **Dallas County**;
- **Lubbock County's** Private Defender (managed assigned counsel program);
- Three public defender offices in **Burnet County, Hidalgo County** (juvenile) and the **Dickens County** (for the **Caprock Region**); and
- The **El Paso** Public Defender Unit for Specialty Court Programs.

**About TIDC** -- The Texas Indigent Defense Commission has distributed funds to Texas counties since 2002 to support effective programs that protect the rights of accused persons who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. In addition to competitive discretionary grants to fund new, innovative programs, the Commission provides formula grant funding to counties in compliance with the requirements of the Fair Defense Act of 2001 based on population and indigent defense expenditures. More information is available at <http://www.txcourts.gov/tidc/>.

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