



JUDGE ROBIN RAMSAY
ASSOCIATE CRIMINAL JUDGE
MAGISTRATE COURT

Christina Ervin, Court Administrator

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March 24th, 2026

Denton County's Indigent Defense Office and Magistrate Processes
Response to Texas Indigent Defense Commission
Policy and Monitoring Report – January 2026

Mr. Scott Ehlers, Executive Director

Mr. Joel Lieurance, Senior Policy Analyst

Members of the Monitoring Staff

Texas Indigent Defense Commission

209 W. 14th Street, Room 202

Austin, Texas 78701

JLieurance@TIDC.Texas.Gov

SEhlers@TIDC.Texas.Gov

Re: Denton County Indigent Defense Processes — Response to 2026 Policy Monitoring Review and Quality Supplement

Dear Mr. Ehlers, Mr. Lieurance, and Members of the Monitoring Staff:

On behalf of the Denton County Magistrate Court and the Denton County Indigent Defense Office, I would like to express our appreciation to the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (“TIDC”) for the time, care, and professionalism reflected in the Commission’s *Policy Monitoring Review of Denton County’s Indigent Defense Systems* (January 2026) and the accompanying *Quality Supplement* regarding attorney-performance indicators. We recognize the importance of these reviews in strengthening indigent-defense systems across Texas and appreciate the Commission’s continued partnership and technical guidance.

This correspondence is intended to provide historical context regarding the development of Denton County’s indigent-defense appointment processes, particularly those implemented beginning in December 2021 and continuing through 2024 and 2025, and to respectfully note that much of the



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data examined in the monitoring review reflects a transitional implementation period preceding full operational maturity of the Denton County Indigent Defense Office.

Development of Denton County's Centralized Indigent Defense Office

Prior to December 2021, Denton County's procedures for receiving and processing requests for court-appointed counsel operated through decentralized pathways shaped by the County's unique municipal-jail structure and longstanding reliance on magistration conducted by both county-designated magistrates and municipal judges. While a portion of arrested persons were delivered to the Denton County Jail and magistrated there by county-designated magistrates, a substantial number of magistration proceedings—particularly within the County's larger municipalities—were conducted locally by municipal judges acting in their capacity as magistrates for persons arrested within their respective jurisdictions. Because Denton County does not operate a centralized magistration system, these distributed magistration practices necessarily influenced how and when requests for appointed counsel were received and transmitted prior to the establishment of the centralized indigent-defense intake structure in December 2021.

Because Denton County includes numerous municipal law-enforcement agencies—several of which maintain their own short-term detention facilities—applications for appointed counsel historically were transmitted by various personnel at those agencies at differing stages, depending on the arresting agency, the location of detention, and whether charges had been filed at the time of request. These decentralized pathways sometimes created delays in matching requests for counsel with pending matters, particularly when defendants were released on bond before transfer to county custody or before filing of formal charges.

Recognizing the need for a consistent and centralized appointed-counsel application process, Denton County applied for and received a multi-year improvement grant through TIDC in 2021. With the Commission's support, the County formally established the Denton County Indigent Defense Office in December 2021 and began implementation of a centralized structure designed to improve communication, intake reliability, and appointment timeliness across all courts.

Early Implementation and Transition Period (2022–2023)

During 2022 and 2023, the newly established Indigent Defense Office undertook significant work to standardize intake procedures across more than two dozen municipal and county detention environments. Among the most significant improvements implemented during this period were:

- establishment of a single designated transmission pathway for requests for appointed counsel from municipal jails;
- development of uniform intake and eligibility-screening procedures;
- creation of a physical public point of contact for defendants seeking appointment of counsel after release from custody;
- implementation of centralized appointment workflows for cases that had not yet been filed by the District Attorney's Office; and
- coordination with courts and detention facilities to improve reliability of application tracking.



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These changes were designed, in part, to address structural issues common to all jurisdictions within Denton County—both those that maintained their own municipal jails and those that delivered arrestees directly to the Denton County Jail—and to improve compliance with the constitutional timing requirements governing the appointment of counsel as identified in *Rothgery v. Gillespie County*.

Because these improvements were implemented gradually during 2022 and 2023, the FY 2023 sampling period examined in the monitoring review necessarily reflects a system that was still transitioning from historically decentralized intake practices to a fully centralized process.

Improvements Achieved After Full Operational Implementation

Since completion of the initial implementation phase, Denton County has continued refining its appointment procedures and communication pathways. In particular:

- applications for appointed counsel are now routinely accepted and processed even when charges remain unfiled;
- defendants released from custody prior to transfer to the county jail now have a clearly identified county-level intake location;
- municipal-to-county transmission reliability has improved through standardized routing procedures; and
- the Indigent Defense Office now serves as the central point of coordination for pre-filing indigency determinations.

Beginning in late 2024 and continuing through 2025, Denton County further strengthened these improvements through development of a broader county-wide magistrate-court coordination process intended to encourage referral of requests for counsel regardless of custody status and to improve matching of applications with pending matters across agencies.

These improvements were designed specifically to ensure earlier access to appointment processes consistent with the constitutional attachment-of-counsel framework described in *Rothgery*.

Observations Regarding Findings Identified in the Policy Monitoring Review

Denton County appreciates the Commission’s observations regarding transmission timing, appointment timing, and related workflow considerations identified in the monitoring review. We respectfully note that many of the identified concerns arise from data drawn primarily from FY 2023, during which the Indigent Defense Office remained in an active implementation phase.

The establishment of a centralized application and intake structure represented a significant procedural transition from historically distributed routing pathways that had evolved over many years in coordination with municipal detention facilities. While the County recognizes that transitional workflows may have contributed to inconsistencies reflected in the sampled data, those conditions do not fully reflect the operational structure currently in place.



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With respect to defendants who are delivered directly to and magistrates at the Denton County Jail, the County has implemented procedures designed to ensure timely and reliable processing of requests for appointed counsel at the earliest possible stage following arrest. A dedicated representative of the Denton County Indigent Defense Office routinely attends these magistrature proceedings and identifies defendants who request the appointment of counsel. When an application has not already been completed prior to magistrature, the representative meets with the defendant immediately afterward to conduct an interview, assist with completion of the indigency application, and initiate the appointment process without delay. As a result, requests for counsel made by defendants magistrates at the Denton County Jail are routinely addressed promptly and, in most cases, processed concurrently with magistrature or within twenty-four hours thereafter, including on weekends and holidays when necessary.

We remain committed to continuing coordination with municipal partners to further strengthen reliability of request transmission and appointment timing across all jurisdictions within the County.

Applications Submitted Following Release from Custody

One of the most significant historical challenges in Denton County—particularly prior to creation of the Indigent Defense Office—involved requests for counsel submitted by defendants who were released on bond before transfer to county custody or before filing of formal charges.

Before establishment of the centralized intake structure, defendants in these circumstances often lacked a clearly identifiable county office responsible for receiving applications. Courts likewise frequently lacked sufficient identifying information to associate requests with pending matters that had not yet been filed.

Creation of the Indigent Defense Office addressed this structural limitation by providing a consistent intake location capable of processing applications even when cases remained unfilled. While Denton County continues to experience occasional delays in receipt of applications from defendants released prior to transfer to county custody, the County has made substantial progress in addressing these issues through implementation of the county-wide magistrate-court coordination framework developed during 2024 and 2025.

Observations Regarding the Quality Supplement

Denton County also appreciates the Commission’s observations regarding attorney-performance indicators, including investigator utilization, client communication practices, and caseload considerations. We understand that these observations are part of a pilot monitoring effort and do not constitute findings affecting compliance status or funding eligibility.

The County remains committed to continued collaboration with the Commission and with local courts and attorneys in strengthening support for investigative resources, improving communication pathways, and ensuring effective representation for indigent defendants.



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Summary - Commitment to Continued Collaboration

Denton County values its longstanding working relationship with the Texas Indigent Defense Commission and appreciates the Commission's technical assistance and guidance in developing a centralized indigent-defense intake structure beginning in 2021. The improvements implemented since that time—including establishment of the Indigent Defense Office, consolidation of municipal-to-county intake pathways, and development of a coordinated magistrate-court referral structure—represent substantial progress toward strengthening appointment-of-counsel processes across the County.

Denton County accepts and understands the conclusions reached by the Commission, particularly insofar as the assessment appears to be based largely on information and case files examined during the initial implementation period of the Denton County Indigent Defense Office. Had it been possible to review applications or case activity from the past eighteen months, it is likely that the results would reflect substantial improvement in both intake reliability and appointment timing. Based on current practices, I am confident that defendants who are magistrates at, or delivered directly to, the custody of Denton County immediately following arrest are routinely and consistently interviewed, that applications for appointed counsel are obtained when requested, and that counsel is appointed—often concurrently with magistration and, when necessary, on weekends and holidays—not later than twenty-four hours from the time of magistration. Therefore, with our implemented changes, Denton County is in compliance with Texas law.

Denton County recognizes that challenges remain when magistration occurs in the various municipal detention facilities throughout the County, and the County continues to develop strategies and procedures to address any remaining deficiencies so as to provide consistent, timely, and high-quality indigent defense services to defendants, the public, and the County. We remain committed to continuing collaboration with the Commission as these processes mature and improve.

Thank you again for your time and assistance in conducting this review and for your continued support of indigent-defense systems throughout the State of Texas.

Respectfully Submitted,



Robin A. Ramsay
Associate Criminal Judge to the
District and County Criminal Courts
of Denton County, Texas

Email Copy to:

The Honorable Andy Eads, Denton County Judge, Andy.Eads@DentonCounty.Gov

The Honorable Judge Bruce McFarling, Bruce.McFarling@DentonCounty.Gov

The Honorable Judge Susan Piel, Susan.Piel@DentonCounty.Gov

Mary Inman, Director Denton County IDC, Mary.Inman@DentonCounty.Gov



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From: [Kimberly McCary](#)
To: [Joel Lieurance](#); [Andy Eads](#); [Bruce McFarling](#); [Susan Piel](#)
Cc: [Robin Ramsay](#); [Wesley Shackelford](#); [Scott Ehlers](#)
Subject: RE: Texas Indigent Defense Commission -- fiscal and policy monitoring reports are attached
Date: Wednesday, March 18, 2026 11:19:28 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[Letter to Parents 2023 legislative changes.doc](#)

On behalf of the Denton County Juvenile Court, please see responses to the concerns the Commission has raised as to the appointment of counsel in juvenile cases, to wit:

REQUIREMENT 4: APPOINT COUNSEL PROMPTLY (JUVENILES).

- Unless the court finds that the appointment of counsel is not feasible due to exigent circumstances, the court shall appoint counsel within a reasonable time before the first detention hearing is held to represent the child at that hearing.⁴⁰
- If the child was not detained, an attorney must be appointed on or before the fifth working day after the date the petition for adjudication, motion to modify, or discretionary transfer hearing was served on the child.⁴¹

As to Point One, every effort is being made to appoint attorneys on the basis of indigency or special circumstances for every initial detention hearing. If an attorney cannot be appointed prior to the hearing due to an exigent circumstance, an attorney is appointed immediately after the hearing. The child is then afforded a subsequent detention hearing upon request and as soon as the next business day.

As to Point Two, as the Commission noted, it is impossible for the Court to know when a child is served with Summons. Nonetheless, the Court has attempted to adhere to this requirement by enclosing what we refer to as a “parent letter” along with each Summons. See attached. This letter is admittedly overwrought as to the information contained therein. I am working to make it more clear that this Court stands ready every single day to conduct indigency hearings once we are advised that a child has been served with a Summons and a parent/guardian is seeking the appointment of counsel.

From: Joel Lieurance <JLieurance@tidc.texas.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2026 3:52 PM
To: Andy Eads <Andy.Eads@dentoncounty.gov>; Bruce McFarling <Bruce.McFarling@dentoncounty.gov>; Susan Piel <Susan.Piel@dentoncounty.gov>; Kimberly McCary <Kimberly.McCary@dentoncounty.gov>
Cc: Robin Ramsay <Robin.Ramsay@dentoncounty.gov>; Mary Inman <Mary.Inman@dentoncounty.gov>; Jeff May <Jeff.May@dentoncounty.gov>; IndigentDefense <IndigentDefense@dentoncounty.gov>; IndigentDefense <IndigentDefense@dentoncounty.gov>; Gale Rubio <Gale.Rubio@dentoncounty.gov>; Wesley Shackelford <WShackelford@tidc.texas.gov>; Scott Ehlers <SEhlers@tidc.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Texas Indigent Defense Commission -- fiscal and policy monitoring reports are attached

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Dear Judges,

The response to TIDC's policy monitoring report is **due on Tuesday March 23**. If you need additional time, we can grant a 60-day extension. **To request the extension, please respond to this email with a request.**

Thanks so much.

-Joel Lieurance

From: Joel Lieurance

Sent: Thursday, January 22, 2026 11:30 AM

To: andy.eads@dentoncounty.gov; bruce.mcfarling@dentoncounty.gov; susan.piel@dentoncounty.gov; kimberly.mccary@dentoncounty.gov

Cc: robin.ramsay@dentoncounty.gov; mary.inman@dentoncounty.gov; Jeff.May@dentoncounty.gov; indigentdefense@dentoncounty.gov; indigentdefense@dentoncounty.gov; Gale.Rubio@dentoncounty.gov

Subject: Texas Indigent Defense Commission -- fiscal and policy monitoring reports are attached

Dear Judges,

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission has completed its fiscal and policy monitoring reviews of Denton County's indigent defense procedures. I have attached the fiscal monitoring report, the policy monitoring report, and the quality supplement. Please distribute the reports appropriately. **The responses to the fiscal and policy monitoring report findings are due by Tuesday March 24, 2026.** No response is needed to the quality supplement, as it makes no findings.

We will present the reports in a zoom presentation at noon on Friday February 27 (meeting link: <https://txcourts.zoom.us/j/85491718535>). This presentation is a chance for us to explain the issues raised in the report and to take questions before you respond. Feel free to send the meeting link to any relevant stakeholders.

We thank you and all Denton County officials and staff for your dedication to indigent defense and for your hospitality to us in the review process. Please let us know if you have any thoughts, questions, or need assistance.

-Joel Lieurance

Senior Policy Monitor

Texas Indigent Defense Commission

512-773-0346



JUDGE KIMBERLY McCARY
COUNTY COURT AT LAW No. 1
DENTON, TEXAS

JUVENILE COURT ADMINISTRATOR
940-349-2526
COURT REPORTER
940-349-2522
COURT BAILIFF
940-349-2523

COUNTY COURT AT LAW NO. 1
210 S. WOODROW LANE.
DENTON, TEXAS 76205

To the Parents, and/or Conservators, and/or Guardians, and/or Custodians of the Respondent named in the attached Petition and/or Motion to Modify (hereinafter “the Respondent”):

Pursuant to §51.115 of the Texas Family Code (FC), each of you shall attend the hearing in the Respondent’s case unless (1) the Court waives your appearance, or (2) you do not reside in Texas, or (3) you are a parent of the Respondent but a managing conservator has been appointed for that Respondent and you are not a conservator of the Respondent.

A Petition and/or Motion to Modify has been filed against the Respondent. The Respondent must be represented by an attorney. Thus, you must employ an attorney for the Respondent and have that attorney present at the time and date of the Appearance Hearing referenced in the Summons. If you are claiming indigence and an inability to employ an attorney for the Respondent, you **MUST** appear (either in person or by remote technology) in the Juvenile Court within five working days after the date the Petition/Motion was served on the Respondent to show proof of your indigence. See court phone number and schedule below.

If you are seeking the appointment of an attorney for the Respondent, any and all persons responsible for the support of the Respondent must provide to the court current year-to-date paycheck stubs and the last three years’ tax returns and any and all written documentation to support your claim of indigency or disability.

NOTICE to Parents/Conservators/Custodians (hereinafter “adult[s]”): Under § 54.041 of the Texas Family Code (FC), the Court can, upon a finding of delinquency or a finding of a child in need of supervision, enter orders that affect adults, including ordering them to do any act reasonable and necessary for the welfare of the Respondent or to refrain from doing any act that is injurious to the welfare of the Respondent. These orders can require an adult to make financial restitution for damages or injuries resulting from the Respondent’s actions, and an adult could be ordered to attend a class such as a G.E.D., E.S.L., or parenting skills. These orders are enforceable by Civil Contempt proceedings, which could result in confinement in jail for a period not to exceed six (6) months and/or a fine up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

Court phone number: 940-349-2526. Call prior to appearing at an Indigency Hearing Appearance. We may be able to accommodate you via phone or remote technology. Indigency Hearing Appearance Times: Mondays through Fridays at 9:00 a.m. and Mondays through Thursdays at 1:30 p.m. for in person hearings or at other times, with permission of the Court, via phone or remote technology.

Cordially, Kimberly McCary, Judge Presiding