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The Texas Indigent Defense Commission Approves More Than \$1.8 Million in Funding to Strengthen Indigent Defense Systems and Address Attorney Shortages

AUSTIN, TX – At its August 21 Board Meeting, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) approved more than \$1.8 million in grant funding to strengthen indigent defense systems across Texas and help counties address the growing attorney shortage, particularly in rural areas. The funding approved by the Commission will equip counties with additional tools to respond to this crisis and help ensure people receive effective assistance of counsel.

“From 2014 to 2024, Texas saw a 29% decline in the number of attorneys handling indigent defense cases in rural counties,” said TIDC Executive Director Scott Ehlers. “That decline is making it difficult for many counties to provide counsel to indigent defendants and juveniles as required by the U.S. and Texas Constitutions.”

The Commission adopted the FY2027 Formula Grant Program budget of \$20.5 million to assist all counties in providing indigent defense services. The Commission also approved targeted grants focused on addressing the rural attorney shortage and expanding access to investigators and other critical resources, including:

- **\$639,997 to the Lone Star Defenders Office** to create the Brooks County Managed Assigned Counsel (MAC) Office and establish a two-year rural investigator pilot project serving Brooks and Jim Wells counties.
- **\$1 million to Potter County** for a two-year pilot project expanding services of the Panhandle MAC program to provide court-appointed legal representation in child protection cases in 21 counties: Armstrong, Bailey, Briscoe, Carson, Collingsworth, Childress, Dallam, Deaf Smith, Donley, Floyd, Gray, Hall, Hartley, Hemphill, Lipscomb, Motley, Oldham, Parmer, Roberts, Sherman and Wheeler counties.
- **\$150,000 to Trinity County** for extraordinary indigent defense costs incurred in the case of Jacob Patrick Chrones.
- **\$11,940 to the Texas Rio Grande Public Defender** to increase a Temporary Assistance for Rural Programs grant, bringing the revised total award to \$284,259.

The Commission also approved seven family protection representation (FPR) legislative proposals and 17 criminal/juvenile legislative proposals in preparation for the 90th Texas Legislature. The proposals include measures to improve representation and ensure counsel in child protection cases, as well as expanding TIDC’s ability to support counties and improve indigent defense systems.

“Improving public defense means making sure counties have the capacity to provide representation without unnecessary delays,” said Nueces County District Judge Missy Medary, TIDC Board Chair and Presiding Judge of the 5th Administrative Judicial Region. “When attorney shortages delay cases, the impact is felt by defendants, counties, and courts. These investments help counties strengthen their systems and improve the delivery of indigent defense services across Texas.”

About TIDC

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission funds, oversees, and improves indigent defense in each of the State’s 254 counties. TIDC is led by 14 commission members and 22 staff. To learn more, visit www.tidc.texas.gov.

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