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**TIDC Awards Dawson Award to Judge Roy B. Ferguson, Approves Legislative Recommendations, and Issues 2023 Data Report on Family Protection Representation**

AUSTIN – On Thursday at its August Board meeting, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) awarded Judge Roy B. Ferguson of the 394<sup>th</sup> District Court the Robert O. Dawson Indigent Defense Distinguished Service Award. The Dawson Award honors and acknowledges the late Professor Robert O. Dawson’s outstanding contributions and symbolizes his lasting impact on the Texas Fair Defense Act and TIDC. The award recognizes outstanding service by a group or an individual who has made an outstanding contribution improving the way Texas provides counsel for its poorest citizens accused of crimes. Judge Ferguson’s work has improved the quality of life for countless people in West Texas through guiding the creation of the Far West Texas Regional Public Defender in 2017, improving access to justice through remote Zoom court proceedings, and creating the online magistration portal and automated appointment system in his district, among other services focused on indigent clients.

“Judge Ferguson has been a trailblazer in the use of modern technology to increase participation in court proceedings and streamline appointment of counsel. He also led the way in the creation of the Far West Texas Regional Public Defender Office, which serves the needs of indigent defendants in a rural area that covers over 20,000 square miles. He is a deserving recipient of the Robert O. Dawson Award,” said Court of Criminal Appeals Presiding Judge and TIDC Board member, the Honorable Sharon Keller.

“I’m incredibly grateful to TIDC for this recognition, and for its unwavering support for the needs of Far West Texans. I’m proud of what we accomplished together in such a short period of time to ensure high quality representation for the poorest of our community,” said Judge Ferguson.

In preparation for the upcoming 89<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, TIDC’s Board approved 12 legislative recommendations to improve indigent defense practices, including:

- Provide clear authority for indigent defendants to have counsel at “magistration” hearings;
- Make staff in public defender offices and managed assigned counsel (MAC) programs home-address information confidential in tax-appraisal records;
- Clearly define the full range of services provided by MAC programs; and,
- Authorize licensed public defender investigators to access driver’s license photos in the Texas Department of Public Safety database.

TIDC’s Family Protection Representation (FPR) Data Report for 2023 is also now available at: [https://www.tidc.texas.gov/media/hx0jy2zl/2023-fpr-data-report\\_final.pdf](https://www.tidc.texas.gov/media/hx0jy2zl/2023-fpr-data-report_final.pdf). FPR is the court-appointed legal representation of children and indigent parents involved in cases alleging child abuse and neglect against a parent by the Texas Department of Family and Protection Services (DFPS). The report notes that Texas counties spent approximately \$62.8 million on FPR in FY2023; \$0 was spent by the state. TIDC is

requesting \$47.5 million in FY 2026-27 for county grants and technical assistance, and 5 staff to run the program.

“Counties, especially in rural Texas, are facing severe shortages of attorneys to represent children and parents in family protection representation cases, as well as attorneys to represent indigent defendants in criminal cases,” said TIDC Executive Director Scott Ehlers. “TIDC’s Legislative Appropriations Request seeks additional state funds to ensure that Texans’ constitutional and statutory right to counsel is fulfilled.”

The Board also approved a budget of \$56.3 million for the 2025 fiscal year to continue funding TIDC’s important work.

### **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 20 staff. To learn more, visit [www.tidc.texas.gov](http://www.tidc.texas.gov).

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