



CHAIR:
The Honorable Sharon Keller
Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal
Appeals

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS:
Honorable Sharon Keller
Honorable Nathan Hecht
Honorable John Whitmire
Honorable Brandon Creighton
Honorable Joseph "Joe" Moody
Honorable Reggie Smith
Honorable Sherry Radack
Honorable Vivian Torres

MEMBERS APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR:
Mr. Alex Bunin
Honorable Richard Evans
Mr. Jay Cohen
Honorable Missy Medary
Honorable Valerie Covey

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
Scott Ehlers

Report from the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) for the April 26, 2024 Texas Judicial Council Meeting

Introduction

This report primarily covers TIDC's work from October 1, 2023 — March 31, 2024. If you would like additional information, please contact Executive Director **Scott Ehlers**: (512) 936-6994 or SEhlers@TIDC.Texas.Gov.

TIDC Board and Committee Meetings



The TIDC Full Board met on [December 7](#) in Austin to consider new and pending Improvement Grant applications for the North Hill Country Regional Public Defender, Galveston County Misdemeanor Mental Health Public Defender, and the Dallas County Public Defender's Office. The Board also approved \$17.5 million in FY24 Formula Grants,

and received updates from the Policy, Improvement, and Family Protection Representation Teams.

The TIDC Policies and Standards (P&S) Committee met on [March 25](#) to discuss the complaints process, model forms, and Indigent Defense Plan templates.

The TIDC Board met the following week on [April 5](#) in Austin to discuss recommendations from the P&S Committee, approve recommendations from the Salary Workgroup (more information below), and for updates from the Improvement, Family



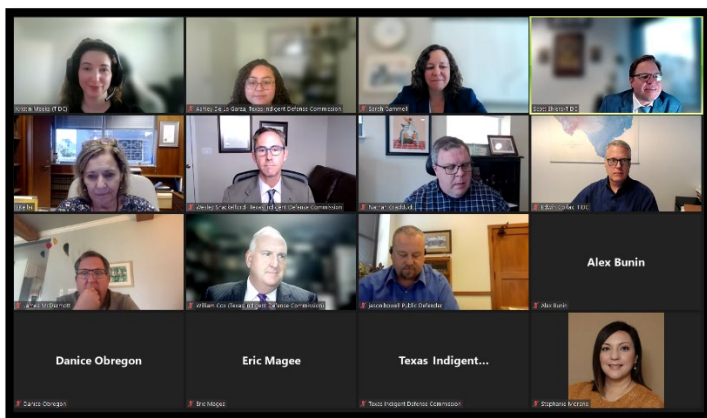
Protection Representation, Grants, and Research Teams. The next TIDC Board meeting will be in June.

In March, [Governor Greg Abbott](#) reappointed **Judge Missy Medary** to the Governing Board of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission. Judge Medary has served as the Presiding Judge of the Fifth Administrative Judicial Region since 2015 and is an appointed member by the Supreme Court to the Texas Judicial Council.

TIDC Data Update

In December and January, the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M and staff began gathering data for our two major research projects under way: the rural public defense needs assessment, requested by the Legislature, and research for the Salary Workgroup, requested by TIDC's Board.

Rural Public Defense Survey: This past session, the Legislature directed TIDC through a budget rider to assess public defender services and resources in rural areas. PPRI conducted that study as part of its contract with TIDC. PPRI collected over 500 survey responses and 49 qualitative interviews. They anticipate having initial findings ready to present to TIDC staff in April, with a full report and recommendations for TIDC's Board in June.



Salary Workgroup: The TIDC Board directed staff to establish the Salary Workgroup to examine salary levels at Texas public defense providers. TIDC's Research Director, **Dr. Sarah Gammell**, led the data collection effort. On October 12, the Salary Workgroup met for the first time to review current practices regarding

compensation in grant-funded public defender offices (PDOs) and managed assigned counsel offices (MACs) and to begin developing policy recommendations to TIDC's Board for evaluating requests for salary increases in grant applications. The Salary Workgroup met again March 25 to consider the data collected and recommendations to TIDC's Board. At the April 5 Board meeting, **Dr. Sarah Gammell** presented the data and Salary Workgroup recommendations to the Board, which were approved for grant decision-making in June.

Staff Update

In addition to its normal monitoring, grants administration, and data collection, TIDC staff has been involved in the following:

- In October, the TIDC Board appointed **Scott Ehlers** as its permanent Executive Director. He had been serving as Interim Executive Director, as well as Director of Public Defense Improvement. [Read full press release here.](#)
- TIDC welcomed Policy Analyst, **Natalie Corvington** in January. Natalie brings a wealth of knowledge and experience as a public defender who has worked on criminal, post-conviction, and family representation matters.
- TIDC held the [Indigent Defense Workshop](#) on October 25-26 at the Texas Association of Counties headquarters in Austin where attendees learned about recent developments in public defense and discussed opportunities to improve the state's indigent defense system. TIDC has been hosting this conference for many years for county stakeholders to learn about indigent defense best practices and innovations.
- TIDC published [Fair Defense Laws 2023 - 2025](#).
- The Family Protection Representation team partnered with the [Children's Commission](#) to produce [videos](#) where judges and attorneys describe what led them to practice in the child welfare legal field and the importance of high-quality legal representation for children and parents in child welfare cases.
- TIDC issued the final fiscal monitoring reports for [Travis County](#) and [Knox County](#).
- TIDC issued policy monitoring reports for [Kaufman](#), [Smith](#), Kendall, and Dallas Counties.





- TIDC staff traveled to Kendall, Maverick, Waller, Potter, Randall, Jim Wells, Willacy, Dawson, and Gaines Counties for fiscal or policy monitoring visits.

- TIDC staff hosted and presented at several workshops and trainings, including the Future Indigent Defense Leaders (FIDL) training 3.0 and 4.0 Class Returner Training in October; UT Law’s Public

Defense Day & [Public Service Expo](#); the [Gault Center's Youth Defender Leadership Summit](#); “[Answering the Call: Serving Your Community in Public Defense](#),” sponsored by the Deason Center at SMU Law and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; the South Texas Justice of the Peace and Constables Association Conference in Del Rio; the Texas Association of Court Administrators’ Annual Education Conference in Frisco on “Magistration and Prompt Appointment of Counsel;” the American Society of Criminology Conference in Philadelphia; the Justice Courts Training Center seminars for Justices of the Peace in Corpus Christi and Denton; [Strengthening the Sixth in Texas: Building the Defense Team Through Collaboration with Investigators](#) in Lubbock; a virtual [training on the FY25 Improvement Grant application](#); the [annual Operation Lone Star \(OLS\) conference](#) in Austin; and a [Family Protection Representation Panel at Texas Tech University School of Law](#).

- TIDC staff attended and hosted regularly held meetings this quarter, including the Indigent Defense Coordinators (IDC) meet-ups, the Gault Center's South Central Regional Advisory Board meeting, the Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council meetings, the Texas Defense Social Service Network meetings, the State Bar Juvenile Law meeting, State Bar Legal Services for the Poor in Criminal Matters meetings, Board meetings for the High Plains Regional Public Defender Office in Lubbock, the Regional Public Defender Office for Capital Cases Board meeting, the Judicial Commission on Mental Health meeting, the Texas Public Defense Leaders meetings, the MAC Leaders meetings, the Children’s Commission meetings, and the Collaborative Council meeting for the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health.

Indigent Defense in the Media, Reports, and Resources

The included public defense articles are for informational purposes and do not constitute TIDC's endorsement of a group or its views.

[First step taken to form new public defender office](#) (October)

[How a New Approach to Public Defense Is Overcoming Mass Incarceration](#) (October)

[2023 Youth Defender Resource Guide](#) (October)

[Gideon at 60: A Snapshot of State Public Defense Systems and Paths to System Reform](#) (November)

[Victoria County commissioners continue steps in creating public defender office](#) (December)

[Brazos County Public Defenders talk future growth during oversight meeting](#) (December)

[Damning Report on Texas Death Row Cases: 'The System Is Utterly Broken'](#) (December)

[60 years After Gideon v. Wainwright: Bridging the gap in access to justice](#) (December)

[Smith Co. judges discuss solutions to problems retaining indigent criminal defense attorneys](#) (January)

[Travis County to launch \\$23 million project to keep mentally ill from jail](#) (February)

[Texas gives \\$125 million to rural sheriffs and prosecutors for pay increases](#) (February)

[Victoria County commissioners appoint chief public defender](#) (March)

[Texas criminal appeals court takes man off death row over intellectual disability](#) (March)

[U.S. Supreme Court extends pause on SB4, Texas' immigration bill; new lawsuit challenges law](#) (March)

[Comm. Price To Discuss The Findings Of The Texas Indigent Defense Commission \(TIDC\) On First Degree And Capital Murder Charges In The Dallas Co. Court System](#) (March)

[Hiring freeze lifted for federal public defenders amid new funding](#) (March)

[Sixth Amendment Center Launches New Right to Counsel Interactive Website](#) (March)

[Texas Marks Third Anniversary of Operation Lone Star](#) (March)

[Appointed attorneys are 'doing less than the bare minimum' for capital murder defendants in Harris County, report says](#) (March)

[Bexar County's big decision: Funding social workers to curb repeat offenders](#) (March)

[CHEAP JUSTICE: The court-appointed system in Nueces County](#) (March)

[Travis County Aims to Allow Defenders at Bail Hearings](#) (March)