



Report from the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) for the June 13, 2025 Texas Judicial Council Meeting

CHAIR:
Honorable Missy Medary
Corpus Christi, Presiding Judge,
5th Administrative
Judicial Region of Texas

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS:
Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Honorable Brandon Creighton
Honorable Emily Miskel
Honorable Joseph "Joe" Moody
Honorable David J. Schenck
Honorable John Smithee

MEMBERS APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR:
Mr. James D. "Jim" Bethke
Mr. Alex Bunin
Mr. Jay Cohen
Honorable Valerie Covey
Honorable Richard Evans
Honorable Missy Medary
Honorable James R. "J.R." Woolley, Jr.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
Scott Ehlers

Introduction

This report primarily covers TIDC's work from September 1, 2024 — May 30, 2025. 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 6 to

consider and approve legislative proposals, approve a grant application related to family protection representation, approve a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Family and Protective Services to improve county access to federal Title IV-E reimbursement funds, received preliminary results from the FY24 Indigent



TIDC Board members and staff during the December Board Meeting.

Expenditure Reports (IDERs), and for updates from the Grants & Reporting Committee and the Policies & Standards Committee. The December meeting was **Presiding Judge Sharon Keller's** last TIDC Board meeting, after 23 years of service to TIDC. TIDC thanks Judge Keller, for her vision, passion, and thousands of hours she gave to TIDC over the years. Indigent defense in Texas is much better thanks to her dedication. After the meeting, current and form



Judge Keller, TIDC Vice Chair Jim Bethke & TIDC staff.

TIDC staff, Board members, and friends celebrated Judge Keller's years of service to the Commission with a reception and [video](#).

In January, TIDC welcomed three new board members, the **Honorable Jimmy Blacklock**, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, the **Honorable David Schenck**, Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, and **Representative John Smithee**, Chairman, House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee.

The [TIDC Full Board](#) met April 4 to discuss TIDC at the legislature, Operation Lone Star, and for updates from the Grants, Policy, Family Protection Representation, and Improvement teams. At the meeting, TIDC reconfigured the Board's committees. The Policies & Standards Committee members are **James Bethke**, **Valerie Covey**, **Richard Evans**, and the committee is chaired by **Alex Bunin**. **J.R. Woolley** is a member of the Grants & Reporting Committee, chaired by **Emily Miskel**, and has a vacant position that will be filled at the upcoming June meeting.



TIDC Board members and staff during the April Board Meeting.

The next TIDC Full Board meeting will be on June 27, 2025 in Austin.

TIDC at the Texas Legislature

Following is a summary of major legislation impacting TIDC, indigent defense, and family protection representation; staff testimony; and other TIDC activities at the Legislature:

TIDC Budget—Based on the conference committee report to [SB 1](#) and [HB 500](#), the Supplemental Appropriations bill (as passed by the House and Senate), TIDC's FY26-27 budget includes:

- **Total Budget:** \$165,240,414 total appropriation for FY26-27, \$41 million of which is for Operation Lone Star (OLS) representation.
- **Unspent OLS Funds for Non-OLS Purposes:** Budget rider providing Unexpended Budget (UB) authority to spend up to \$10 million in unexpended OLS funds in FY26-27

on “programs in rural counties, created on or before September 1, 2025 ... for programs with one-time expenses or temporary assistance.”

- **No Funds for OLS Public Defender Office Appeals:** A budget rider prohibits TIDC from using funds “for grants to public defender offices related to Operation Lone Star ... to fund appellate proceedings.”
- **Wharton & Matagorda Public Defender:** Budget rider directing TIDC to fully fund a public defender office for Wharton and Matagorda Counties for the first year of the program and two-thirds of eligible costs in subsequent years.
- **Terrell & Val Verde Public Defender:** Budget rider directing TIDC to use \$1 million to establish and operate a public defender office in Terrell and Val Verde Counties.
- **[HB 500](#):** Supplemental appropriation of \$5.1 million to make up for TIDC’s budget shortfall in the FY24-25 biennium.

Other Legislation and Resolutions

- **[SB 2111](#)** (Zaffirini/Moody), TIDC’s omnibus bill passed both chambers and was sent to the Governor on May 27.
- **[SB 1838](#)** (Zaffirini/Moody), TIDC’s family representation fee schedule bill has passed both chambers as of May 27.

- On March 18, **Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini** recognized the 62nd anniversary of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Gideon v. Wainwright* and celebrated the creation of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission with **[SR 264](#)**. Watch **[here](#)**. **Representative John Smithee**, Chairman of the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee



Dean Zaffirini and TIDC staff celebrate Gideon Day in the Texas Senate.

and Texas Indigent Defense Commission Board Member recognized the 62nd anniversary of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, and celebrated the creation of TIDC with **[HR 572](#)**. Watch **[here](#)**.

Staff Testimony



Wesley Shackelford testifying on HB 4944 at the House Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence Committee hearing.

On September 9, **Scott Ehlers** testified on TIDC's Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) at the Joint Budget Hearing for Article IV. On September 30, **Scott** testified on Operation Lone Star at the House Committee on [State Affairs hearing](#). On January 27, **Scott** testified on TIDC's Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) at the [Senate Finance Committee hearing](#) (Scott's testimony begins at 4:14:41). You can read TIDC's LAR [here](#) and view TIDC's LAR factsheet [here](#). On February 27, **Scott** testified on TIDC's Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) at the [House Appropriations \(S/C on Articles I, IV, & V on Courts\) Committee hearing](#) (Scott's testimony begins at 44:30). On March 4, **Scott** testified at the [House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee hearing](#) (Scott's testimony begins at 17:25). **Crystal Leff-Piñon** testified on [SB 1838](#) at the [Senate Committee on Jurisprudence hearing](#) (Crystal's testimony begins at 36:42). **Wesley Shackelford** testified as a resource witness on [HB 4944](#) at the [House Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence Committee hearing](#) (Wesley's testimony begins at 5:20:40). On April 14, **Scott** testified on [HB 4885](#) at the [House Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice hearing](#) (Scott's testimony begins at 10:25). **Crystal** testified on [HB 4870](#) at the [House Subcommittee on Family and Fiduciary Relationships hearing](#) (Crystal's testimony begins at 1:58:50). On April 15, **Scott** testified on [SB 2111](#), TIDC's omnibus bill, at the [Senate Criminal Justice Committee hearing](#) (Scott's testimony begins at 1:12:00). On April 28, **Crystal** testified on [HB 5551](#) at the [House Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence subcommittee on Family](#)



Scott Ehlers testifying on HB 4885 at the House Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice hearing.

[and Fiduciary Relationships](#) (Crystal's testimony begins at 1:36:25). **Scott** testified on [HB 4915](#) at the [House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee hearing](#) on April 29 (Scott's testimony begins at 1:03:15).

Other Activities at the Legislature

- TIDC hosted an educational forum for legislators, their staff, and the public at the Texas Capitol Auditorium on March 11. *Defending Liberty: Challenges and Solutions for Protecting the Right to Counsel in Texas* focused on the attorney shortage crisis in Texas for criminal indigent defense and



Scott Ehlers facilitating the Open Discussion at the TIDC Defending Liberty forum.

family protection representation, and how TIDC is working to address this problem and others through its LAR and other legislative proposals. Watch the full event [here](#).

Staff Update

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

- TIDC welcomed Policy Analyst, **Cody Huffman**, in November. Cody comes to TIDC from Smith & Bledsoe Family Law in Austin. He has a Bachelors in Broadcast Journalism with double minors in Writing and Spanish from Texas State University. He has a Juris Doctorate from St. Mary's University School of Law, where he was a part of the Criminal Justice Clinic as a student attorney, was a member of the nationally ranked Advocacy Team, and was a staff writer on *The Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review for Race and Social Justice*.

- TIDC’s summer interns are Meredith Charlton, Caroline Fay, Elizabeth Harding, and Kaitlyn Tully.
- TIDC’s [new data portal](#) for submitting Indigent Defense Expenditure Reports (IDER) and Attorney Practice Time Reports launched in September. There is an IDER for criminal/juvenile case expenses, and for family protection representation (CPS) case expenses. TIDC partnered with the Office of Court Administration to collect interpreter expense data as part of the IDER, which is required by 2023 legislation.
- In conjunction with the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (TCDLA), TIDC organized multiple Public Defense Days at law schools across the state that featured panelists from public defender offices, managed assigned counsel programs, private practitioners, and innocence projects. The participating law schools



TIDC staff at Public Defense Day at Texas Tech University School of Law.



TIDC Staff visiting the Harris County Office of Managed Assigned Counsel (MAC). L-R: Natalie Ware, Misd. Chief and Training Director, Wesley Shackelford, Ashley De La Garza, Kenneth Hardin, Executive Director, Debra Stewart, Natasha George, Joel Lieurance.

included Texas Tech University School of Law, Texas A&M Law, SMU Dedman School of Law, South Texas College of Law, Baylor University School of Law, the University of Houston Law Center,

- TIDC issued the final fiscal monitoring report for [Henderson](#) and [Erath](#) Counties.
- TIDC staff traveled to Culberson, Hudspeth, Brewster, Pecos, Presidio, Jeff Davis, Kendall, Orange, Harris, Cameron, Bastrop, Wharton, Victoria, Starr, and Jim Hogg, Brazoria, Galveston, Jefferson,

Childress, Maverick, Tom Green, and Taylor Counties for fiscal and/or policy monitoring visits and technical assistance.

- TIDC staff hosted and presented at several workshops and trainings, including: the 2024 Texas Center for the Judiciary Education Conference in San Antonio; multiple training webinars for counties to learn about TIDC’s new data website, how to complete the FY24 Adult Criminal and Juvenile Delinquency Indigent Defense Expenditure Report (IDER), the OCA’s Interpreter Report, the



TIDC staff at St. Mary's Wrongful Conviction Presentation and Panel.

FY24 Attorney Practice Time Report, and the FY24 Family Protection Representation IDER; meetings of TIDC’s Family Protection Representation Mentorship Program; the Sul Ross University’s legal career student outreach program; Texas Association of County Auditors Conference; the 2024 Child Welfare Judges Conference in Georgetown; the 102nd Annual County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas Conference in San Marcos; the American Society of Criminology 2024 Annual Meeting; the Government Innovation Texas 2024 Conference; Justice Beyond the Cities: The State of Rural Public Defense in Texas & TIDC’s LAR webinar; the Brazos County CPC2 Lunch-n-Learn; the FY26 Improvement Grant application training webinar; Meet the Employer Monday at St. Mary's Law School; TCDLA’s Mental Health & Juveniles Seminar in Houston; the Public Service Career Fair hosted by UT Law; the Texas Association of Counties’ Court Assistant Training Conference in Waco; the 2025 South Texas College of Law Houston (STCLH) Government and Public Interest Table Talk event; the Earl Carl Institute for Legal & Social Policy, Inc. at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law; TCDLA’s first Managed Assigned Counsel (MAC) training in Austin; a panel on family protection representation at Texas Tech University School of Law; the Oklahoma Public Service Pathways Fair at the Oklahoma Bar Center in Oklahoma City; and the St. Mary's Wrongful Conviction Presentation and Panel.

- TIDC staff attended regularly held meetings this quarter including the Children's Commission meetings, the Regional Public Defender Office for Capital Cases Board meetings, the Texas Managed Assigned Counsel Leaders and Public Defense Leaders meetings, the National Association of Counsel for Children's State Coordinators meeting, the High Plains Regional Public Defender's Office (HPRPDO) Board meeting, and the State Bar's Legal Services to the Poor in Criminal Matters Committee meetings.