



**TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION**  
**GRANTS & REPORTING COMMITTEE MEETING BOOK**  
**APPENDIX**

**I. PENDING IMPROVEMENT  
GRANT APPLICATIONS**

**II. SUPPLEMENTAL RFA  
APPLICATIONS**

**GRANTS AND REPORTING COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**AUGUST 22, 2025**  
**1:00 P.M.**



**2026 Atascosa County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**81st Judicial District Mental Health Court for Atascosa County**  
**Mental Health Public Defender Improvement**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Atascosa**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **17460014685**

Division To Administer Grant: **Tracy Barrera**

Program Title: **81st Judicial District Mental Health Court for Atascosa County**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$250,250.00**

Authorized Official: **Weldon P. Cude**

Financial Officer: **Tracy Barrera**

Program Director: **STEPHANIE R. BROWN**

Mailing Address: **1 Courthouse Circle; Suite 105; Jourdanton, TX 78026**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

This request is in pursuit of the goal of the Atascosa Area Advocate Public Defender's Office (AAPDO) to provide a specialized Public Defender (PD) and Social Worker (SW) to advocate on behalf of clients identified with mental health/addiction issues within the newly created 81st Judicial District Mental Health Court of Atascosa County. Upon successful completion, the PD and SW will assist the client to seek self-awareness, better relationships with family and friends, a positive outlook on life, job and educational opportunities, and becoming a contributing member of the community, while maintaining sobriety.

**c. Problem Statement**

Atascosa County has a considerable urgency to provide a supervised regimen of treatment and innovative case management to mentally ill/addicted clients with the goal of returning stable, productive, law-abiding citizens to society. Significant changes are needed to break the cycle of mental illness and recidivism and enhance public safety.

The purpose of this program is to address the challenge of Atascosa County individuals charged with crimes who also suffer from mental health/addiction issues. These individuals are often termed "frequent flyers" within the criminal justice system due to their constant involvement with the system. A consistent increase in the number of individuals with recognized mental health/addiction issues within the criminal justice system is a clear indication a dedicated skilled defender and social worker are necessary to the MH program and are necessary to seriously address the clients' mental health concerns and/or addiction to drugs/alcohol. Like so many other rural areas, our current system lacks a dedicated framework for effectively handling these individuals, resulting in costly, inefficient, and often inadequate responses to mental health crises within the justice system. The SW will work as a part of the defense team, and the attorney will include information developed by the SW in their advocacy.

The social and economic costs of the current system are high. Additionally, the lack of a coordinated mental health response exacerbates the challenges of reintegration into society, contributing to higher recidivism rates and increased long-term strain on both the legal and healthcare systems. Currently, while some efforts are made to connect individuals with mental health resources through minor crisis intervention, these efforts are fragmented and insufficient. Without a dedicated mental health division within the Public Defender's Office, there is no formal structure to ensure that individuals with mental health needs are consistently identified, treated, and supported throughout the legal process.

The pure gravity of the deficiency of services and resulting frequency of criminal justice involvement is revealed utilizing data collected from the Atascosa County Jail (ACJ) and the Camino Real Community Services (CRCS). Maximum capacity at the ACJ is 250 detainees. As with most

county detention centers of this size, the jail is often near capacity. From the years 2020 through 2024, the average number of detainees identified with behavior conditions was well above 100 individuals. The top three behavioral conditions identified per fiscal year were Bipolar Affective Disorder (BAD), Major Depression Defective Disorder (MDD) and Schizophrenia and related disorders. Of those three categories, (MDD) was the most identified. The average number of detainees identified with MDD was 228. In addition, most of these detainees are in need of some form of (psychotropic) drugs. However, the current contract with CRCS' jail services is for doctor provided services only, which include psychiatric evaluations and follow-ups. Unfortunately, CRCS is unable to provide outpatient services, such as medication, to those mental health clients within the jail. However, with the implementation of this program, the goal is to obtain a method to provide medications to the detainees via CRCS, similarly to the Bexar County program with the Center for Health Care Services.

Furthermore, over the 12-month period of 2024, Atascosa housed a total of 5,454 detainees with an annual population average of 183 detainees per month. During this year, of the three behavioral conditions identified, 86 were diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, 267 were identified with MDD and 127 were identified with Schizophrenia Disorder. Thus, 11% of the jailed population were identified as having mental health disorders, demonstrating the need for more targeted and integrated mental health services. Despite these significant needs, the county relied on incarceration, rather than proactive diversion or treatment options. Individuals with mental health disorders often face prolonged incarceration, delayed treatment, and recurring cycles of criminal justice involvement, leading to increased public spending on jail services, medical care, and crisis interventions. In 2025, to counter these deficiencies, the county created the 81<sup>st</sup> Judicial District Court Mental Health Specialty Court in Atascosa County. The MH PD and SW will advocate for clients to receive the medication and services needed in this mental health specialty court.

The proposed activity aims to establish a Mental Health Division within the Public Defender's Office to address these challenges, which will focus on providing comprehensive, coordinated legal representation for individuals with serious mental illness. This initiative will reduce jail overcrowding, decrease the reliance on emergency psychiatric interventions, and provide more effective, cost-efficient solutions for individuals in the criminal justice system.

#### **d. Objectives**

The objectives of the PD and the dedicated SW is to represent those clients identified with mental health/addiction issues within the newly created 81<sup>st</sup> Judicial District Mental Health Court of Atascosa County. If funding is granted the PD, and SW, who will work under the exclusive supervision of the AAPDO, will initially represent up to 40 clients whose criminal charges are the result of a mental health/addiction issue. The number of represented clients will increase as the program develops and expand to other counties within the AAPDO's participatory judicial districts (i.e., Karnes, Frio and Wilson Counties). Until the full caseload of mental health clients is achieved, the SW and PD will assist other PDs with their caseloads within those other jurisdictions. This advocacy comes with all privileges and confidentiality afforded all client representation, including HIPPA compliance. The matching costs should be allocated among the participating counties similarly to how the current matching program is allocated.

This minimum 12-month program is designed for adults facing non-violent felony convictions. Along with legal representation and early bond release, it will be the goal of the PD and SW to explain the roles of the PD and SW as dedicated client advocates, in addition to striving to obtain mental health and addiction treatment and social service coordination.

The allocation of funds will assist the AAPDO accomplish the established model of ensuring equal justice to those offenders with mental health issues, while guiding the offender into treatment and

away from the criminal justice system.

The PD and SW will protect the rights of the defendants, while attempting to ensure the client understand the status of their case, the options available to them, and the requirements of the MH specialty court program.

The defense team will provide representation, while cognizant of the unique needs of clients facing behavioral health challenges. The defense team will support their clients' successful completion of the 12-month program to resolve their case in the most beneficial way possible with strategies that will reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

The PD and SW will assist clients in utilizing the full benefits included within the program. The PD and SW will work together making decisions regarding the case and relevant treatment plans and will participate in the staff meeting or "staffing" held prior to court sessions and will work together to develop any additional services needed.

#### **e. Activities**

The role of the PD will be to provide legal advice and guidance appropriate to that client's circumstances. While recognizing each client/case is different, the amount of time needed to handle each matter is extremely time consuming due to the nature of the case and the client's mental health status. The PD's role is to review the file; participate in the intake interview; ensure the case is accurately investigated to hold the State to its burden of prosecution; and strive to make the client clearly understand what it means to be a part of the specialty court system. The PD will consistently strive to make the client cognizant of the status of the legal rights during each phase of the specialty court and will ensure that all rights are protected. The PD will advocate for the client first and foremost in this team-based approach.

The PD and SW will support the client's participation in each phase of the program. Throughout each phase, there is no minimum nor maximum time limit, and each phase is based solely on the needs of the client.

The PD and SW will advise the client of their options of the program, including the possibility of early termination of probation, continued treatment, and incentives and sanctions, depending upon the level of participation. In this manner, the development and maintenance of cooperative and collaborative working relationships should result in effective solutions to the mental health matters encountered.

The SW will interact with clients as needed to provide information and emotional and mental health support on behalf of, and as an extension of the public defender's office. The SW's role will involve assessing the needs of the client, making referrals to community resources and supporting follow-through with those linkages referrals, and providing additional support to assist in the successful completion of the specialty court program, and success within the court's system in general. The SW will also continue to seek resources outside of the specialty court program, as needed.

These goals can be achieved in the following manner:

1. Hire one full-time PD and one full-time SW who are fully dedicated to providing specialized and holistic legal representation to clients appointed to the AAAPDO. This establishes a dedicated framework that is currently missing.
2. During the Orientation Phase, coordinate with the local mental health authority, probation, the court, and district attorney to identify participants with probable serious mental illness.

3. Address overcrowding and incarceration costs by securing mental health bonds or specialty court diversion for eligible clients.
4. Deliver interdisciplinary training on mental health defense, restoration, and trauma-informed advocacy to PDO staff, local judges, probation, law enforcement, and the defense to build county-wide capacity to handle mental health cases effectively.
5. During the Prosocial and Adaptive Habilitation phases, the PD and SW will support the client's attendance with the treatment appointments as scheduled, which can improve continuity of care and lower recidivism.

#### **f. Evaluation**

With the assistance of the PD and SW, this program works to ensure those clients identified in need of specialty care are more likely to be diverted from jail to treatment. Relevant information will be reported to TIDC through quarterly progress reports.

1. Early Identification. Obtain confirmation that 100% of jail bookings are screened for serious mental illness. If there are no conflicts, immediate appointment to the AAAPDO should occur, and the mental health defender is assigned as the responsible attorney. HIPAA releases by clients and HIPAA-compliant exchanges of information will be obtained. The PD will explain to the client that individual sessions will occur, in addition to the necessity of the client's participation in the following: Group sessions - Attend process groups sessions each week; Recovery Support Groups- Required attendance to be determined by Treatment Team; Work to develop treatment plan with SW; The importance of completing treatment intake and completing recommended mental health screenings as needed. Screening and routing efficiency is reported at scheduled meetings.

2. Treatment and Engagement. Upon determining those clients eligible to receive bond relief and diversion, the PD will explain to the client that they shall: Complete Court Orientation; Complete probation intake; Develop Supervision Plan with SW; Be present when home visits are conducted once per month; Submit to urinalysis testing no less than twice per week; Submit to unannounced drug and alcohol testing; Abide by the 9:00 p.m.- 5:00 a.m. curfew; Abide by travel restrictions and not spend weekends or overnight absences from home without the express permission from the Court; and Avoid people, places and things that will impair recovery. Thus, decreasing the average length of pretrial incarceration.

3. Continuity of Care: The SW will ensure the client participates in: Development of treatment plan; Development of supervision plan; Completion of Court Orientation; Treatment plan developed with the SW; and ensure modifications occur as needed.

The PD will ensure the client understands program requirements.

#### **g. Future Funding**

Future funding is essential to allow Atascosa County the ability to improve indigent defense of the mentally ill and to meet constitutional norms. Atascosa County has the financial capability to meet

the fund matching requirements of the Mental Health Public Defender Improvement Grant Program but would not be able to make the described improvements in their indigent defense systems without a substantial infusion of state funding. AAAPDO recognizes that a dedicated Mental-Health Defense Division is essential to protecting the rights-and improving the clinical outcomes of justice-involved residents with serious mental illness.

As caseload capacity stabilizes, the AAAPDO will integrate the Mental-Health Division into a broader regional model, offering representation to other participating counties under interlocal agreements, spreading fixed costs and sustaining specialized staff. With this structured financial plan, AAAPDO can be successful as a permanent, fiscally sound component of the Counties' indigent-defense system.

#### **h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

The funds requested include all relevant numbers pertaining to the employment and salary of an additional Assistant Public Defender and a Social Worker to be incorporated into the previously established Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office. The Mental Health Public Defender and Social Worker are being requested to oversee the increase of new appointments on cases with an underlying mental health component. The Mental Health Public Defender will provide specialized legal representation to clients with mental health issues who are involved in the criminal justice system by advocating for clients' legal rights and needs, coordinating with mental health professionals, and developing individualized defense strategies. This work will ensure that clients receive appropriate treatment and support throughout the legal process.

The salaries for these positions are based on pay parity. The salary for the Mental Health Assistant Public Defender would be (\$102,000.00) and the Social Worker's salary would be (\$70,000.00).

Personnel Costs		\$237,045.00
FTE's	2.00	
Salary	\$172,000.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$65,045.00	
Travel and Training		\$2,000.00
Equipment		\$8,000.00
Supplies		\$3,205.00
Contract Services		\$0.00
Indirect		\$0.00
Total		\$250,250.00
Required County Match		
Total less County Match		\$250,250.00

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# Mental Health PDIP 2026 Budget Request

Account Number	Account Name	2026 Budget
	Salary, Admin	\$ 70,000.00
	Salary, Attorneys	\$ 102,000.00
	Retirement	\$ 15,394.00
	Insurance-Hospital	\$ 27,364.00
	Social Security	\$ 13,158.00
	Conference/Training Expense	\$ 2,000.00
	Dues/Memberships	\$ 1,000.00
	Miscellaneous	\$ 2,205.00
	Computers/Scanners/Printers	\$ 8,000.00
<b>AAAPDO Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$ 250,250.00</b>

Salary	\$ 172,000.00			
Fringe	\$ 65,045.00			
Travel & Training	\$ 2,000.00			
Equipment	\$ 8,000.00			
Supplies	\$ 3,205.00	County Match 20%	\$	50,050.00
Contract Services	\$ -	TIDC 80%	\$	200,200.00
	\$ 250,250.00	2026 Budget	\$	250,250.00



**2026 Hays County Improvement Grant Application Narrative  
Mental Health Team for Hays County Public Defenders Office  
Mental Health Public Defender Improvement**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Hays**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **097494884**

Division To Administer Grant: **Hays County Judge's Office**

Program Title: **Mental Health Team for Hays County Public Defenders Office**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$505,103.34**

Authorized Official: **Ruben Becerra**

Financial Officer: **Marisol Villarreal-Alonzo**

Program Director: **Stephen Michael Thomas**

Mailing Address: **712 S. Stagecoach Trail; Suite 1045; San Marcos, TX 78666**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

In 2023, Hays County launched a Public Defenders Office in collaboration with the Neighborhood Defender Service to provide legal representation for indigent defendants. This approach brings together attorneys, social workers, and support staff and handles a caseload where half of the clients require mental health support. There is a need to establish a dedicated mental health team to address complex mental health needs within the PDO. Establishing this team will fill a gap, ensuring individuals receive holistic care and resources to address underlying issues contributing to involvement in the legal system.

**c. Problem Statement**

Too many individuals with mental health challenges are swept into a criminal justice system that fails to provide the care they need. Currently, in Hays County, 94 clients (with 146 charges) have been flagged under Section 16.22 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, identifying mental health concerns in their cases. In addition, 15 clients (with 23 charges) are enrolled in Mental Health Court (MHC), which has a cap of 35 clients; meaning the existing Public Defenders Office (PDO) is already managing nearly half of the cases within this court. Expanded mental health defense services are needed as many more individuals with mental health challenges are still not receiving the full support they require. Many clients with untreated mental health issues may not be formally flagged, but they still face significant challenges that demand tailored legal representation and access to the appropriate mental health services.

These numbers only capture part of the issue. Many clients with serious mental health concerns go unnoticed by the system, their needs ignored while they cycle through an overburdened system ill-equipped to help. Clients who should receive mental health care are instead incarcerated, facing criminal charges without the support that could prevent their situation from worsening. The longer they remain in pretrial detention, the more their mental health deteriorates, creating a vicious cycle that doesn't just harm them, it undermines the effectiveness of the entire system.

Hays County has already recognized this gap. When seeking a public defense provider, the county was looking for a team capable of handling up to half of the cases with mental health considerations. This is a progressive step and speaks to the county's understanding that many individuals in the justice system are struggling with mental health issues. We have already begun addressing the complex needs of the most vulnerable clients and are ahead of the curve in recognizing that mental health is an integral part of the solution.

Now, with the county set to launch a new DWI/Drug Court, it's clear the mental health component will only grow. This makes it all the more critical that a specialized mental health defense team is fully equipped to expand our capacity and meet the demand of this new program. It's a compelling moment to build on the county's vision and create a comprehensive, interdisciplinary defense approach that ensures vulnerable clients don't just get justice, they get the support they need to regain stability.

**Description of Plan & Activities**

A Holistic, Specialized Approach to Mental Health Defense

Neighborhood Defender Services is Hays County's current provider for the Public Defenders Office. NDS's model of client-centered, holistic defense recognizes the whole person, not just the criminal charge. For clients with mental

health challenges, this means addressing not only their legal needs but their emotional, psychological, and social needs. Our approach is designed to ensure that clients facing the most complex mental health challenges get the focused, integrated care they deserve.

In Hays County, the current PDO team includes a Managing Attorney, two attorney teams, a social worker, client advocate, team administrator, and investigator. Currently, each attorney handles an average of 150 cases. However, we expect the mental health attorney to carry a lower caseload to account for the severity and complexity of mental health cases. This adjustment is essential to ensure that each client receives the focused, specialized attention they need.

The specialized mental health defense team will work in close collaboration, with each role complementing the others to provide comprehensive, client-centered care. While each member has specific responsibilities, they are all part of a coordinated effort to ensure that the client's mental health is considered throughout the legal process and that the client's well-being is prioritized at every step.

- The mental health attorney is the primary advocate for the client's legal rights, but their role goes beyond just legal defense. By integrating mental health considerations into the legal strategy, they ensure that the client's mental health needs are woven into every aspect of the defense, from pretrial motions to sentencing recommendations.
- The social worker is embedded within the defense team and serves as a critical advocate for the client's non-legal needs. They begin by assessing the client's mental health, housing, and social needs, ensuring that clients are connected to the appropriate treatment, housing, social support, and crisis intervention services. This allows clients to receive wraparound care, addressing the root causes of their involvement in the legal system.
- The investigator and case manager—a combined role—gathers critical information about the client's mental health history, supporting the attorney's defense strategy by providing essential context for mitigation. At the same time, they manage the administrative logistics of each case, ensuring that the case progresses smoothly, all necessary documentation is handled, and that no detail is overlooked.

Each member of the specialized mental health defense team plays a crucial role in ensuring that clients receive a holistic defense. The mental health attorney integrates mental health considerations into the legal strategy, ensuring the defense is aligned with the client's needs. The social worker provides essential support by connecting clients to the treatment and resources they need, while also guiding mitigation strategies. The investigator and case manager gathers critical mental health information and ensures smooth case progression by handling administrative tasks.

This collaborative, coordinated approach ensures that each client receives both the legal advocacy and mental health support necessary to address their immediate needs and set them on a path to long-term stability.

#### **d. Objectives**

Our program goals are directly aligned with our vision to meet the needs of the most vulnerable individuals in Hays County. By tracking both quantitative outcomes and qualitative changes in clients' lives, we will ensure that this program has a real impact. The goals are designed to drive success in both the short-term and the long-term, and they reflect our commitment to addressing both the immediate needs and sustained recovery of clients.

☛

Se Serve 127 felony case equivalents, focusing on clients with severe mental health issues or those in immediate crisis. These individuals are often at risk of being misunderstood or overlooked, and they need immediate intervention. Our team will provide legal defense informed by each client's unique mental health needs.

☛ Reduce charges through targeted mitigation strategies that focus on addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, often tied to untreated mental health issues. By securing reduced charges or dismissals, we help clients improve their chances for long-term recovery and stability.

☛ Connect clients to wraparound services, including housing, substance abuse treatment, and mental health care. These services will help stabilize clients' lives beyond the legal process, ensuring that they receive the resources and support they need to thrive in their communities.

☛ Ensure clients have access to mental health treatment, including securing diagnoses and facilitating treatment plans with mental health professionals. By connecting clients to appropriate care, we address the underlying issues contributing to their legal challenges.

☛ Expand mental health flagging across all cases, even for those clients not formally flagged, ensuring that we identify and support clients who require mental health intervention but may not be officially recognized. This will allow us to better track and address mental health in every case.

- Staff and participate in all mental health court dates, ensuring timely access to Mental Health Court and other specialty courts. This helps clients get the mental health support they need without unnecessary delays and ensures that they are diverted to the appropriate treatment whenever possible.

## **Why This Matters**

A holistic approach to defense, and particularly mental health defense, is about recognizing the full complexity of our clients' lives and meeting them where they are. Mental health is not an afterthought in this model. It is integral to how justice is defined. By embedding mental health care within the defense process, we're able to ensure that clients don't just receive a defense in court but the support they need to rebuild their lives. Through careful case management, community collaboration, and a client-centered approach, we can ensure that clients aren't just seen as cases but as people, each with their own unique challenges and pathways to stability.

## **Social Worker Role and Workflow**

The social worker will play a pivotal role in the holistic defense of our clients, integrating their deep knowledge of community resources and mental health support systems into the legal strategy. From the very beginning of a case, the social worker's work begins with assessment of each client's broader support needs, both personal and social. In collaboration with our current social worker, who has become embedded in the Hays County Homeless Coalition, this new mental health-focused social worker will help build and expand networks that provide our clients with the resources they need to stabilize their lives.

Mental health cases present layers of complexity that go beyond the legal charges at hand. The social worker will develop tailored mitigation plans, rooted in a deep understanding of the client's mental health history, personal circumstances, and community supports, all while making sure that these plans are as proactive and comprehensive as possible. Mitigation in mental health cases is often far more intense and nuanced than in traditional defense cases. This work includes identifying treatment options, securing family and community supports, and ensuring that all necessary treatment providers are fully informed and involved in the client's journey.

One of the most important aspects of the social worker's role is building out connections to resources; a process that requires research, outreach, and relationship-building with local service providers. This work is critical to ensuring that clients are not just connected to the right mental health care but also to resources that help them maintain stability once their legal case concludes. Whether it's a community housing program, a mental health clinic, or an organization focused on substance abuse treatment, the social worker works tirelessly to secure the appropriate services. Their role goes beyond identifying resources by building partnerships and expanding the network of support available to each client. The result is a robust support system that extends well beyond the courtroom, helping clients move toward stability while the case is in process and long after resolution.

Importantly, the social worker is also a critical member of the defense team, embedded in the process from day one. They participate in case staffings, collaborating with attorneys, client advocates, and investigators to ensure that each client's needs, mental, emotional, and legal, are being met in an integrated, coordinated way. The social worker is there to provide context and insight that informs the defense strategy and ensures that decisions are made in the best interest of the client, with full empathy and respect for their autonomy.

The social worker's role as client advocate is also vital. In many mental health cases, clients face stigma, misunderstanding, and at times, outright neglect. The social worker ensures that every decision made in the course of the case is accessible and empathetic, explaining legal decisions in a way that clients can understand and ensuring they have the autonomy to make informed decisions about their treatment and future.

In this workflow, the social worker is more than just a support role; they are integral to the success of the defense. They ensure that the client's humanity is centered in every phase of the case, from pretrial to sentencing. Whether working on mitigation strategies, identifying crisis management resources, or advocating within the court, the social worker plays a critical, irreplaceable role in moving our clients toward stability, justice, and a fair defense.

## **e. Activities**

### **START UP TASKS**

Neighborhood Defenders Service will create detailed job descriptions for an attorney, social worker, and investigator who will specialize in mental health cases. These will differ from existing positions as their sole focus will be to provide legal and social work support for clients with cases falling under Section 16.22 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, which indicates an "early identification of Defendant Suspected of Having Mental Illness or Intellectual Disability".

## ON-GOING TASKS

- Once hired, the mental health focused attorney will be a key public advocate for mental health awareness in the criminal justice system. The attorney will cultivate meaningful relationships with the mental health court and key providers, familiarize themselves with available treatment options appropriate to address specific mental health considerations, and establish connections with correctional personnel to ensure equitable treatment for clients with unique mental health needs. They will oversee the work of the social worker and investigator to ensure efforts are coordinated, client-centered, and collaborative
- The mental health social worker will focus on building impactful partnerships and collaborations, expanding a network of support that extends far beyond the courtroom, empowering clients to address their mental health needs and work towards positive outcomes. The social worker serves as an ongoing resource for clients even after the court case is resolved, providing continued support and stability to the community.
- The investigator will play a pivotal role in the identification and acquisition of crucial evidence, conducting thorough research, drafting motions, negotiating plea agreements, and preparing other essential documentation vital to the case. Their contributions are instrumental in securing a fair and equitable resolution that takes into account mental health considerations unique to each client, ensuring a just outcome.
- Through holistic case management, the program will serve 127 felony case equivalents, focusing on clients with severe mental health issues or those in immediate crisis in one year. This will include representation, advocacy, connection to resources, and assistance in navigating the criminal justice system.

During the project period, the mental health team will have a focus on building connections with resources in the community to better serve clients such as community/advocacy groups and services.

## f. Evaluation

The comprehensive data collection and case management system used by the Hays County PDO, defenderData, will be essential in monitoring the success of our mental health services. Expanding our tracking system to capture both formally flagged and unflagged mental health cases will give us a more accurate picture of the full scope of mental health challenges within our caseload. Specifically, we will monitor:

- Disposition type-jail time, community supervision, number of days in jail before disposition, and total length of time before disposition.
- Competency findings-including the length of stay in jail for clients found incompetent and the time before restoration.
- Mental health flagging-including new categories for clients not formally labeled but still requiring mental health intervention.
- Percentage of clients accepted into the Mental Health Court and other specialty courts.
- Reduction in custody days-monitoring the number of days clients spend in jail while awaiting treatment or disposition.
- Referrals to wraparound services-tracking the number of clients referred to mental health providers, housing programs, substance abuse treatment, and social support services. We will monitor how many clients successfully engage with these services, which are critical to long-term stability and rehabilitation.

This data will enable us to assess program impact and adjust strategies to ensure the best outcomes for our clients. By focusing on both quantitative metrics and qualitative case outcomes, we can advocate for systemic improvements and demonstrate the value of a specialized mental health defense team.

## g. Future Funding

Hays County plans to reapply for funding over the four year eligible grant period with matching funds being built into the Public Defenders Office budget. Once the four year period is up, the county budget will absorb the entirety of the project.

## h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

All funds will be used to pay Neighborhood Defender Service and are listed in Contract Services. Attached to the application is a PDF document with a breakdown of funds within contractual services.

Hays County is requesting \$7,500 in indirect costs to cover costs associated with subrecipient monitoring.

Personnel Costs	\$0.00
FTE's	
Salary	
Fringe Benefits	

Travel and Training	
Equipment	
Supplies	
Contract Services	\$505,103.34
Indirect	\$7,500.00
Total	\$512,603.34
Required County Match	\$122,340.47
Total less County Match	\$390,262.87

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**Personnel**

Title	FTE	Salary	Cost to Hays FY26
Staff Attorney	1	\$ 83,000.00	\$ 87,150.00
Social Worker	1	\$ 84,460.00	\$ 88,683.00
Investigator	1	\$ 79,310.00	\$ 83,275.50
Total Salary	3		\$ 259,108.50
Fringe @ 43%			\$ 111,416.66
Total Personnel			\$ 370,525.16

**OTPS**

Contract Services	\$ 27,918.56
Supplies	\$ 52,607.11
Travel and Training	\$ 7,000.00
Equipment Purchases	\$ 10,000.00
Total OTPS	\$ 97,525.67
Total Expenses	\$ 468,050.83
Indirect 10% Pers.	\$ 37,052.52
	<b>\$ 505,103.34</b>

**2026 Medina County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**FY26 Mental Health Improvement Grant Application**  
**Mental Health Public Defender Improvement**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Bandera, Gillespie, Kendall, Kerr, Medina**  
Fiscal Year: **2026**  
State Payee Identification Number: **TX**  
Division To Administer Grant: **Medina County Auditor's Office**  
Program Title: **FY26 Mental Health Improvement Grant Application**  
Requested Grant Amount: **\$362,549.00**  
Authorized Official: **Beverly Ham**  
Financial Officer: **Sarah Saathoff**  
Program Director: **Karli Kennell**  
Mailing Address: **1300 Avenue M; Hondo, TX 78861-1218**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

The HCRPDO hopes to hire a licensed social worker and four case managers to help clients receive services to break the pattern of recidivism, improve their defense, further develop mitigating evidence, help mentally ill clients to follow bond conditions, help negotiate better plea agreements due to mitigating evidence and treatment programs, as well as reducing time in jail. The case managers will seek out appropriate programs and treatments in all the counties to assist with mental health forms, treatments, and placements after release and during the pendency of the case. This will result in financial savings and further it is basic humanity. Our clients not only are suffering because they are in the system, but also because they are mentally ill and lack the necessary skills to seek out the medical care they deserve.

**c. Problem Statement**

During the four years of operation of the Hill Country Regional Public Defender Office's (HCRPDO) existence, there has been overwhelming evidence of the lack of mental health resources to assist indigent clients in receiving the mental health treatment they need before, throughout, and after leaving the criminal justice system.

According to the most recent data, that was gathered in 2021 by Texas Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (TLETS), 5% of the Texas population has a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) diagnosis. On top of this, 39% of people booked into Texas county jails have been in contact with the public mental health system in the last three years. Further, 72% of people with a SMI diagnosis, who are in jail, have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder, based on national estimates. Also based on national estimates, 92% of people with a SMI diagnosis in jail have had a serious trauma.

Along with this startling data, a study in Florida shows that homeless people with a SMI diagnosis have an average of sixteen interactions with mental health treatment before they are willing to accept any form of help.

Since 2021, according to the Hill Country Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (MHDD), the suicide data shows that 130 people in the Hill Country catchment area died of suicide. In the Medina County Sheriff's office, there are two mental health officers and the county averages twenty mental health calls per month and, on average, only two people of those twenty are transferred to crisis facilities. During the time-period of June 2023 to November 2023, none of these calls were handled by the specialized officers.

Between 1985 and 2020, the population of all Texas correctional facilities increased by 251%. The percentage population of people with a SMI diagnosis has increased accordingly.

Because of these numbers, inevitably, people diagnosed with a SMI diagnosis end up in the criminal justice system. This grant would provide the opportunity for earlier identification and aid to the clients that are appointed to the HCRPDO. This would allow for screenings and for informed decision-making around a client's care in jail and out. Further, it would enable the attorneys of the HCRPDO to seek bonds that allow for post-release programs that route people into community-based care programs instead of extended jail stays.

Frighteningly, once a client is found incompetent, the wait for treatment is often more than a year. The current average wait time for an inmate from arrest to commitment to the State Hospital, according to Texas Health and Human Services, is 528 days for a client in a non-maximum-security unit and 389 days for someone in a maximum-

security unit. Meaning that during this time, the client is receiving limited mental health care treatment in the jail. Jail rules often restrict the medications and behavioral therapy clients may receive. Because of their mental and behavioral complications, they often end up in a solitary cell to protect themselves and the jail population. The limited beds in State Hospitals cause a true period of suffering for clients and prevents any progress, and sometimes worsens, the mental health issues.

Also, if the mental or behavioral health issue is identified early, attorneys and case managers could seek to find diversionary programs that allow the criminal charges to be resolved while taking care of the client's behavioral and mental health needs in the community. Criminal charges could be used as leverage to encourage clients to actively participate in treatment by finding alternatives to long prison sentences such as deferred adjudication or probation for people who comply with mental health treatment.

If this persistent problem is not addressed, the difficulties are going to grow, costing the counties millions of dollars in jail costs and mental health treatment, as well as continuing to allow those with serious mental illnesses to suffer and pose a threat to our communities. This grant could be a start in resolving these issues. It would provide a resource immediately upon arrest to begin helping our most vulnerable citizens, help our office to provide even better defense services and mitigation evidence while protecting the rest of the community and decreasing costs to the counties. This is an issue of care for humanity, improvement in criminal defense, and financial responsibility.

#### **d. Objectives**

The goals of this grant are simple but will require a plan and work to achieve. The goals are as follows:

1. Assist in getting treatment to clients who have nowhere to turn for assistance and end up in the criminal justice system due to mental and behavioral health issues by assisting them in finding placements, getting more mitigating evidence, and helping them receive treatment:
  - a. This will be measurable by how many mentally-ill people receive assistance either during their criminal justice process and introduction to the mental health community to enable continued care after our representation.
  - b. Within the first twelve months of the grant, the goal will be to locate programs and direct at least half of our mentally-ill clients to aid and to work to increase the mitigating evidence we can get from this process to help reduce their sentences. While the goal is to direct the clients to aid, we will also work to get them to accept the help.
  - c. Quarterly reports will be provided to show how many clients with a serious mental or behavioral diagnosis are getting assistance, how many programs people have started, and how many were able to get improved results to their cases due to the mental health treatment.
  - d. These objectives are consistent in trying to get clients out of the criminal justice system and motivate them to receive the treatment they need to become healthier, less of a risk to society, and less likely to become recidivists.
2. Reduce the delay in getting treatment to incarcerated people with mental illness:
  - a. By collaboration with the jails, magistrates, and pre-trial services to quickly identify the inmates who are suffering.
  - b. By determining which inmates are suffering with mental health issues and getting them the help they need.
  - c. By getting all clients the medication and treatment needed during the criminal justice process.
  - d. By measuring how many clients received reduced sentences either due to mitigating evidence or by participating in programs.
  - e. Also, by determining how many people who were released on bond were assisted in being successful on bond by this program.
  - f. As well as measuring the number of inmates who are able to get out of jail and into community-based programs.
  - g. Also, the quarterly report the HCRPDO prepares will indicate how many inmates with mental and behavioral diagnoses were released on bond or received in-custody treatment or medications that they would not have received otherwise.
  - h. This is consistent in reducing the cost of housing the clients with mental health diagnoses and encouraging treatment as an alternative to incarceration.



3. Reduce the delay in getting clients who were found incompetent to treatment instead of remaining in jail:
  - a. By reducing the shockingly long wait time for treatment for incompetent clients, the social worker and case managers would look for programs and alternatives to the State Hospital for treatment as well as monitoring and assisting in their treatment if they remain in custody hoping to allow them to regain competency.
  - b. Also count the number of clients who have insurance and are willing to attempt to regain competency through private means facilitated by this program.
  - c. Determining the success of this would simply require an evaluation of waiting time for treatment once incompetency is determined.
  - d. This will also be reported in the same quarterly report.
  - e. As well as being a more humane way of handling this situation, this will also reduce the jail costs for housing and treating the mentally ill.

#### **e. Activities**

Once the grant is received, the HCRPDO hopes to utilize the social worker and case managers to interview the flagged clients and determine their history and diagnosis, if there is any. After this, the HCRPDO will work as a team, with the mental health staff, researching options to see what help they can provide.

1. These tasks will be accomplished as follows:

- a. A client is flagged by the jail, the attorney, magistrate, and/or pre-trial as a person who is potentially suffering with a mental or behavioral illness.
  - b. One of the case managers or the social worker will visit the client in jail or in the office and prepare a HIPAA release and a Mental Health Intake form (attached as Attachment A).
  - c. After this meeting, the mental health staff will begin to research different community-based organizations that might fit this client and will subpoena the records of any mental health treatment this client received before this time.
  - d. Once an appropriate program is located, and if the client is willing to participate (the mental health team will explain the program to the client and try to positively influence them to participate), the attorney will discuss options with the District or County Attorney's office. These options could include release on bail with bond conditions requiring treatment, use of the criminal charge as leverage to convince the client to participate actively in treatment, discussion of different forms of in-jail treatment, and discussions of alternatives to prison if the client will go into treatment and stay in it, possibly as a condition of probation or after several extended resets.
  - e. If the client does receive a sentence that is custodial, the mental health team will help the client with options upon release and will discuss with the jail the mental health history to assure that the client is receiving appropriate medication and/or treatment as seen fit by medical doctors.
2. These programs will work together with Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD), pre-trial services, and with MHDD to try to find treatment programs within MHDD or community-based programs to work hand-in-hand with probation and pre-trial to provide help for these clients. The existing programs will be essential in assisting with locating and encouraging participation in programs.

- a. In order to start-up this program, the mental health team will reach out, through community resources and locate different programs that are available. Because of the size of the region we represent, the four assistants to the social worker will be assigned regions to help divide and conquer the area. As an office, the HCRPDO already located several programs that are helpful; however, there are more programs and there is more help within the community. Having someone dedicated to finding these programs will help a great deal.
- b. An employee in this program will be meeting with and assisting clients suffering with a serious mental illness or behavioral issue to find treatment options that will help prevent recidivism, reduce sentences, enable success on probation and bond thus reducing costs to the counties and enabling the client to hopefully receive treatment that will help with their future success.
- c. With any amount of success in these endeavors, jail costs will decrease because incarcerations will be shorter, recidivism will decrease, people will suffer less, and there will be less clients requiring specialized care in the jails.
- d. Most importantly, these programs will enable our attorneys to provide an even stronger and more vigorous defense for our clients. Hopefully, this will result in less long prison sentences, less probation violations, and less bond forfeitures.
- e. This will be a program primarily implemented by the new staff.

#### **f. Evaluation**

The mental health team will provide quarterly reports quantifying the work that they completed.

- 1. The form will count how many people were contacted during the quarter.
- 2. Also, it will show how many people accepted help and were able to either get out of jail and into a program or receive community-based help in the jail. This will show how many were released on bond and how many had their pleas adjusted because of mental health treatment. Also, this will show how many people are waiting on a commitment because of incompetency findings.
- 3. All of these will be quantifiable. They will be counted and the numbers reported on the quarterly report. The quantifiable numbers will include how many people are receiving assistance, how many people have been placed in a program, how many people are receiving treatment, how many sentences were reduced due to this program, and how long people are waiting for a commitment or treatment to regain competency.
- 4. These reports will be quarterly but will provide statistics for each month in the quarter.
- 5. Data will be collected from the courts, the jails, CSCD, pre-trial services, and from the HCRPDO's case management system.
- 6. Success will be determined by improvement in these numbers. If there is a continued increase in treatment options and people being admitted to treatment programs as well as less time in jail and less time waiting for a bed once found incompetent, success will be clear.
- 7. This will all be recorded through the quarterly reports where the trends will be clear. An annual report will be provided with graphs showing progressions throughout the year.

8. Every quarter, when the reports are produced, they will be discussed with the Chief Public Defender to see how progress is going as well as to see if there are changes that need to be made to achieve these goals.

#### **g. Future Funding**

The establishment of this Mental Health Team into the Hill Country Regional Public Defender Office fits into the counties' long-term indigent defense financial systems as it is a cost-effective way of providing high quality representation for mentally ill indigent defendants. Sustaining this office is both financially feasible and in the best interest of the counties thanks to TIDC's 2/3 sustainability funding.

A separate detailed budget has been provided with this application.

#### **h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

##### **Salary:**

The salaries will be \$73,500 maximum for the licensed social worker and \$52,500 maximum for 4 case managers, for a total of \$283,500.

##### **Travel & Training:**

Travel and Training will be provided at a budgeted amount of \$7,500.

##### **Additional Costs:**

The additional costs for this program will be budgeted at \$162,186. This includes fringe benefits, contracts, office supplies, indirect costs, and start-up expenses.

Personnel Costs		\$383,226.00
FTE's	5.00	
Salary	\$283,500.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$99,726.00	
Travel and Training		\$7,500.00
Equipment		\$30,000.00
Supplies		\$4,880.00
Contract Services		\$6,000.00
Indirect		\$21,580.00
Total		\$453,186.00
Required County Match		\$90,637.00
Total less County Match		\$362,549.00

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# FY 25-26 TIDC Improvement Grant

## Mental Health Program for the HCRPDO

Account title	FY24-25 Budget	Budget Notes
Other Salary	283,500	1 Licensed Social Worker and 4 Case Managers
<b>Salary totals</b>	<b>283,500</b>	

FICA	21,688	7.65%
Insurance	50,000	\$10,000 per employee
Retirement	23,502	8.2900%
Workers Comp	1,338	0.4720%
Unemployment	198	0.0700%
Cell Phone Allowance	3,000	5 employees*\$50/month*12 months
<b>Fringe Totals</b>	<b>99,726</b>	<b>Fringe subtotal</b>
<b>Salary &amp; Fringe</b>	<b>383,226</b>	<b>Salary &amp; Fringe totals</b>

Travel	5,000	
Training	2,500	
<b>Travel &amp; Training</b>	<b>7,500</b>	

Office Supplies	1,000	
General Supplies	500	
Legal	500	DSM
Telephone	2,880	G3 \$45/mth*12 mths + Zulty's \$3*5*12mths
<b>Supplies totals</b>	<b>4,880</b>	

Contracts	6,000	
<b>Contract Services</b>	<b>6,000</b>	

Indirect Cost	21,580	4.8%
<b>Start Up Expenses</b>	<b>30,000</b>	5x laptops, furniture, etc
<b>Total Program Budget</b>	<b>453,186</b>	

<b>TIDC Grant</b>	<b>362,549</b>	80%
<b>5 County Match</b>	<b>90,637</b>	20.00%
	<b>453,186</b>	

<b>Expenses - Salary - Travel &amp; Training</b>	<b>162,186</b>
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Mental Health HCRPDO Salary		
Licensed Social Worker	\$	73,500.00
Case Manager	\$	52,500.00
Case Manager	\$	52,500.00
Case Manager	\$	52,500.00
Case Manager	\$	52,500.00
<b>total Salary</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>283,500.00</b>

**2026 Polk County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**Public Defenders' Office for Polk County**  
**Multi-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Polk**  
Fiscal Year: **2026**  
State Payee Identification Number: **746001621**  
Division To Administer Grant: **Commissioners Court**  
Program Title: **Public Defenders' Office for Polk County**  
Requested Grant Amount: **\$760,607.09**  
Authorized Official: **Sydney Murphy**  
Financial Officer: **Louis Ploth**  
Program Director: **Sydney Murphy**  
Mailing Address: **410 E Church St Ste E; Livingston, TX 77351**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

This program will establish a dedicated Public Defender's Office to ensure timely, competent legal representation for indigent defendants. By hiring three full-time defense attorneys and implementing case-tracking procedures, the office will reduce pre-trial incarceration, improve defense quality, and increase accountability. The system will monitor key metrics from booking to resolution to evaluate effectiveness. These reforms address systemic failures in the current indigent defense wheel, where insufficient oversight and attorney shortages compromise justice. Funded through the existing county budget, this initiative will protect the county from legal liability and uphold defendants' constitutional right to effective counsel.

**c. Problem Statement**

The indigent defense system is failing to provide effective legal representation. Attorneys assigned through the indigent defense wheel are not consistently fulfilling their statutory duties, contributing to prolonged pre-trial incarceration and inadequate defense for indigent defendants. Court staff hesitate to enforce accountability for fear of mass resignations, which would leave the county without sufficient defense attorneys, due to a limited supply of local attorneys. In this environment, inadequate attorneys continue to receive appointments simply to maintain numbers on the wheel. Personal relationships between parties further complicate oversight, as judges may be reluctant to sanction or remove attorneys with whom they have longstanding ties. The absence of effective checks and balances leads to finger pointing rather than solutions, while defendants bear the consequences.

There are 99 people currently imprisoned in Louisiana, which makes it difficult for friends and family. It also makes communication with attorneys difficult due to facility restrictions. Each court appearance involves a six-hour drive time plus pickup time round trip on an already stretched-thin staff. People are languishing in the jail. This office receives calls about people who have been in jail for months and have not yet seen their attorney. When invited to a meeting about applying for this grant, Sheriff Byron Lyons replied, "Sounds like a great idea. We are willing to help in this, to ease our overcrowding."

**d. Objectives**

Establish a public defender's office to provide prompt, effective legal representation for indigent defendants, improving defense quality and accountability. The office will initially handle approximately 50% of indigent cases, supplementing rather than replacing the existing attorney appointment wheel. This ensures continued income opportunities for private attorneys and preserves the wheel's capacity to manage codefendant conflicts and overflow cases. Once a procedure is established, additional staff can be added to handle increased caseload. We plan to create this office on our own but are in ongoing discussions with at least two other counties in our region who have expressed possible interest in joining us after the program is up and running. One of the counties in our district had other pressing budget issues, so we told them they were welcome to join us in the future, after we have completed the startup and laid the foundation.

Appoint an Oversight board and schedule quarterly meetings to facilitate stakeholder communication.

Implement a case management and data tracking system to monitor attorney performance and case timelines from booking to resolution. These efforts aim to reform a system plagued by inconsistent representation, limited oversight, and prolonged pretrial incarceration.

Track data and share with district stakeholders to increase interest and participation in program.

#### e. Activities

1. Furnish an office and hire chief public defender, who will staff (three lawyers, one investigator, and an admin/paralegal) solely dedicated to handling the burden of indigent criminal defense in a prompt and effective manner, ensuring staff are designated to provide representation. 2. Provide necessary software and subscriptions to facilitate full-time focus on this area of practice, learning by both training and experience the details that can make a difference in an effective defense. 3. Track measurable data and a timeline for each case from booking to resolution. 4. Devise and implement a process for tracking status of cases and assignments, tracking key statistics to measure effectiveness of office and policies from jail to court.

#### f. Evaluation

Annual report of measurable statistics, compared to before program and each following year.(i.e. Time from booking to 1st appointment with attorney, days in jail, resolution time) Working together with the jail and the courts to create a more efficient system should decrease jail population, attorney hours, and the amount of time from request to first attorney visit. Measurable differences are expected to improve the overall process.

#### g. Future Funding

The county currently funds indigent defense through appointment of attorneys and attorney fees line item. The development of an office dedicated to providing public defenders provides protection from lawsuits and reassurance that defendants are receiving the defense to which they are entitled by law. This is seen as a priority and will become part of the annual budget. According to TIDC's published caseload guidelines, the three staff attorneys will cover approximately 50% of the caseload. The first year, the county will fund \$455,000, half of our current Attorney Fees line item, in addition to the 20% match.

#### h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

\*Please see uploaded Budget document, Salary spreadsheet, and Equipment, Supplies, Contract Services information.

Salaries are aligned with current positions at the District Attorney's office. For example, the lead attorney will have the same salary as the first chair at the District Attorney's office.

<u>Class/Title</u>	<u>Salary</u>	<u>Benefits</u>	<u>Total</u>
Chief PubDefender	\$145,000.00	\$32,438.36	\$177,438.36
Felony Attorney	\$125,000.00	\$29,530.00	\$154,530.00
Misd. Attorney	\$91,400.00	\$24,645.00	\$116,045.00
Misd. Attorney	\$91,400.00	\$24,645.00	\$116,045.00
Chief Investigator	\$72,892.00	\$24,588.00	\$97,480.00
<u>SrTrial Assoc./Para.</u>	<u>\$64,762.00</u>	<u>\$21,344.00</u>	<u>\$86,106.00</u>
6 Total FTEs	\$590,454.00	\$157,190.36	\$747,644.36

These rates are more than the 25th percentile in Table 9: Salary Ranges by Position Type as of April 2024. The Felony Attorney is almost to the 75th percentile, and the Paralegal is above the 75th percentile amount.

We have attempted to account for items For Travel and Training, the attorneys will attend Rusty Duncan, including funds for hotel, mileage, and meals. The same amount is allotted for the investigator and office person to attend suitable training. In addition, there is money for mileage to attend meetings with other counties or at the Capitol as needed in the establishment of the office.

Equipment costs include \$63,000.00 for a vehicle outfitted with radio and fuel costs for the inspector. This cost is based on the vehicle acquired for the Investigator at the District Attorney's office. The remaining \$26,000.00 includes furniture for offices, reception area, a conference room, and a workroom.

Supplies contains costs for cell phones for the attorneys and inspector, office supplies, trial supplies, and a computer and laptop for each full-time employee.

Contract services such as office phones, including internet, copier/printer lease, Office software licensing, online research fees and subscriptions, dues are listed as well as expert witness fees.

Indirect costs include utilities, panic buttons, cleaning and renovation of space, and insurance.

Personnel Costs		\$747,644.36
FTE's	6.00	
Salary	\$590,454.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$157,190.36	
Travel and Training		\$7,500.00
Equipment		\$93,164.50
Supplies		\$29,700.00
Contract Services		\$65,750.00
Indirect		\$7,000.00
Total		\$950,758.86
Required County Match		\$190,151.77
Total less County Match		\$760,607.09

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	Price	Fee	Number	Cost
<b>Equipment</b>				
Desk, U-Shaped	\$3,689.50	\$75.00	5	\$18,822.50
Desk, Straight	\$2,266.50	\$50.00	1	\$2,316.50
Hutch	\$1,016.50	\$30.00	1	\$1,046.50
Inv. Vehicle	\$55,000.00		1	\$55,000.00
Vehicle Radio	\$5,000.00		1	\$5,000.00
Fuel	\$3,000.00		1	\$3,000.00
Conf. Rm Chairs	\$200.00		8	\$1,600.00
Conf. Table	\$1,500.00		1	\$1,500.00
Waiting Chairs	\$200.00		6	\$1,200.00
Side Table	\$400.00		2	\$800.00
Bookshelf	\$400.00		6	\$2,400.00
Workroom Table	\$479.00		1	<u>\$479.00</u>
				<b>\$93,164.50</b>
<b>Supplies</b>				
Cell phones	\$500.00		5	\$2,500.00
Trial Supplies	\$2,000.00		1	\$2,000.00
Office Supplies	\$3,000.00		1	\$3,000.00
Computers	\$2,100.00		6	\$12,600.00
Laptops	\$1,600.00		6	<u>\$9,600.00</u>
				<b>\$29,700.00</b>
<b>Contract Services</b>				
Office Phones	\$600.00		1	\$600.00
Copier/Printer	\$500.00		1	\$500.00
Office Software	\$250.00		6	\$1,500.00
Online Research	\$8,650.00		1	\$8,650.00
Expert Witness Fees	\$50,000.00		1	\$50,000.00
Dues	\$4,500.00		1	<u>\$4,500.00</u>
				<b>\$65,750.00</b>



**2025 Atascosa County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**Indigent Defense Improvement Grant Program Supplemental Funds for Interns and Office Equipment-  
FY2026/FY2027**  
**Rural Regional Public Defender Sustainability**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Atascosa, Frio, Karnes, Wilson**

Fiscal Year: **2025**

State Payee Identification Number: **17460014685**

Division To Administer Grant: **Tracy Barrera**

Program Title: **Indigent Defense Improvement Grant Program Supplemental Funds for Interns and Office Equipment- FY2026/FY2027**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$37,600.00**

Authorized Official: **Weldon P. Cude**

Financial Officer: **Tracy Barrera**

Program Director: **STEPHANIE R. BROWN**

Mailing Address: **1 Courthouse Circle; Suite 105; Jourdanton, TX 78026**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

The Legal Internship Program allows an attorney in training to conduct legal research, draft documents and perform administrative tasks to gain practical experience. Legal internships are used as a major tool to assist law students in determining if this field is really where they want to be. Legal intern training is an attempt to hire those with in-house training upon bar passage. The use of Ipad tablets to enhance immediate client services is increasingly beneficial due to versatility and portability, and are useful for immediate brief writing, filings and enhancing productivity away from the office.

**c. Problem Statement**

LEGAL INTERNS: Atascosa County has created a local high school summer internship program exclusively for high school students. High school students are paid \$15.00 per hour to assist various office divisions within the county, including the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office (AAAPDO). Unfortunately, these high school students are limited in their abilities within the courtroom. Unlike law student interns, a temporary bar card is not provided to high school students. This temporary bar card, along with an attorney supervisor, allows the law student intern to appear before the court in various realistic learning opportunities, whereas the high school intern provided by the county cannot.

In addition, due to the rural location's distance from a major city and the current lack of funding, law students are reluctant to volunteer their time so far away from a major city center, especially to work for free.

Without the opportunity of an internship in realistic legal circumstances, time, money and effort may be wasted.

PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: Technological gaps within the legal landscape remain in many aspects of the judicial system, despite the advent of progressions toward matters such as artificial intelligence. Inefficiencies in court filings, caseload and reporting data will continue to thrive without the use of portable technology. Needing an office for manual tasks from a bygone era such as entering and managing case information is far too time-consuming and leads to backlogs, case delays and continuances. The drive for hybrid systems and virtual hearings remain in this post-COVID era

The law student of today's era are trained to focus on access to justice via technology according to a report by Thomson Reuters. Without the use of portable devices, these law students are less inclined to work for a law firm that remains focused on manually inputting data and seeking solutions within an office environment.

**d. Objectives**

LEGAL INTERNS: According to the *Absolute Internship*, an international internship program, legal interns provide a platform to explore different areas of law, and identify preferred specializations, which assist students in making informed career choices. The advantage of being a legal intern includes gaining practical legal experience, networking with legal professionals, developing valuable skills, and gaining insight into the day-to-day workings of a Public Defender's office. Internships offer students the rigors of the legal profession by providing them with necessary skills and knowledge, in addition to boosting their confidence in their abilities. Furthermore, legal internships can be utilized as a source of job fulfillment for open positions within the Public Defender's Office.

Our legal interns will assist Assistant Public Defenders with various tasks such as legal research, drafting legal documents, attending court proceedings, and providing support in case preparation. By investing time in these formative experiences, students not only enhance their employability but also lay a strong foundation for a fulfilling career in law, according to *The Importance of Internships: How Internships Can Shape Your Legal Career*.

**PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY:** The AAPDO is requesting funds for 15-Ipads in order to streamline client services and data to make for faster and efficient representation in court. The drive to develop accessibility and streamline processes stands as a foundational purpose for law firms and courts to wholeheartedly embrace technology into their system. The integration of digital platforms drives innovation, facilitating online filing, case tracking, and document management. This not only reduces the burden of relying on a physical structure but also minimizes bureaucratic red tape, contributing to a more agile and responsive judicial system.

The integration of Ipads tablets in the courtroom is not simply a modernization effort; it is an essential transformation that aligns the legal system with the expectations of the 21st century. It also aligns with the goal of hiring the law students of the current generation who seek to associate with an innovative and a forward-thinking law firm.

#### **e. Activities**

**Legal Internship:** The AAPDO will implement a 6-week internship program utilizing candidates from predominantly Texan law schools, and other law schools across the country. This PDO will provide job descriptions to the law schools' career services division, including contact information, pay, hours and duties. Most law school career services programs have a specific time of the year to conduct virtual and in-person interviews. The choice to interview in person or virtually depends upon the time and location, although in-person is preferred. After the school or virtual interviews have been conducted, the potential candidates will have an in-office interview. The purpose of the subsequent interview is to allow the potential candidate the opportunity to see where the office is located. Considering the AAPDO is located in a rural area almost an hour away from the nearest law school, this in-office interview will factor into the decision as to whether or not the candidate is willing to make the daily drive. The candidate will be introduced to office staff and attorneys, will obtain a "lay-of-the-land," visit the local courthouse, and obtain further instructions on the additional counties' locations. When all parties agree the working relationship is worth proceeding with, an offer will be made, and the candidate will be provided with office instructions, a start date and time and instructions via the human resource department. The legal intern will complete documentation for a temporary bar card issued by the State Bar of Texas. The candidate is then placed on the next Commissioner's Court agenda for the Treasury department's acknowledgement.

Upon starting, the legal intern will be provided with a desk and all necessary office equipment, i.e., a computer, phone and contact information for all employees. The intern will be trained to work the PDO's software case database and record keeping methods. After the introduction of office procedures, the legal intern will accompany the PDs to court.

In court, the intern will become familiar with the Judge, court staff and procedures. Under the guidance of a supervising attorney, the legal intern will participate in various tasks such as legal research, drafting legal documents, handling simple court proceedings, providing support in case preparation and sitting second chair in hearings and trials. At the end of each court day, the legal intern will update case file data via the PDO's software system, discuss the case results for the day, and prepare for the next day's docket.

This internship will assist the existing staff attorneys in serving clients better and completing tasks faster. The internship will also help the legal intern connect what is learned in class with practical tasks, like research and assisting attorneys. Through these methods, the value lies in exposure to legal processes and teamwork. By collaborating with the PDO, this opportunity can prove to be relevant, enriching, and aligned with the skills students are learning in their courses, according to *QHE Association*, an independent quality assurance agency in education and training.

**PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: The Staffing, Operations and Technology: A 2025 survey of State Courts** provides that most courts are facing an unprecedented convergence of major waves of change, especially the far-reaching impacts of both GenAI and generational shifts in workforce and leadership roles. Courts must deal with these changes while continuing to face challenges in case backlogs and staff shortages. Resources, including often-limited budgets, must be strategically balanced between current operations and investments in technology that could improve future operations. The current situation shows that courts will be unrecognizable in a few decades.

One way to counter the changes is with portable technology. *Ipad* tables and other such devices are assisting in moving cases and the court forward to emerge on the other side of changes with more efficient, technology-driven procedures. With the use of portable devices, documents, dates and data are easily manipulated in real time, without the need to return to the office for creations or alterations.

#### **f. Evaluation**

**LEGAL INTERNSHIP:** This PDO must consider balancing the need for dedication and education with the wellbeing of interns, which is a crucial aspect of maintaining a successful legal internship program. According to the article of *How Internships Shape Careers*, students are provided with real world experience needed to secure a job post bar passage.

1. Understanding Industry Expectations: Internships allow students to experience real-world work environments. They learn about deadlines, teamwork, and corporate culture, which are not covered in academic courses.
2. Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice: Academic learning often lacks practical applications. Internships provide hands-on opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to real-world tasks.
3. Growing Demand for Practical Experience in Hiring: Employers prioritize candidates with internship experience because they require less training and can contribute immediately.

#### Gaining Hands-On Experience in the Chosen Legal Field:

1. Applying Knowledge to Real-World Scenarios: Internships help students use their classroom knowledge in practical situations, allowing the real-world exposure to sharpen their expertise.
2. Exposure to Public Defender's Office Operations and Workflows: Interns observe how professionals manage projects, handle clients, and solve problems, improving their adaptability.
3. Enhancing Professional Growth and Confidence: Working in professional environments makes students more confident and prepared for full-time roles.

**PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY:** According to *Everlaw: Technology that Makes a difference*, the discovery process has undergone drastic changes over the past decade. Body cam images, surveillance video, geodata, and multiple types of cell phone data have joined institutional records, email, and paper documents as sources of evidence in a typical investigation.

Facing the growing demands of the discovery process, with resources that remain flat, Public Defender Offices need to find advanced tools that allow them to not only meet the needs of modern ediscovery, but to go far beyond baseline requirements - without requiring additional resources.

These changes are impressive not only because they show the ingenuity of the legal system in the face of problematic times, but also because they have upended long-standing court norms to better serve attorney and their clients. As courts deploy online tools, law firms and court officials set out goals for ensuring that those technologies were implemented in ways that addressed inequities in legal proceedings.

Moving beyond case management and filing, the introduction of Ipads and tablets exemplifies a pivotal step in the modernization of court processes. These devices are tools used to empower judges, lawyers, and stakeholders to access case information, schedules, and documents remotely. If an attorney needs to review case records, track schedules, or access relevant documents outside of the courtroom, a portable device or tablet enables seamless remote access, reducing dependency on physical case files and facilitating efficient case preparation.

#### g. Future Funding

Future funding is essential to allow Atascosa County the ability to improve indigent defense with the assistance of legal interns and portable technology. However, the current need to make the request can be alleviated with the granting of these supplemental funds for the next 2-years. Although this Improvement Grant Program does not currently require future assistance from Atascosa, Karnes, Wilson or Frio Counties, the point remains that without the assistance of this grant, AAAPDO will not be able to hire legal interns, nor entice the legal interns with adaptive or technological advancements. We will not be able to make the described improvements in our indigent defense systems without this substantial infusion of state funding.

#### h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

The funds requested through use in 2027 include all relevant numbers pertaining to the employment of 4-legal interns at \$18.00 per hour for 6 weeks, and the purchase and use of 15-Ipad tablets at 1500.00 each. These requests will be incorporated into the previously established Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office.

Personnel Costs	\$15,100.00
FTE's	
Salary	\$14,000.00

Fringe Benefits	\$1,100.00	
Travel and Training		
Equipment		\$22,500.00
Supplies		
Contract Services		
Indirect		
Total		\$37,600.00
Required County Match		
Total less County Match		\$37,600.00

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**2026 Bee County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**New Improvement Grant Application. Please edit**  
**Multi-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Bee, Live Oak, McMullen**  
Fiscal Year: **2026**  
State Payee Identification Number: **74-6000327**  
Division To Administer Grant: **Bee County**  
Program Title: **New Improvement Grant Application. Please edit**  
Requested Grant Amount: **\$479,393.00**  
Authorized Official: **George P. Morrill , III**  
Financial Officer: **April Cantu**  
Program Director: **George P. Morrill , III**  
Mailing Address: **105 W. Corpus Christi Rm 305; Beeville, TX 78102**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

Bee, Live Oak, and McMullen Counties have been participating in the TIDC sustainability grant program since its inception. Costs for contracted public defender services have risen significantly, and the counties struggle to afford the rising costs of the public defender contract. The opportunity for temporary reduction in the required county matching requirement would greatly help the counties to meet this burden.

**c. Problem Statement**

Costs for the contracted regional public defender office have risen substantially. The counties request the available temporary assistance under the Legislature's special appropriation to TIDC for assistance with existing rural programs to reduce on a temporary basis for FY26 and FY27 the required county match, currently 1/3, to temporarily waive it or reduce it as much as is possible.

**d. Objectives**

To reduce county matching funds required on a temporary basis for the sustainability grant that funds the rural regional public defender office.

**e. Activities**

The program will continue to operate as it has been.

**f. Evaluation**

N/A

**g. Future Funding**

The counties understand that any assistance provided under this program will be temporary, and that the 1/3 county match requirement will resume after this special funding opportunity is exhausted.

**h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

The three counties in this program have a scheduled 1/3 matching contribution for FY26 of \$479,393. We respectfully request to reduce this match as much as possible for FY26 and FY27 depending on the availability of funds for this program.

Personnel Costs	\$0.00
FTE's	
Salary	
Fringe Benefits	
Travel and Training	
Equipment	
Supplies	
Contract Services	\$479,393.00
Indirect	
Total	\$479,393.00
Required County Match	\$0.00
Total less County Match	\$479,393.00

**2026 Burnet County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**NHCPD FY 26 Technology Grant**  
**Single-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Blanco, Burnet, Llano**  
Fiscal Year: **2026**  
State Payee Identification Number: **74-6000454**  
Division To Administer Grant: **Texas**  
Program Title: **NHCPD FY 26 Technology Grant**  
Requested Grant Amount: **\$65,350.65**  
Authorized Official: **Bryan E. Wilson**  
Financial Officer: **Kelley Glaeser**  
Program Director: **Michelle Moore**  
Mailing Address: **220 S. Pierce St; Burnet, TX 78611**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

Updated computer equipment will enhance the ability of Burnet, Blanco, and Llano Counties to ensure uninterrupted and effective representation of indigent, court-appointed clients across all three jurisdictions. The North Hill Country staff relies heavily on computers in their daily work. Newer technology will improve efficiency in handling client matters from the moment of arrest through every stage of the criminal process. This includes addressing mental health and addiction concerns, filing motions and writs, maintaining communication with counties and related agencies, and preparing for trials and hearings.

**c. Problem Statement**

The **North Hill Country Public Defender's Office (NHCPDO)** represents clients charged with approximately **840 misdemeanors and 720 felonies annually** across Burnet, Blanco, and Llano Counties. Many of NHCPDO's current computers are at or near the end of their life cycle. Several lack essential capabilities, such as Wi-Fi connectivity and video conferencing, which are critical for communicating with courts and opposing counsel. Inadequate access to reliable technology delays case access, creates logistical challenges, places additional burdens on defendants, and contributes to inefficiencies in the court system. This need is especially urgent given the **high percentage of mentally ill clients** the office serves weekly. To provide complete and holistic representation, NHCPDO attorneys must have fully functioning, up-to-date information technology equipment and software.

**d. Objectives**

**Upgraded computers would significantly improve the efficiency and quality of client representation throughout the criminal justice process-from arrest through resolution-in the tri-county court system and in accessing available state resources.** These technology upgrades would also strengthen the social worker program, enabling staff to respond to client needs in a more timely, comprehensive, and effective manner.

**e. Activities**

Purchase **fifteen (15) Microsoft Surface Laptop computers** and **fifteen (15) desktop towers**, each paired with **one (1) monitor** (for a total of fifteen monitors), along with all **required software and accessories**. This equipment will be utilized by the NHCPDO team, which includes **eleven attorneys, two legal assistants, two social workers, and one investigator**. These upgrades will ensure that all team members have access to reliable, efficient technology to support effective representation and client services across Burnet, Blanco, and Llano Counties.

**f. Evaluation**

**Track client appointments and services provided:**

Maintain a monthly record of the number of clients appointed to the North Hill Country Public Defender's Office. In addition, track all services provided to each client, including but not limited to **mental health support, social work involvement, and investigative services**. This data will be used to assess service delivery, identify resource needs, and support continuous improvement in client representation.

**g. Future Funding**

**This grant application is intended to cover the costs of equipment and initial implementation.** It includes funding for the first year of **Adobe Standard** licensing. Ongoing participation costs-such as future software license renewals and program maintenance-will be the responsibility of **Burnet, Blanco, and Llano Counties**.

**h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

Equipment

15 Laptops @ \$2,274.81	\$34,122.15
15 Docks @ \$228.73	3,430.95
15 Keyboards @ \$50.92	762.80
15 Monitors @ \$186.10	2,791.50
15 Towers @ \$1,460.27	27,904.05
15 Acrobat Subscriptions @ \$155.88	2,338.20
<hr/>	
Total	\$65,350.65

Personnel Costs	\$0.00
FTE's	
Salary	
Fringe Benefits	
Travel and Training	
Equipment	\$65,350.65
Supplies	
Contract Services	
Indirect	
Total	\$65,350.65
Required County Match	
Total less County Match	\$65,350.65

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**From:** [Michelle Moore](#)  
**To:** [Edwin Colfax](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Application for new computer equipment  
**Date:** Tuesday, August 19, 2025 11:18:47 AM

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Edwin,

I wanted to meet with IT here since I was relying on them heavily for this quote. The IT director is suggesting that we have 8 towers total for workstations as backups. 3 towers would go to the Burnet main office, 3 towers to the 2nd Burnet office and 2 towers to the Llano office. (We are now in 2 portable buildings in Burnet as we have grown.) This would actually lower the price by \$10,221.89 for a total of \$52,790.56.

Edwin, if you have any questions, please let me know. You can call me on my cell anytime at 972-567-9018.

Michelle

On Mon, Aug 18, 2025 at 2:44 PM Edwin Colfax <[EColfax@tidc.texas.gov](mailto:EColfax@tidc.texas.gov)> wrote:

Hello Michelle,

I am preparing materials for our board to consider the grant requests you have submitted. It was not clear why each staff member requires a desktop tower computer and a laptop and docking station. We would typically think that a laptop and dock would be sufficient when paired with the monitor and external keyboard. Please include the explanation in an email to me to supplement your grant request.

Thank you,

Edwin Colfax

Director of Grant Funding

Texas Indigent Defense Commission

512-463-2508 (direct)



**2026 Culberson County Improvement Grant Application Narrative  
Supplemental Request under FY26-27 General Appropriations Act  
Single-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Presidio, Terrell, Val Verde**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **746002433**

Division To Administer Grant: **County Judge's Office**

Program Title: **Supplemental Request under FY26-27 General Appropriations Act**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$1,257,986.00**

Authorized Official: **Carlos G Urias**

Financial Officer: **Kerri L. Quiett**

Program Director: **James Gerard McDermott, II**

Mailing Address: **PO Box 927; 300 LaCaverna; Van Horn, TX 79855**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

1. Increased Subsidy Far West Texas Regional Public Defender requests a temporary increase of funds from TIDC to relieve the participating counties of the financial cost of the program. The counties understand that this grant would be temporary, limited only to the two years of this special fund. 2. Recruitment Project The Far West Texas Regional Public Defender has had regular and persistent recruiting and retention. Among the funding requests: (1) retaining a recruiting firm to complete a nationwide search for felony qualified attorneys; (2) having recruiting events, sponsorships and tables at interstate and intrastate criminal law CLEs and local bar association luncheons and gatherings outside the region; (3) travelling to on-campus interviews and travel for candidates to travel to in-person interviews; and (4) relocation cost reimbursement.

**c. Problem Statement**

1. Increased Subsidy

Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, and Presidio Counties

The poverty of the five counties that have been part of the historic core grant is well established. The counties cannot afford to provide even basic services in the region, but they cannot also afford to provide this constitutional mandate without the public defender. Because of the rates of poverty in the counties and the large number of people who pass through the area, this office handles over 85% of the felony criminal docket across all five counties.

These counties are very rural, with a population density of 1.25 persons per square mile, in an area twice the size of the state of Maryland. They face chronic socioeconomic challenges, including a young population with low labor force participation rates, per capita income, and educational attainment. There is limited economic activity and a high dependence on government-related and agricultural jobs. The communities have few private businesses to provide goods and services, as well as a small number of local private-sector jobs, educational opportunities for workforce development, and long commutes to access jobs. The counties have a lack of accessible healthcare facilities and low rate of insurance coverage.

Like all Texas counties, the general fund for each county is funded primarily through property taxes. However, the property valuations in the region are low because of the poverty and lack of resources. By law, the counties cannot increase the property tax rate by more than 3.5% without voter approval, which has proven prohibitive in this resource-scarce region. In the course of the past eight years, there have been no significant capital improvements in the region to increase the tax base. There have been no significant new buildings or new industry in the region. As a result the taxable appraised values of properties remain within statutory caps. With inflation rates averaging above 5% for the past years, the county budgets have needed to increase to respond to the need for increased wages and other increased costs while the real dollar value of tax revenue has decreased.

As an additional strain, large portions of land in the region are publicly owned and therefore not taxed. For example, in 2024 the Texas General Land Office bought the Brewster Ranch, 353,785 acres in Brewster County, thereby further decreasing the property on which Brewster County can collect taxes. Much of Presidio County is either public land or is owned by non-profit trusts. Although the geography of the counties is huge, the property just does not generate tax revenues.

One of the counties now-Presidio County-is operating out of reserves. Tax revenue does not come close to matching the provision of essential services in the county. Jeff Davis County has been unable to raise its tax revenue through several budget cycles. Hudspeth County is unable to repair its courthouse as it has been damaged from recent earthquakes. There is no room for discretionary spending outside of essential government services. Brewster County, the county with the largest county budget in the region, has less than \$8 million to spend to support a county an area larger than 6000 square miles. Those infrastructure needs are exacerbated by the over 600,000 visitors to the park system in the last calendar year. This number is an increase of about 100% over averages before 2020.

Each of these counties is needing to confront this problem in different ways. Relief for two years from this fund to further subsidize indigent defense costs would give the counties some room to craft long term solutions while lessening the urgency for an immediate, but poorly planned solution.

### Val Verde and Terrell Counties

Val Verde and Terrell Counties are the current expansion counties for the program. The most pressing issue in those counties is the slow pace by which the private court-appointed lawyers are moving their cases. This issue was discussed in depth in the grant proposal this year.

The result is that the courts expect for the next two years to be paying for two systems simultaneously. The public defender budget for the two counties \$403,430.30. The program is projecting that it will start taking cases by January 1, 2026, only 90 days after funding, and it's mandate is to take 100% of eligible adult criminal cases (except in cases of conflict). However, that will not alleviate the need to pay for prior cases, and the public defender will not be able to absorb those cases. They will need to stay with their current attorneys until completion.

It is anticipated that the counties will pay about \$600,000 in FY2026 and \$300,000 in FY2027 to close out existing cases with the private bar while also paying for the services of the public defender. This will represent increases in county expenditures for the first two years of program participation rather than a cost savings. Use of funds from this grant will bridge the gap and give the program the ability to show that use of the program will help the county contain costs for indigent defense.

### 2. Recruitment Project

Recruiting lawyers has been an ongoing problem for the Far West Texas Regional Public Defender. For the Alpine office, the remoteness of the office has proven to be a substantial barrier. The local bar is small and does not generate applicants. The closest airport is 3 hours away. There are a lack of jobs for spouses who might have their own careers. Traditional recruiting efforts, through job postings and networking, have yielded at best 1 or two applicants for each posted position, and nearly 80% of applicants are unqualified for the work.

As an example, the program posted a job in May 2025 for an open felony position. It was filled after much effort with a lawyer from El Paso. She will be commuting on the weekends-a three hour drive-because her spouse and family cannot move at this point. She was the only viable applicant.

At this point, the Alpine office has three attorney positions open: one entry-level position and two positions for a 0-3 year attorney.

The new office in Del Rio has four positions open: an entry-level position and three felony positions.

The staffing shortage is not due to a lack of effort. The program has followed the guidance from TIDC staff to participate in Texas law school on campus interviewing programs. So far for the fall of 2025 we have received zero requests for interviews in the first round. We have posted at approximately 80 out-of-state law schools and have so far received two applicants. Postings for the felony lawyers positions have yielded one applicant in here months-and that person has interviewed in at least two other rural public defender offices in Texas. As the Commission knows, we completed a major salary adjustment two years ago to help with recruiting and retention, but now the need is to reach qualified lawyers who also have the interest and the ability to move to the remote counties we serve.

Without targeted, well-funded recruitment and retention strategies, the Far West Texas Regional Public Defender will remain unable to operate at full capacity. Two years ago, the program paused accepting new cases for three months because of staffing and caseload issues. It is a primary objective of the chief public defender to avoid repeating that decision if at all possible.

#### **d. Objectives**

##### **1. Increased Subsidy**

This grant will subsidize county contributions for the Far West Texas Regional Public Defender by 50% for each of the two years, consistent with the legislative directives of the FY26-FY27 General Appropriations Act.

The Far West Texas Regional Public Defender will continue the same level of service across the existing counties-accepting 100% of qualifying cases except conflicts. The FWTRPDO will ultimately take 100% of adult criminal court appointments in Terrell and Val Verde Counties, excepting conflicts and cases related to Operation Lone Star. Recruiting for staffing of that office and the search for office space has already started, and we anticipate taking cases by January 1, 2026.

The staffing model proposed for this expansion has been built through an analysis of current open cases with guidance from both the TIDC caseload guidelines and the new ABA-Rand Corporation study concerning caseloads. Built into this model as well is the presence of two mental health social workers.

##### **2. Recruitment Project**

Become Fully Staffed: recruit and hire felony-qualified attorneys to meet current staffing requirements. Establish Long Term Recruiting Programs: create and establish policies and procedures to ensure long-term staffing needs are met. Create and establish long-term partnerships with law schools and legal organizations nationwide to increase the applicant pool long-term.

#### **e. Activities**

##### **1. Increased Subsidy**

The program plans to continue all activities outlined in the grant application for sustainable funding submitted for FY 2026. These activities included:

1. Having an office head in Del Rio on October 1, 2025.
2. Hiring staff: a process which has already begun.
3. Start-up tasks. October 2025-March 2026.
  - a. Finding office space. Purchasing furniture, computers, and supplies.
  - b. CMS.
  - c. Meeting with local judges to determine appropriate caseload guidelines for the local situation, relying on the TIDC caseload guidelines and the ABA-Rand Corporation analysis as benchmarks.
  - d. Meeting stakeholders and local criminal-justice offices, such as prosecutors, county and district judges, magistrates, jail staff, and probation officers. Meeting local employees in the MHMR regional provider as well as their administration. Meeting other local low-income legal services providers (Legal Aid, Federal Public Defender). Meeting local social

services providers, including hospitals, food banks, faith-based organizations. Identifying substance-abuse recovery options. Meet community leaders and advocates.

- e. Anticipated first case assignment: January 2026. We want to start taking cases within 90 days of funding. We will not wait until full staffing to start taking cases. We plan to start in phases based on staffing and infrastructure

## 2. Recruitment Project

### Engage a Recruitment Firm

To address staffing shortages and recruit highly qualified felony-level attorneys, we would engage a professional recruitment firm. The recruitment firm would conduct targeted outreach, to identify attorneys with the skills, experience, and interest in our communities. We would retain full control over interviews and hiring decisions.

This method could provide a cost-effective and timely solution for reaching a broader and more qualified applicant pool than would otherwise be available through in-house recruitment.

### Recruitment Programs

**Criminal Law CLE Exhibitions:** Staff and have exhibits at Criminal Law CLEs nationwide in order to promote applications. As an exhibitor, the office will host a staffed booth to provide information, build visibility, distribute targeted promotional materials, and engage directly with felony-qualified criminal defense attorneys. Attending CLE exhibitions is designed to expand the applicant pool, build long-term interest in the office, and support the goal of hiring and retaining highly qualified attorneys to meet the growing legal needs of the service area.

**Promotional Videos.** Engage a professional videographer to create a video to highlight the work of the office and the benefits of living in and working in our rural counties. We could post the video to our youtube and social media pages and use it at recruiting events.

**Promotional Materials.**

We need high-quality, visually engaging materials help establish credibility, attract interest from felony-qualified attorneys, and reinforce the office's identity as a professional workplace.

### Relocation Stipends and Sign-on Bonuses.

As stated above, there is no pool of local attorneys from which to recruit for Alpine and a very small group from which to recruit for Del Rio. Providing relocation stipends of up to \$5,000 for relocation can help immensely to help a person to make the financial choice to move a significant distance for a job at one of our offices. with an individual's choice to leave a job or close a practice. Contingent upon the new hire staying with the program for at least 2 years.

Provide sign-on bonuses.

A sign-on bonus of in the amount of \$7,500 upon the hiring of a qualified felony attorney. An experienced lawyer would likely have to close a private practice or leave another job, both of which come with associated significant costs. Contingent upon the new hire staying with the program for at least 2 years.

**Travel Funds:** Both in-state and out-of-state travel would be required by both our office and our applicants. We would likely want vetted applicants to visit our office and the area before either party would be ready to commit to hiring.

### Law School Pipeline Program

**Paid Internships:** Paid law student internships would allow us to invest in long-term recruitment. Removing financial barriers to well-qualified students interested in working in a public defender would allow CVPDO to create relationships with prospective misdemeanor attorneys.

Partnerships with Law Schools: Create partnerships with law schools to funnel law students interested in public defense to the office. Such partnerships would include speaking at criminal law events, classes, and clinics, and conducting on campus interviews.

The program change has already started creating an office in Del Rio. The office in Alpine has been fully operational since December 15, 2017-75 days after funding first became available

#### **f. Evaluation**

##### **1. Increased Subsidy**

The FWTRPD office already has a system to comply with TIDC data reporting requirements. Local stakeholders will join the oversight board and thus have a role in regular evaluation of program activities. We have upgraded the database and have the training to comply with TIDC reporting requirements in a timely manner.

##### **2. Recruitment Project**

###### **Recruitment Firm Goals:**

The program will review the quality of applicants with the retained firm to determine if it is a beneficial resource for expenditures. Staff will work with TIDC staff in making a decision about ongoing use of the recruiting firm.

###### **Recruitment Programs:**

The program will track applications received and from the source to determine success of various efforts. There is no effective baseline against which to measure because recruiting efforts have been sporadic and unpredictable.

Report yearly the number of CLE Exhibitions staff attends.

###### **Law School Pipeline Program:**

For the first year, the goal is one intern in each office each summer. For the second year, the goal is to have one intern in each office each summer and to have worked with law schools for remote internships during the academic year.

#### **g. Future Funding**

Not applicable

#### **h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

##### **1. Increased Subsidy**

The current contribution for the seven participating counties is \$772,466.82, after a budget adjustment that is being submitted to reflect increased health insurance costs and the county actual cost of living adjustment. The request is for 50% of this amount for FY2026: \$386,233.41. The counties request 50% of their cost in FY2027, which is estimated to increase by 5% for COLAs and other expense increases to \$811,090.16. Half of that amount would be \$405,545.08.

Total for the biennium: \$791,778.49

##### **2. Recruitment Project**

###### **Recruitment Firm Costs, Stipends, and Bonuses**

The BCRI budget for recruitment firm costs is based on the industry standard of a 25% commission per successful hire, paid at the time of hire. The commission is commonly 25% of the candidate's starting salary plus any signing bonus. The commission is returned if the new hire is not retained for a specified period of time (generally one year).

The budget is projected for 4 first-degree qualified lawyers across both offices and 2 third-degree qualified lawyers.

The budget includes a \$7,500 sign-on bonus and up to \$5,000 in relocation reimbursement expenses. The bonus would be required to be repaid by the newly hired attorney if the applicant is

not retained for a period of two years. These amounts are subject to payroll taxes and TCDRS pension withholding.

#### Recruitment Programs and Materials

To fund exhibitor fees, booth space, and basic materials at multiple Criminal Law CLE conferences nationwide, targeting felony-qualified attorneys. Contemplates 8 CLE Exhibition events per year over the two-year grant period with estimated costs of \$1,000 per exhibition. Travel funds include round trip airfare and mileage for 2 staff across multiple events during the grant period. Hotel expenditures are based on 3 hotel nights being needed for approximately 16 events for two staff members.

On-campus interviews and interviews in-person in the offices. Funds to travel to law schools to attend on-campus interviews and to build relationships at schools through presentations at criminal law society meetings, clinic classes, and criminal law and procedure classes.

Promotional Material costs to include the design, distribution of brochures, branded items, banners and other necessary items for exhibitions.

#### Law School Pipeline Program

We would want to offer a stipend of \$5,000 per 8-week period law students spend interning/externing with CVPDO. The request contemplates 8 law student interns over the two-year grant period. Stipends are taxed.

Personnel Costs		\$110,668.00
FTE's	0.00	
Salary	\$20,000.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$90,668.00	
Travel and Training		\$90,000.00
Equipment		\$0.00
Supplies		\$7,500.00
Contract Services		\$258,040.00
Indirect		\$0.00
Total		\$466,208.00
Required County Match		\$0.00
Total less County Match		\$466,208.00

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<b>Recruiting Project</b>						
<b>Law School Pipeline Program</b>						
Intern Stipend	\$20,000					
FICA	\$1,530					
<b>Recruitment CLEs and Exhibitions</b>						
CLE Exhibitions	\$16,000			Travel breakdown		
Travel and Accommodation Stipends for Recruitment						
Travel for CLE events	\$36,928			travel to CLE events for 2 people to 16 events in two years	Airfare for two	19200
Travel for on-campus interviews and law school visits	\$33,950				mileage to/from airport and parking	4928
Travel for in-person interviews on location	\$18,750				hotels	6400
Videographer for Recruitment Videos	\$3,500				local travel	1600
Recruitment Promotional Materials	\$7,500				per diems	4800
					Total	36928
<b>Recruitment Firm Costs and Stipends</b>						
Recruitment Firm Commission	\$238,540					
Moving Stipends and signing bonus	\$75,000					
Fica	\$5,738			Travel to OCI and law school events: 25 schools in 2 years	Airfare (airfare as proxy for mileage if in-state)	15000
Retirement mandatory withholding	\$ 8,400.00				mileage to/from airport and parking	7700
					hotels	5000
<b>Total Grant Request:</b>	<b>\$465,835.50</b>				local travel	2500
					per diems	3750
					Total	33950
				Travel for final interviews in-person in office	Airfare for up to 15 candidates	9000
					car rental plus gas	3750
					hotels	3000
					Meals	3000
					Total	18750

**2026 Hale County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**Temporary Reduction of Required County Matching Funds for Rural Regional Public Defender**  
**Multi-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Hale**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **17560009734**

Division To Administer Grant: **Hale County**

Program Title: **Temporary Reduction of Required County Matching Funds for Rural Regional Public Defender**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$683,925.00**

Authorized Official: **David B. Mull**

Financial Officer: **Melinda Silvas**

Program Director: **David B. Mull**

Mailing Address: **500 Broadway; Plainview, TX 79072**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

The High Plains Regional Public Defender Office was started last year to provide indigent defense services in 13 counties. The program has encountered several significant problems during launch that resulted in loss of staff (including the chief defender) and the program has been forced to pause accepting new cases until a new chief defender is hired. These challenges have placed unexpected burdens on the participating counties because program services have not been provided as planned and costs for private counsel appointments have been much higher than anticipated. In light of these challenges, and the inherent difficulty that our very rural counties have meeting the demands of indigent defense funding, we request a temporary waiver of the required 1/3 county match for our sustainability grant, or as much of a reduction as the Commission may consider appropriate, for FY2026 and FY2027.

**c. Problem Statement**

The High Plains Regional Public Defender Office (HPRPDO) was created to serve 13 rural counties in the southern panhandle. The program was direly needed because very few attorneys are available in the region to handle indigent defense cases. The creation of this office holds great promise for helping our counties meet the requirements to provide counsel to those who cannot afford it, however the program encountered a number of challenges during the start-up that have delayed the benefits and placed unexpected additional burdens on the participating counties.

The program has had significant difficulties recruiting attorneys to fill all positions. The original chief defender began accepting most cases from the counties before enough staff were hired to handle them. As a result, most attorneys have resigned due to excessive caseloads and the chief defender submitted her resignation. One of the 13 counties has dropped out, but the remaining counties still need this program and want to see it succeed.

Because the new program has incurred costs and yet we are forced to continue to appoint and fund private counsel until the staff is rebuilt and caseloads are managed properly with a phase-in plan, we are requesting that our grant match be waived for FY2026 and FY2027, or reduced as much as possible under this special funding opportunity. The counties are aware that this assistance is temporary, and the matching requirements would be returned to the standard match after this grant.

**d. Objectives**

Waive or reduce as much as possible the required county match for the High Plains Regional Public Defender Office sustainability grant for FY2026 and FY2027.

**e. Activities**

Restructure county match under sustainability grant.

**f. Evaluation**

Measure reduction in required county contributions for FY26 and FY27.

**g. Future Funding**

NA, temporary assistance requested under special grant opportunity.

**h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

The budget is currently being revised based on one of our counties opting not to continue. The fully operational budget for the original participating counties was for a total program cost of 2,051,776 and our scheduled match is 1/3 (shared proportionally across participating counties). We are requesting a temporary waiver of the match or reduction of the match as much as possible for FY26 and FY27 based on the revised budget once finalized.



The figure above is only an estimate of match for one year.

Personnel Costs	\$0.00
FTE's	
Salary	
Fringe Benefits	
Travel and Training	
Equipment	
Supplies	
Contract Services	
Indirect	
Total	\$0.00
Required County Match	
Total less County Match	\$0.00

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## 2026 Maverick County Improvement Grant Application Narrative

**Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.**

### Multi-year

#### a. Application Form

Counties Represented: **Dimmit, Maverick, Zavala**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **17460007028**

Division To Administer Grant: **Maverick County Judge's Office**

Program Title: **Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$1,000,000.00**

Authorized Official: **Ramsey English Cantu**

Financial Officer: **Gloria Martinez**

Program Director: **Isaak T. Ruiz**

Mailing Address: **500 Quarry Street; Suite 3; Eagle Pass, TX 78852**

#### b. Introduction (Executive Summary)

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

#### c. Problem Statement

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

#### d. Objectives

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

#### e. Activities

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

#### f. Evaluation

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

#### g. Future Funding

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

#### h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

Maverick County is requesting a reduction of matching funds (as much as possible) for FY26 & FY27 for the existing Regional Public Defenders Grant Program that includes Dimmit and Zavala Counties.

Personnel Costs	\$0.00
FTE's	
Salary	
Fringe Benefits	
Travel and Training	
Equipment	
Supplies	
Contract Services	
Indirect	
Total	\$0.00
Required County Match	\$0.00
Total less County Match	\$0.00

**2026 Medina County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**New Improvement Grant Application. Please edit**  
**Multi-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Bandera, Gillespie, Kendall, Kerr, Medina**  
Fiscal Year: **2026**  
State Payee Identification Number: **TX**  
Division To Administer Grant: **Medina County Auditor's Office**  
Program Title: **New Improvement Grant Application. Please edit**  
Requested Grant Amount: **\$348,211.42**  
Authorized Official: **Beverly Ham**  
Financial Officer: **Sarah Saathoff**  
Program Director: **Karli Kennell**  
Mailing Address: **1300 Avenue M; Hondo, TX 78861-1218**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

The Hill Country Regional Public Defender's Office ("HCRPDO") is committed to ensuring equal justice by providing high-quality legal representation to individuals who cannot afford private counsel. Our team of dedicated attorneys, investigators, and support staff work tirelessly to uphold the constitutional rights of our clients, often in the face of high caseloads and limited resources. As demands on public defense services continue to grow, so too does the workload and complexity of the cases we manage. To continue meeting our constitutional obligations and maintain the high standard of representation our clients deserve, we are seeking supplemental funding to support staff salaries. This investment is critical to retaining experienced professionals, reducing burnout, and strengthening our ability to effectively serve the community. We rely not only on our core staff but also on the contributions of law student interns, who gain critical hands-on experience while assisting attorneys and staff. We are seeking funding to provide paid internships for law students and qualified undergraduates who support our work. Offering paid positions will allow us to expand access to this valuable training opportunity, especially for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It will also help us attract a broader applicant pool and strengthen the long-term pipeline of recruits.

**c. Problem Statement**

The Hill Country Regional Public Defender's Office ("HCRPDO") is committed to ensuring equal justice by providing high-quality legal representation to individuals who cannot afford private counsel. Our team of dedicated attorneys, investigators, and support staff work tirelessly to uphold the constitutional rights of our clients, often in the face of high caseloads and limited resources.

As demands on public defense services continue to grow, so too does the workload and complexity of the cases we manage. To continue meeting our constitutional obligations and maintain the high standard of representation our clients deserve, we are seeking supplemental funding to support staff salaries. This investment is critical to retaining experienced professionals, reducing burnout, and strengthening our ability to effectively serve the community.

We rely not only on our core staff but also on the contributions of law student interns, who gain critical hands-on experience while assisting attorneys and staff. We are seeking funding to provide paid internships for law students and qualified undergraduates who support our work. Offering paid positions will allow us to expand access to this valuable training opportunity, especially for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It will also help us attract a broader applicant pool and strengthen the long-term pipeline of recruits.

**d. Objectives**

The goals of this grant are simple and are as follows:

1. Increase salaries across the board for our staff to keep salaries in the office competitive with other offices. This will be measurable by staff retention and recruitment efficiency.
2. Hire and train interns to feed our office with pre-trained skilled workers and to reduce the costs of working here for the interns.

**e. Activities**

Our staff are currently engaged in the core operations that fulfill our mission, including: aggressively pushing cases to trial, visiting new clients in custody as soon as possible, filing and arguing writs and motions for reduced bonds,

investigating alleged charges, and advocating for clients in plea negotiations. These activities are ongoing and essential to serving our community effectively and consistently.

By supplementing staff salaries, we aim to support the sustainability and quality of these activities by reducing turnover, improving staff retention, and recognizing the increased responsibilities and workload many have taken on. This support would allow us to maintain continuity in services and preserve institutional knowledge within our team. Continuity greatly aids our clients because of the rapport that our clients build with their respective attorneys. If an attorney leaves the office, that client must start anew with a different attorney. Trust and consistency are imperative in criminal defense.

During the two-year period that the grant covers, staff will be consistently reminded that the salary supplements that the grant will cover **are temporary and will expire after the two years. During the two-year period, the HCRPDO will continue to advocate for the host county to approve salary increases that are in line with TIDC's recommendations and local prosecutors offices.**

Additionally, interns at the HCRPDO play a vital role in supporting our day-to-day operations. Under the supervision of attorneys, they assist with legal research, draft motions, observe and support courtroom proceedings, help with case preparation, and engage directly with case files and investigative work. Their contributions are not only educational but materially support the functioning of our office. By funding paid internships, we are investing in both the future of public defense and the quality of our current operations. This support allows us to continue offering meaningful, hands-on training while ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent capable and committed students from participating.

Specifically, we recruit actively at Texas' best law schools. In October of 2025, for example, we are conducting several interviews with qualified applicants from the University of Texas School of Law through their Career Services Office. Informing these recruits that the positions will be paid will help separate us from their other prospective opportunities. The Deputy Chiefs and Felony Attorneys have historically participated in interviews with intern applicants, but the hiring process was rather informal due to the position being unpaid. Through the requested grant, the office plans to create three official intern positions for 12 weeks during the summer. The interns would be expected to work for 40 hours per week and be compensated at the rate of \$20.00 per hour. These official positions will be posted by the HCRPDO to schools' job posting boards. The Deputy Chiefs will conduct interviews with interested applicants and ultimately select the top three candidates. Interns will be interviewed and offered on a rolling basis until the three positions are filled. The positions will preferably be filled by third-year law students. The hope is that upon completion of the internship, the intern will have displayed the necessary talent and work-ethic to receive an offer of employment from the HCRPDO post-graduation.

#### **f. Evaluation**

The success of this grant initiative will be measured through clear, trackable indicators focused on staff retention and intern program sustainability-two areas that are critical to the long-term strength and continuity of the HCRPDO.

##### **1. Staff Retention:**

Retention will be evaluated by tracking year-over-year employment data for attorneys, investigators, and support staff. A reduction in turnover rates-particularly among experienced attorneys-will serve as a direct indicator of the effectiveness of the salary adjustments supported by this grant. Additional qualitative data, including internal exit interviews and semi-annual employee satisfaction surveys, will further inform us of how compensation impacts employee morale and long-term commitment.

##### **2. Intern Program Sustainability:**

The success of the intern stipend initiative will be assessed through the number of interns recruited, retained, and successfully onboarded during the grant period. We will track participation by semester, intern hours worked, and feedback from both interns and supervising staff. Key indicators of success will include increased intern retention through the duration of placements, obtaining interns from quality schools, reduction in mid-term dropout due to financial strain, and an uptick in former interns applying for permanent positions within the HCRPDO or other rural defense offices. Ultimately, we hope to demonstrate that stipends directly enhance our ability to build a skilled pipeline of future rural defenders.

Taken together, these evaluation methods will provide both quantitative and qualitative evidence of the grant's impact. This data will guide our continued improvement efforts and demonstrate our commitment to strategic, measurable outcomes in strengthening indigent defense across the region.

## g. Future Funding

### h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

Our total requested grant amount is \$348,211.42, a breakdown is provided below.

During budget development earlier this year, we followed the recommendations from the TIDC salary study, as well as the salary study from our host county, and the local county and district attorney offices salaries. Based on this information, we created a clear and structured salary scale. Our proposed salary budget was approved by our oversight board and submitted to TIDC. However, our host county did not accept the oversight board's recommendation and instead approved only a 2.5% salary increase for all staff, with a few exceptions for investigators and misdemeanor attorneys. Other than the exceptions above the vast majority of staff salaries will fall well below TIDC salary recommendations. Therefore, we are requesting salaries for staff members to be subsidized using \$145,305.71 per year, for a total request of \$290,611.42 over two years.

The second item of our request includes funding for three summer intern positions, each covering 12 weeks at 40 hours per week. The positions will be paid at \$20.00 an hour so we are requesting \$28,800 a year for a total of \$57,600 over two years.

Personnel Costs		\$348,211.42
FTE's	0.00	
Salary	\$348,211.42	
Fringe Benefits	\$0.00	
Travel and Training		\$0.00
Equipment		\$0.00
Supplies		\$0.00
Contract Services		\$0.00
Indirect		\$0.00
Total		\$348,211.42
Required County Match		\$0.00
Total less County Match		\$348,211.42

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**2026 Potter County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**Panhandle Area Public Defender's Office– Rural Regional Program**  
**Multi-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Armstrong, Carson, Deaf Smith, Moore, Oldham, Potter**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **17560011151029**

Division To Administer Grant: **Potter County Public Defender**

Program Title: **Panhandle Area Public Defender's Office– Rural Regional Program**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$523,532.25**

Authorized Official: **Nancy Tanner**

Financial Officer: **Brandon Boston**

Program Director: **Nancy Tanner**

Mailing Address: **500 S. Fillmore; Ste 103; Amarillo, TX 79101**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

The Panhandle Area Public Defender Office (PAPDO), serving Armstrong, Carson, Deaf Smith, Moore, Oldham, and Potter Counties, aims to address the shortage of lawyers taking appointed cases in rural areas before it escalates into a crisis. The program seeks to expand its reach within Potter County, aiming to handle 65% of all felony cases, and is actively recruiting and training attorneys, including newly licensed ones, through a robust mentorship program to achieve this goal within two years. The PAPDO also intends to develop a program that reflects the Panhandle's unique cultural values while maintaining the successful structure currently in place.

**c. Problem Statement**

Rural Texas counties in the Panhandle face a critical and worsening shortage of lawyers willing and able to accept court-appointed cases, severely compromising the constitutional right to counsel for indigent defendants. This escalating crisis stems from several interconnected factors: an aging legal workforce nearing retirement, a significant lack of new attorneys choosing to practice in the area, and overall population decline, as evidenced by the Texas Demographic Center's presentation, "Shifting Demographics in Texas and the Amarillo Area," which reveals sustained population loss both recently and over the last decade. The Panhandle Area Public Defender Office (PAPDO), offers a proactive and comprehensive approach to mitigating these issues by providing a stable, dedicated legal workforce to handle indigent defense cases. However, attracting and retaining qualified attorneys for PAPDO positions requires a competitive salary structure that aligns with regional and statewide benchmarks, as indicated by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) salary survey data. An increase in the budget to facilitate raising attorney salary pay is critical to ensure the PAPDO can effectively recruit and retain the legal talent. All of our counties have agreed to these increases. However, with reduced tax revenue, this will increase the taxpayer rate significantly as currently outlined. While this request is a one-time offset, it will allow us to work with our partner counties to lessen the immediate blow of a substantial budgetary increase. Without a sufficient budget allocation to offer competitive salaries, the PAPDO will struggle to attract and retain the necessary talent, jeopardizing its ability to address the pressing issues within the rural Texas Panhandle's indigent defense system and potentially exacerbating the current crisis.

**d. Objectives**

The PAPDO is requesting a one-time grant to support our sustainability funding program. This funding will be primarily dedicated to significantly reducing the required county match for our sustainability grant program, and fund future summer internship opportunities. This will allow us to continue and enhance the Chief Public Defender's creative recruitment program to attract attorneys to the PAPDO while easing some of the overall county match for fiscal year 2026 and 2027. This strategic investment in our office's capacity will yield significant benefits. As outlined, the PAPDO will continue using its proven activities, guidelines, and procedures to ensure the expansion will be a viable program and an asset to the new counties it serves. Our core goals remain unwavering: arrestees will receive representation at their 15.17 hearing, new defendants qualifying for county-provided counsel will meet with a PAPDO attorney within 48 hours of referral, ensuring high-quality representation throughout the pre-trial process and access to communicate with their attorney as needed. We will also continue to work closely with Indigent Defense Coordinators in counties with this position to ensure all currently jailed defendants who qualify for services are accounted for and receiving services. However, the cost of providing constitutionally mandated indigent defense in rural areas like the Texas Panhandle remains a significant challenge for counties.

**e. Activities**

By reducing the required county match, the one-time grant will allow us to:

1. **Reduce County Burden:** Lowering the county match directly translates to a decrease in the financial burden on the host county facing tighter budgetary constraints. This will free up county resources that can be allocated to other vital services.
2. **Enhance Program Stability and Quality:** By bolstering our ability to attract and retain attorneys, we ensure the stability and quality of our indigent defense services, enabling us to consistently meet and exceed our goals of providing timely and high-quality representation. We are more able to attract interns to our rural area if subsidize their intern experience. Our offices pride themselves on giving quality intern experiences which we hope translates into them wanting to return after licensure. This approach helps address the challenges faced by rural public defender systems, including the lack of attorneys that can impede the quality of defense services.

Receiving additional funding to enhance attorney and internship experience:

3. **Offering competitive compensation:** Increasing the funding for internship programs would allow competitive stipends, making internships more accessible to a wider range of students by providing a stipend for interns to cover expenses like housing, airfare, commuting and food, particularly those with financial needs.
4. **Competitive pay can also help attract candidates who might otherwise gravitate towards higher-paying opportunities in other practice areas.**
5. **Increased funding to allow participation in industry conferences or training workshops.**

#### f. Evaluation

This evaluation plan outlines the processes and measures to assess the effectiveness and impact of the grant funding on the Panhandle Area Public Defender Office (PAPDO) sustainability program. It focuses on evaluating both the implementation of the grant-funded activities and the overall effect of the program in operation. PAPDO aims to address the shortage of attorneys in rural Panhandle counties by strengthening our ability to recruit and retain talent. Measures to demonstrate impact include:

**Measure 1: Number of attorneys applying for PAPDO positions:** This indicates the attractiveness of the program. PAPDO Chief and Office Manager will track the number of applications received for attorney positions and record information in a centralized data repository.

**Measure 2: Number of attorneys hired and retained:** This reflects successful recruitment and retention efforts. PAPDO Chief and Office Manager will track the impact of specific recruitment initiatives (e.g., if a student loan repayment program is utilized, track the number of attorneys who utilize it and their retention rates).

**Measure 3: Time to fill vacant attorney positions:** A decrease in this metric signifies improved recruitment efficiency.

**Measure 4: Attorney turnover rates:** Lower rates suggest better retention.

This evaluation plan focuses on improving the quality and accessibility of the PAPDO internship program to attract a broader range of talented students and serve as a pipeline for future hires. Measures to demonstrate impact include:

**Measure 5: Tracking Internship Program Implementation:** Documenting the enhancements made to the internship program, including compensation adjustments and participation in conferences and workshops.

**Measure 6: Number of internship applications received:** Indicating increased interest in the program.

**Measure 7: Interviews with interns:** Assessing their satisfaction with the program, effectiveness of mentorship, relevance of work experience, and overall professional development received. Exploring their experiences, challenges, and insights gained during the internship.

**Measure 8: Post-internship career choices of former interns:** Identifying the percentage who pursue public defense or related fields.

**Measure 9: Feedback from supervising attorneys and staff:** Evaluating intern performance, skills development, and contribution to PAPDO's mission.

#### g. Future Funding

Not applicable.

#### **h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

To ensure the long-term viability and expanded reach of our indigent defense services, we are requesting a one-time grant to address the critical need for increased attorney compensation and to establish a robust attorney internship program. Our staffing levels and overall budget framework are anchored in the recommendations of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) salary survey, further refined by insights from the Chief Public Defender, specifically concerning local specifications for salary costs, travel, and other relevant expenditures. This one-time request for funds will enable us to offer competitive attorney salaries while easing the cost to Potter County for fiscal year 2026 and 2027. Additionally, the establishment of an internship stipend program is vital for nurturing the next generation of public defenders and increasing our capacity to serve the community. A detailed budget document, outlining these costs comprehensively, is provided separately for your review

##### **Personnel Costs:**

The PD requested and was granted 4 new hire positions: 2 additional Assistant Public Defenders with a salary range up to \$120,000, 1 investigator at \$60,000 and 1 receptionist at \$42,500. The PD anticipates 2-5 interns for Summers 2026 and 2027 we estimate stipends at \$4,000 per intern per summer. Additionally, we are requesting total salary increases of \$780,299 including benefits from fiscal year 2025. Please refer to our separate detailed budget document for specific position salary. The total amount for the increased Personnel line item is \$780,299.

##### **Travel and Training:**

As resources are available, the office will provide training to improve the knowledge and skills of interns to make them more proficient as public defenders. We estimate the travel and training stipends will cost approximately \$180,000 with no increase to our approved grant.

##### **Equipment:**

This line item covers the costs of the computers, and office furniture required to equip the offices for the four new PD staff members and up to 5 interns. The total expected costs increased for equipment, replacement, and upgrades of \$5,000 for fiscal year 2026.

##### **Supplies and Direct Operating:**

No additional funding.

##### **Contract Services:**

No additional funding.

##### **Indirect:**

Not Applicable

Personnel Costs		\$780,298.38
FTE's	8.00	
Salary	\$433,690.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$346,608.38	
Travel and Training		\$0.00
Equipment		\$5,000.00
Supplies		\$0.00
Contract Services		\$0.00
Indirect		\$0.00
Total		\$785,298.38
Required County Match		\$261,766.13
Total less County Match		\$523,532.25



Appointments to PAPDO FY 24	#	%
Armstrong	14	0.7%
Misd	3	
Fel	11	
Carson	132	6.9%
Misd	15	
Fel	117	
Deaf Smith	508	26.7%
Misd	205	
Fel	303	
Moore	372	19.6%
Misd	291	
Fel	81	
Oldham	93	4.9%
Misd	15	
Fel	78	
Potter (Misdemeanor & Felony)	783	41.2%
Misd	434	
Fel	349	
TOTAL =	1902	

10/1/2025 - 9/30/2026

Panhandle Area Public Defender Office Costs - PROJECTED INCREASE TO FY26 Expenditures - % based on PD appointments						
Year	Counties		PD Office Costs		TIDC Grants for PD Office	County portion to be paid
FY2026	6 Counties		\$ 785,298.38		\$ 523,532.25	\$ 261,766.13
	Armstrong	0.7%		\$ 5,780.32	\$ 3,853.55	\$ 1,926.77
	Carson	6.9%		\$ 54,500.20	\$ 36,333.47	\$ 18,166.73
	Deaf Smith	26.7%		\$ 209,743.21	\$ 139,828.80	\$ 69,914.40
	Moore	19.6%		\$ 153,591.48	\$ 102,394.32	\$ 51,197.16
	Oldham	4.9%		\$ 38,397.87	\$ 25,598.58	\$ 12,799.29
	Potter	41.2%		\$ 323,285.29	\$ 215,523.53	\$ 107,761.76

10/1/2026 - 9/30/2027

Panhandle Area Public Defender Office Costs - PROJECTED INCREASE TO FY27 Expenditures - % based on PD appointments						
Year	Counties		PD Office Costs		TIDC Grants for PD Office	County portion to be paid
FY2027	6 Counties		\$ 780,298.38		\$ 520,198.92	\$ 260,099.46
	Armstrong	0.7%		\$ 5,743.52	\$ 3,829.01	\$ 1,914.51
	Carson	6.9%		\$ 54,153.20	\$ 36,102.13	\$ 18,051.07
	Deaf Smith	26.7%		\$ 208,407.77	\$ 138,938.51	\$ 69,469.26
	Moore	19.6%		\$ 152,613.56	\$ 101,742.38	\$ 50,871.19
	Oldham	4.9%		\$ 38,153.39	\$ 25,435.59	\$ 12,717.80
	Potter	41.2%		\$ 321,226.94	\$ 214,151.29	\$ 107,075.65

**BUDGET - INCREASED POSITIONS & COSTS PROJECTED FY26**

Additional IncreasedSupply Costs	
Description	Cost
Non-capital Equipment	\$ 5,000.00
CAFA - no increase	\$ 22,108.00
<b>TOTAL=</b>	<b>\$ 27,108.00</b>

**Salaries and Benefits - Potential Increased Expenditures FY26**

Salaries	
Position	Annual Salary Increase
First Assistant	26,400.00
Office Manager	3,800.00
Lead Mental Health Case Manager	700.00
Public Defender - Team Lead - Colton Risinger	1,700.00
Public Defender - Team Lead - Erin Odle-Baird	1,700.00
Public Defender - Team Lead - Lakeshia Walton	1,700.00
Public Defender 3 - Sharon Meier	1,700.00
Public Defender 3- New Hereford	120,000.00
Public Defender 3 - New Dumas	120,000.00
Public Defender 2 - OPEN	1,700.00
Public Defender 1 - Devon Johnston	240.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Investigator - New Position - Dumas	60,000.00
Legal Assistant	8,500.00
Legal Assistant	6,000.00
Legal Assistant	6,000.00
Legal Assistant	6,000.00
Mental Health Case Manager	3,350.00
Mental Health Case Manager	850.00
Mental Health Case Manager	850.00
Receptionist - New Position	42,500.00
	<u>433,690.00</u>

Benefits	
Position	Annual Benefit Increase
First Assistant	18,639.84
Office Manager	13,462.18
Lead Mental Health Case Manager	12,751.97
Public Defender - Team Lead - Colton Risinger	12,981.07
Public Defender - Team Lead - Erin Odle-Baird	12,981.07
Public Defender - Team Lead - Lakeshia Walton	12,981.07
Public Defender 3 - Sharon Meier	12,981.07
Public Defender 3- New Hereford	40,083.60
Public Defender 3 - New Dumas	40,083.60
Public Defender 2 - OPEN	12,981.07
Public Defender 1 - Devon Johnston	12,646.58
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
Investigator - New Position - Dumas	26,337.60
Legal Assistant	14,538.95
Legal Assistant	13,966.20
Legal Assistant	13,966.20
Legal Assistant	13,966.20
Mental Health Case Manager	13,359.09
Mental Health Case Manager	12,786.34
Mental Health Case Manager	12,786.34
Receptionist - New Position	22,328.35
	<u>346,608.38</u>

**BUDGET - INCREASED POSITIONS & COSTS PROJECTED FY27**

Supply Costs	
Description	Cost
Non-capital Equipment - no increase	\$ 5,000.00
CAFA - no increase	\$ 22,108.00
<b>TOTAL=</b>	<b>\$ 27,108.00</b>

**Salaries and Benefits - Potential Increased Expenditures FY27**

Salaries	
Position	Annual Salary Increase
First Assistant	26,400.00
Office Manager	3,800.00
Lead Mental Health Case Manager	700.00
Public Defender - Team Lead - Colton Risi	1,700.00
Public Defender - Team Lead - Erin Odle-B	1,700.00
Public Defender - Team Lead - Lakeshia W	1,700.00
Public Defender 3 - Sharon Meier	1,700.00
Public Defender 3- New Hereford	120,000.00
Public Defender 3 - New Dumas	120,000.00
Public Defender 2 - OPEN	1,700.00
Public Defender 1 - Devon Johnston	240.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Public Defender INTERN STIPEND	4,000.00
Investigator - New Position - Dumas	60,000.00
Legal Assistant	8,500.00
Legal Assistant	6,000.00
Legal Assistant	6,000.00
Legal Assistant	6,000.00
Mental Health Case Manager	3,350.00
Mental Health Case Manager	850.00
Mental Health Case Manager	850.00
Receptionist - New Position	42,500.00
	<b>433,690.00</b>

Benefits	
Position	Annual Benefit Increase
First Assistant	18,639.84
Office Manager	13,462.18
Lead Mental Health Case Manager	12,751.97
Public Defender - Team Lead - Colton Risi	12,981.07
Public Defender - Team Lead - Erin Odle-B	12,981.07
Public Defender - Team Lead - Lakeshia W	12,981.07
Public Defender 3 - Sharon Meier	12,981.07
Public Defender 3- New Hereford	40,083.60
Public Defender 3 - New Dumas	40,083.60
Public Defender 2 - OPEN	12,981.07
Public Defender 1 - Devon Johnston	12,646.58
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
not eligible for benefits	-
Investigator - New Position - Dumas	26,337.60
Legal Assistant	14,538.95
Legal Assistant	13,966.20
Legal Assistant	13,966.20
Legal Assistant	13,966.20
Mental Health Case Manager	13,359.09
Mental Health Case Manager	12,786.34
Mental Health Case Manager	12,786.34
Receptionist - New Position	22,328.35
	<b>346,608.38</b>

## **2026 Tom Green County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**

**New Improvement Grant Application. Submission 1: Big Country Recruiting Initiative; Submission 2: Increase TIDC Funding from 66 2/3% Sustainability to 80% for Core Operations; Submission 3: Increase TIDC Funding from 66 2/3% to 80 for Expansion.**

### **Indigent Defense Programs to Address Pandemic-Related Backlogs**

#### **a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Callahan, Coke, Coleman, Concho, Irion, Runnels, Schleicher, Shackelford, Sterling, Taylor, Tom Green**

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **75-6001184**

Division To Administer Grant: **Tom Green County Judge's Office**

Program Title: **New Improvement Grant Application. Submission 1: Big Country Recruiting Initiative; Submission 2: Increase TIDC Funding from 66 2/3% Sustainability to 80% for Core Operations; Submission 3: Increase TIDC Funding from 66 2/3% to 80 for Expansion.**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$1,945,170.00**

Authorized Official: **Lane Carter**

Financial Officer: **Nathan Cradduck**

Program Director: **Elizabeth Berry**

Mailing Address: **113 W. Beauregard Avenue; San Angelo, TX 76903**

#### **b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

Submission 1: The Big Country Recruitment Initiative (BCRI) is designed to ameliorate the difficulties in identifying, hiring and retaining felony-qualified attorneys for the Concho Valley Public Defender's Abilene Office. BCRI contemplates retaining a recruiting firm to complete a nationwide search for felony-qualified attorneys with a passion for Public Defense; having recruiting events, sponsorships and tables at interstate and intrastate criminal law CLEs and local bar association luncheons and gatherings; and using funds to incentivize relocation to rural West Texas locations. Submission 2: In 2021, Tom Green County collaborated with six rural counties (Coke, Concho, Irion, Runnels, Schleicher, Sterling) applied for a regional rural sustainability grant and created the Concho Valley Public Defender's Office. Since then, neighboring counties (Taylor, Coleman, Callahan, Shackelford) merged with the CVPDO. The CVPDO is now a vital source of representation in felony, misdemeanor, and juvenile cases across eleven counties in West Texas. Rural sustainability funding through TIDC is what made the office possible. An increase in the reimbursement percentage from the state will ensure the future survival and longevity of our program. Submission 3: same

#### **c. Problem Statement**

Submission 1:

The Concho Valley Public Defender's Office (CVPDO) in Abilene began accepting felony cases in June 2023 with grant funding allocated for 12 felony-qualified attorneys. As of this application, only six (6) felony attorneys are currently staffed in the Abilene Office, leaving six (6) critical positions unfilled. Several of the current felony attorneys are newly promoted from handling misdemeanors, and only two have more than five years of experience in high-level criminal cases. Meanwhile, appointments in this region have weighed heavily skewed toward high-level, serious felony offenses. This leaves a gap in the volume and types of cases to which CVPDO is assigned and the attorneys we have recruited and trained to date. Due to this shortage, CVPDO is unable to meet its full contractual obligations to represent indigent clients in Taylor, Shackelford, Coleman, and Callahan Counties. This results in limited service coverage and increased reliance by the courts on the outside private counsel wheel to handle indigent defense matters.

The persistent staffing shortage is not due to a lack of effort. CVPDO has implemented a variety of recruitment strategies, including outreach to experienced local attorneys; staffing booths at state CLE conferences; participating in law school recruitment events; and engaging personal and professional networks. These methods have supported regular turnover but have not yielded a single applicant for the Abilene office since December 2024, and we have not hired any additional felony-qualified lawyers since August 2024.

A number of new rural public defender offices have been opened by TIDC in recent years, further decreasing the pool of qualified applicants in Texas. Additionally, our current staff attorneys have full caseloads and we do not have anyone on staff who can dedicate the time necessary to recruiting, nor do we have the funds to travel out of state to expand our search beyond Texas borders.

This issue reflects a broader statewide and national trend: rural public defender offices face significant difficulty attracting and retaining qualified attorneys, particularly in felony practice areas. Contributing factors include geographic isolation, lower salaries compared to private practice or urban offices, lack of awareness about regional opportunities, and a limited pipeline of law students choosing careers in rural public defense. These challenges have serious implications for access to justice in rural communities.

When public defender offices are understaffed, indigent defendants often experience delays in representation, higher pretrial detention rates, and longer case resolution times, undermining their constitutional right to counsel. Social costs include prolonged family separation, economic instability, and decreased trust in the criminal legal system. Economically, the lack of adequate defense representation increases costs for local courts, jails, and taxpayers due to case backlogs and inefficient use of judicial resources.

Without targeted, well-funded recruitment and retention strategies, the CVPDO Abilene Office will remain unable to operate at full capacity, hindering its ability to deliver timely, high-quality legal representation and jeopardizing the office's long-term viability in the region.

#### Submission 2:

Small rural counties in Texas are increasingly impoverished. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the national average of people living below the poverty line is 11.5% of the population. In Texas, the state average is 13.7%.

Of the eleven counties served by the CVPDO, all but one have a higher percentage of the population living below the poverty level than both the national average, according to 2023 data. Here are the breakdowns: Callahan County (12.7%); Coke County (13%); Coleman County (17.7%); Concho County (22.2%); Irion County (13%); Runnels County (15.3%); Schleicher County (8.96%); Shackelford County (12.8%); Sterling County (16.4%); Taylor County (14.81%); and Tom Green County (14.6%).

In 2024, eight of the eleven counties served by the CVPDO have a population of less than 10,000. Here are the breakdowns: Callahan County (12,994); Coke County (3,396); Coleman County (7,684); Concho County (3,300); Irion County (1,553); Runnels County (9,880); Schleicher County (2,302); Shackelford County (3,169); Sterling County (1,372); Taylor County (148,813); and Tom Green County (120,103). These areas are suffering from declining population, decreasing tax base, failing businesses and increased poverty, while inflationary costs affect all county departments.

Returning these counties to the reimbursement rate of 80% for the next two years will ensure the future commitment of these counties to our program, thus ensuring that CVPDO will continue to be a vital resource in our area for years to come.

Each year, our counties must do a cost-benefit analysis of their contribution amount for participating in our program. Even though the cost savings have proven out in the modeling and in experience, sometimes the one-time cost may seem insurmountable instead of paying the few private counsel available over the course of the fiscal year. During the expansion in late 2022, one of the counties that was added was Jones County. As soon as the 80% reimbursement rate provided by TIDC in year one dropped to the usual sustainability rate of 66 2/3%, Jones County withdrew from the program. The concern is that other counties will follow suit. Therefore, returning the reimbursement rate to the original 80% for an additional two years would solidify the longevity of CVPDO and its use as a resource for indigent defense services for the foreseeable future.

Submission 3:  
same

#### d. Objectives

Submission 1:

##### 1. Become Fully Staffed:

- Recruit and hire six (6) felony-qualified attorneys in order to meet current staffing requirements.
- Create further pathways for misdemeanor-qualified attorneys to gain exposure to our office, and then provide more internal growth.

##### 2. Enhance Access to Justice:

- Ensure that CVPDO's Abilene office is able to better represent indigent individuals within the criminal justice systems by reducing caseloads.
  - Ensure quicker case resolutions, better court efficiency and higher attorney retention rates.
3. **Establish Long Term Recruiting Programs:**
- Create and establish policies and procedures to ensure long-term staffing needs are met.
  - Create and establish long-term partnerships with law schools and legal organizations nationwide to increase the applicant pool long-term.

Submission 2:

The objective of the higher reimbursement rate is to ensure the continued commitment of our eleven counties to using CVPDO as the primary provider of indigent defense in criminal cases.

Submission 3:

same

#### e. Activities

Submission 1:

##### 1. Engage a Recruitment Firm

- To address staffing shortages and recruit highly qualified felony-level attorneys, CVPDO would engage professional recruitment firms. Recruitment firms conduct targeted outreach based on CVPDO's hiring criteria, using both personal and extended legal professional networks to identify attorneys with the skills, experience, and commitment necessary to excel in rural public defense. CVPDO retains full control over interviews and hiring decisions.
- Given the urgency of filling felony-qualified vacancies, this method provides a cost-effective and timely solution for reaching a broader and more qualified applicant pool than would otherwise be available through in-house recruitment alone.

##### 2. Recruitment Programs

- **Criminal Law CLE Exhibitions:** Staff and have exhibits at criminal law CLEs nationwide in order to promote applications to the Abilene office. As an exhibitor, the office will host a staffed booth to provide information, build visibility, distribute targeted promotional materials, and engage directly with felony-qualified criminal defense attorneys. Attending CLE exhibitions is designed to expand the applicant pool, build long-term interest in the office, and support the goal of hiring and retaining highly qualified attorneys to meet the growing legal needs of the service area.
- **Promotional Videos:** Engage a professional videographer to create "day-in-the life" videos to post to social media and the CVPDO's website. The videographer would create professionally produced videos to showcase the work, mission, culture, and support systems within the office to attract top legal talent, particularly those unfamiliar with the region or hesitant to enter rural public defense without clear expectations.
- **Promotional Materials:** High-quality, visually-engaging materials help establish credibility, attract interest from felony-qualified attorneys, and reinforce the office's identity as a professional, mission-driven workplace.
- **Relocation Stipends and Sign-on Bonuses:** Provide relocation stipends up to \$5,000 for relocation to the Abilene area. Provide sign-on bonuses in the amount of \$7,500 upon the hiring of a qualified felony attorney. Both the stipend and sign-on bonus would be contingent upon the new hire staying with the CVPDO for at least two (2) years.
- **Travel Funds:** Both in-state and out-of-state travel would be required by both our office and our applicants. We would likely want vetted applicants to visit our office and the area before either party would be ready to commit to hiring.

##### 3. Law School Pipeline Program

- **Paid Internships:** Paid law student internships would allow CVPDO's Abilene office to invest in long-term recruitment. Removing financial barriers to well-qualified students interested in public interest careers would allow CVPDO to create relationships with prospective misdemeanor attorneys. Through direct exposure to indigent defense work within the offices, law students would be able to build meaningful professional relationships with staff attorneys and supervisors, hopefully translating into full-time post-graduation employment.
- **Partnerships with Law Schools:** Create partnerships with law schools to funnel law students interested in public defense to the CVPDO. Such partnerships would include speaking at

criminal law events, classes and/or clinics, and conducting on campus interviews.

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Submission 2:

The program plans to continue all activities outlined in the grant application for sustainable funding submitted for FY 2026.

Submission 3:

Same

#### **f. Evaluation**

Submission 1:

- **Recruitment Firm Goals:**

- The BCRI will review the quality of applicants with the retained firm, determine the number of successful hires made, and continued retention of previous hires on a quarterly basis. Comparisons will be made with baseline retention and the quality of attorneys hired through other methods.

- **Recruitment Programs:**

- Determine on a quarterly basis the percentage of qualified applicants referred from CLE exhibition events who progress to interviews. Comparisons will be made with baseline retention and the quality of attorneys hired through other methods.
- Report yearly the number of CLE Exhibitions CVPDO staff has attended.

- **Law School Pipeline Program:**

- On a yearly basis, determine the number of interns who have successfully completed the internship program each year. Determine on a yearly basis the percentage of interns that have applied for full-time positions within CVPDO following graduation.

Submission 2:

The Oversight Board, in conjunction with the Chief Public Defender, will monitor program evaluation. The Chief Public Defender will handle required grant status reporting to TIDC. Financial reporting to TIDC and any other required agencies will be the responsibility of the Tom Green County Auditor, in cooperation with the Chief Public Defender. Reporting of annual county pro rata case data for TIDC reporting compliance will be prepared and distributed to the member counties by Tom Green County. The Chief Public Defender will provide information requested by the Auditor to achieve timely completion of required expenditure reports.

The Chief Defender will continue to track and maintain caseload information with a case management system and other software tools in order to maintain proper client files and to comply with grant reporting requirements.

The CVPDO will continue to monitor available data and work with the administrative staff for the jails in order to monitor compliance with to timeliness of case processing, inmate populations, and to provide data on cost effectiveness.

Annually the CVPDO will submit a report, approved by the Oversight Board, to each Commissioners Court that documents the activities of the office to include costs, case dispositions, and such statistical information that the Chief should include for each Court to be informed of successes and failures, benchmarks achieved, and future goals.

Submission 3:

same

#### **g. Future Funding**

Submission 1: N/A

Submission 2: N/A

Submission 3: N/A

#### **h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

Total amount for all 3 Submissions: \$1,945,170

Submission 1: Subtotal: \$392,728.00

- **Recruitment Firm Costs, Stipends, and Bonuses**

- The BCRI budget for recruitment firm costs is based on the industry standard of a 25% commission per successful hire. The commission is commonly 25% of the candidate's starting salary plus any signing bonus. The commission is returned if the new hire is not retained for a specified period of time (generally one year). The budget request is based off the CVPDO's felony attorney's starting yearly salary plus any sign-on bonus paid. The budget contemplates CVPDO's Abilene office hiring six (6) felony-qualified attorneys.
- The BCRI budget includes a \$7,500 sign-on bonus. The bonus would be required to be repaid by the newly hired attorney if the applicant is not retained for a period of two years.
- The BCRI budget includes up to \$5,000 in relocation reimbursement expenses to incentivize and cover the cost of moving to the PDO's service area. The relocation bonus would be required to be repaid by the newly hired attorney if the applicant is not retained for a period of two years.

- **Recruitment Programs and Materials**

- To fund exhibitor fees, booth space, and basic materials at multiple criminal law CLE conferences nationwide, targeting felony-qualified attorneys. Contemplates eight (8) CLE Exhibition events per year over the two-year grant period with estimated costs of \$1,000 per exhibition.
- Travel funds include round trip airfare and/or mileage for two (2) staff across multiple events during the grant period.
- Hotel expenditures are based on 3 hotel nights being needed for approximately sixteen (16) events for two (2) staff members at an approximate rate of \$200 per night.
- Promotional material costs to include the design, distribution of brochures, branded items, banners and other necessary items for exhibitions.

- **Law School Pipeline Program**

- The BCRI Budget contemplates a stipend of \$5,000 per 8-week period law students spend interning/externing with CVPDO. The request contemplates eight (8) law student interns over the two-year grant period.

- **Total Request: \$392,728.00**

Submission 2: Subtotal: \$844,292.00

Under the current sustainability model and based on the previously approved additional positions for the CVPDO Core Operations, for FY 2026, TIDC's contribution of 66 2/3% would be \$2,110,729.15. The seven counties of the CVPDO Core Operations grant are slated to contribute \$1,055,364.58 under the normal sustainability funding. With this additional stipend, this would raise TIDC's contribution to 80%, totaling \$2,532,874.98 and the total seven county match would be \$422,145.83 per year.

Total for the biennium: \$844,292.00

Submission 3: Subtotal: \$708,150.00

Under the current sustainability model and based on the previously approved additional positions for the CVPDO Expansion, for FY 2026, TIDC's contribution of 66 2/3% would be \$1,770,371.91. The four counties of the CVPDO Expansion grant are slated to contribute \$885,185.95 under the normal sustainability funding. With this additional stipend, this would raise TIDC's contribution to 80%, totaling \$2,124,446.29 and the total four county match would be \$354,074.38 per year.

Total for the biennium: \$708,150.00

Personnel Costs		\$0.00
FTE's	0.00	
Salary	\$0.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$0.00	
Travel and Training		\$40,728.00
Equipment		\$0.00
Supplies		\$7,500.00
Contract Services		\$269,500.00
Indirect		\$75,000.00



Total	\$392,728.00
Required County Match	\$0.00
Total less County Match	\$392,728.00

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<b>Big Country Recruitment Initiative Budget</b>	
<b>Law School Pipeline Program</b>	
Intern Stipend	\$40,000
<b>Recruitment CLEs and Exhibitions</b>	
CLE Exhibitions	\$16,000
Travel and Accommodation Stipends for Recruitment	
Hotels	\$19,200
Travel	\$15,000
Per Diem	\$6,528
Videographer for Recruitment Videos	\$3,500
Recruitment Promotional Materials	\$7,500
<b>Recruitment Firm Costs and Stipends</b>	
Recruitment Firm Commission	\$210,000
Moving Stipends	\$30,000
One-Time Signing Bonuses	\$45,000
<b>Total Grant Request:</b>	<b>\$392,728.00</b>

**2026 Victoria County Improvement Grant Application Narrative  
Crossroads Defenders - Temporary Improvement Grant - OLS Fund  
Multi-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented: **Jackson, Lavaca, Matagorda, Refugio, Victoria, Wharton**  
Fiscal Year: **2026**  
State Payee Identification Number: **74-6002445**  
Division To Administer Grant: **Administrative Services**  
Program Title: **Crossroads Defenders - Temporary Improvement Grant - OLS Fund**  
Requested Grant Amount: **\$2,696,840.00**  
Authorized Official: **Ben Zeller**  
Financial Officer: **Michelle Samford**  
Program Director: **Nora Brosig Kucera**  
Mailing Address: **101 N Bridge St; Room 102; Victoria, TX 77901**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

Crossroads Defenders (CxD), a regional public defender office serving rural Victoria, Jackson, Lavaca, and Refugio Counties, has been operational since 2024, delivering high-quality indigent defense and achieving docket efficiencies, quicker dispositions, and reduced jail populations. This proposal seeks temporary supplemental funding to incentivize expanding services to Wharton and Matagorda Counties, acquire legal research materials and upgraded technology, improve recruiting, and outfit satellite offices. Goals include enhanced capabilities, cost savings through shared infrastructure, and sustained improvements in rural indigent defense access and quality.

**c. Problem Statement**

Rural counties in Texas face significant challenges in providing effective indigent defense services, including limited access to qualified attorneys, inconsistent representation quality, docket backlogs, delayed case dispositions, and overcrowded jails, particularly for individuals with mental illness or intellectual disabilities.

Crossroads Defenders (CxD), a regional public defender office established in 2024 with TIDC grant funding and administered by Victoria County, has begun to address these gaps in Victoria, Jackson, Lavaca, and Refugio Counties since commencing representation operations in December '24. By streamlining caseload processing and implementing holistic defense strategies, CxD has improved attorney availability, enhanced representation quality, accelerated docket management, achieved quicker dispositions, and reduced jail populations, including targeted support for vulnerable defendants, aligning directly with TIDC's planning recommendations.

However, neighboring Wharton and Matagorda Counties continue to struggle with similar deficiencies, relying on fragmented assigned counsel systems that lack the efficiencies of a regional model. Fortunately, through the tireless leadership of Judge Spenrath, Judge Seiferman, and Senator Huffman, Wharton and Matagorda Counties were able to secure funding to start up a Rural Regional Public Defender's Office (Lower Colorado River Regional Public Defender Office "LCRRPDO"). However, as TIDC is well aware, starting a RRPDO from scratch is a tall order, and success is not always guaranteed. CxD believes it can help by extending its proven services to cover these neighboring counties.

A unified public defender office will effectively provide accelerated service delivery to Wharton and Matagorda Counties. By skipping over the tedious and time-consuming steps of opening a new law office, CxD will be able to simply recruit-and-go. This will save many months, if not a year or more of administrative headache and delay. TIDC will enjoy the fruits of its investment on a much more rapid time-table. Furthermore, TIDC will only need to manage one grant going forward, supervise one office, and will save thousands each year from the cost sharing of administrative positions.

Discussions are now underway, and all parties are evaluating the costs, benefits, risks, and rewards from a joint program. We believe that TIDC assistance, via OLS funds (or otherwise), will make a unified office an attractive and cost effective option. Without this funding expansion risks stalling, which may perpetuate inequities and result in missed opportunities for synergized recruitment, long-term cost savings, and streamlined grant management.

Aside from the contemplated unified office, CxD's current operations are hindered by gaps in essential tools: insufficient technology limits courtroom efficiency and remote collaboration across rural areas; incomplete legal research and reference materials restrict case preparation; lack of resources geared towards recruiting slow the staffing and quality of the office; and the absence of satellite offices in each county impedes client access, witness meetings, and local presence, forcing reliance on centralized facilities that increase travel burdens in large geographic regions. These one-time enhancements are critical to scaling CxD's proven model, ensuring equitable, high-quality indigent defense for an expanded population of over 150,000 residents while advancing TIDC's goals for cost-effective rural systems.

#### d. Objectives

The objectives for this supplemental grant are designed to address the identified challenges in rural indigent defense by expanding the Crossroads Defenders (CxD) model, enhancing operational capabilities, and ensuring sustainable integration of new counties. Each objective is time-bound, measurable, and directly tied to program evaluation metrics such as case intake numbers, resource utilization rates, cost savings reports, and stakeholder feedback.

1. **Secure Adjusted Reimbursement Incentives:** Obtain TIDC approval for 100% reimbursement funding for Victoria, Jackson, Lavaca, Refugio in FY26 and 90% reimbursement for all six counties, including Wharton and Matagorda, in FY27. By allowing the original four CxD Counties to join in the 100% reimbursement for FY26, they will be strongly incentivized to add Wharton and Matagorda Counties. Furthermore, providing 90% stepdown reimbursement for FY 27, all counties, including Wharton and Matagorda, would further incentivize all parties to join forces. This will ease the pressure on the counties and CxD, allowing for proper onramp for recruitment and training.
2. **Expand Regional Coverage:** By December 31, 2025, finalize agreements with Wharton and Matagorda Counties to join CxD, enabling the program to commence rolling case acceptance in these counties in early to mid 2026, with a target of 100% case acceptance by Oct 1., 2026.
3. **Enhance Legal Research Capabilities:** Procure and distribute legal research and reference materials to all CxD attorneys, increasing case preparation and efficiency.
4. **Upgrade Technology Infrastructure:** Acquire and implement upgraded technology (e.g., laptops, printers, and office supplies) for CxD staff, increasing the overall capabilities of the office.
5. **Increase Recruiting Capabilities:** Overcome rural recruiting challenges by utilizing paid job posting platforms. Provide travel funding for both office staff and potential candidates. Increase branding and provide promotional materials to increase visibility and program awareness.
6. **Outfit Satellite Offices:** By January 31, 2026, outfit and operationalize small satellite offices in Jackson, Lavaca, Refugio, Counties (Victoria as central hub), facilitating client/witness meetings and giving CxD staff a place to print documents and meet with clients during court dates.

#### e. Activities

To achieve the stated objectives, Crossroads Defenders (CxD) will undertake the following targeted, one-time or temporary activities under this supplemental grant. These steps build on CxD's existing infrastructure and leverage proven processes from the original regional setup and insights from the Lower Colorado Regional Public Defender's Office application, such as shared administrative efficiencies and holistic defense models. Activities will be implemented by current CxD staff (e.g., Chief Defender and administrative team), ensuring cost-effectiveness and minimal disruption to ongoing operations. Justification for each activity draws from TIDC's 2023 Rural Indigent Defense Planning Study, which highlights regional models' potential for 15-25% reductions in per-case costs and faster dispositions through centralized resources. New elements (e.g., expansion and enhancements) differ from existing programs by scaling to additional counties without duplicating administrative infrastructure, focusing on temporary incentives and tools rather than permanent expansions.

##### 1. Implement Adjusted Reimbursement Structure

Submit detailed budget projections to TIDC (via Modified Grant Award) by the end of Calendar Year 2025, outlining the shared 100% reimbursement for FY2026 and 90% for FY2027, based on projected cost savings and expenditure baselines from all six counties. Increased reimbursement in FY26 incentivizes the original four counties to welcome Wharton and Matagorda by joining them in the 100% reimbursement period, while the 90% step-down benefits the emerging Wharton and Matagorda office, which eases recruitment/training pressures and encourages long-term collaboration, aligning with TIDC's goal of sustainable rural systems without increasing local burdens.

## **2. Facilitated Regional Expansion**

Convene negotiation meetings with Wharton and Matagorda County stakeholders (commissioners courts, judges, and indigent defense coordinators) in fall of 2025, to draft and execute interlocal agreements, using CxD's existing template from the original four counties as a base.

Conduct needs assessments by October 31, 2025, to integrate Wharton/Matagorda's docket data into CxD's case management system, and assess particularized County needs, and train County staff on the PDO appointment process.

Outfit the El Campo office, assemble furniture, install tech, and make ready the office space, by the end of 2025.

Recruit and onboard attorneys and staff dedicated to Wharton and Matagorda Counties. Recruitment support through shared regional job postings and law school presence.

This will enable rolling case acceptance in early to mid-2026 and full 100% acceptance by October 1, 2026, avoiding the 6-12 month startup delays of independent offices.

## **3. Procure and Deploy Legal Research Materials and Upgraded Technology:**

Purchase and distribute legal research materials, hornbooks, reference guides, and other supplements. Update the CxD law library to enable sharing of more limited and costly resources.

Purchase and distribute technology items (e.g., laptops, printers, and office supplies) as needed throughout 2026-2027.

## **4. Outfit and Operationalize Satellite Offices:**

Identify courthouse adjacent offices in surrounding counties and equip the offices with basic amenities and integrate them into CxD's operations by Q2, 2026, including scheduling protocols for part-time staffing or formalized office hours.

## **5. Increase Recruiting Tempo and Effectiveness:**

Immediately acquire software and services to broadly advertise job openings. Travel to law school career fairs and OCIs, throughout the '26 & '27 recruiting seasons. Provide limited funding to bring qualified candidates to South Texas for interviews. Design and purchase recruiting and promotional materials to advertise CxD to potential recruits.

## **f. Evaluation**

The evaluation will assess progress on objectives and rural indigent defense impact using quantitative metrics, qualitative feedback, and fiscal analysis. Led by the CxD Chief Defender and Office Manager, evals will draw from case management data, expenditure reports, and surveys. Most of the requested items are easily measured (e.g. expansion vs. no expansion, resource purchase vs. no resource purchase, tech vs no tech, & recruiting effectiveness compared to previous methods).

**Adjusted Reimbursement Incentives (Objective 1):** Evaluate by comparing pre-and post-approval indigent defense expenditure reports from all six counties, measuring incentive effectiveness through 100% stakeholder buy-in (tracked via inter-local agreements by December 31, 2025) and cost savings per county (quarterly from September 1, 2025, via TIDC-submitted reports).

**Regional Expansion (Objective 2):** Track agreement finalization by reviewing signed interlocal documents by December 31, 2025. Measure case acceptance rollout through case management system reports, counting rolling intakes in Wharton and Matagorda starting in spring 2026 and confirming 100% acceptance by October 1, 2026 (monthly counts aiming for ~200 new cases annually from March 1, 2026).

**Legal Research Capabilities (Objective 3):** Assess procurement and distribution via inventory logs yearly.

**Technology Upgrades (Objective 4):** Evaluate acquisition and implementation yearly, through inventory and internal survey. Capability improvements will be quantified via survey (e.g., reduced downtime, increased efficiency, increased connectivity).

**Recruiting Capabilities (Objective 5):** Track platform acquisitions, travel, and materials deployment via expense logs throughout 2026-2027. Effectiveness will be measured by applicant tracking reports (e.g., 30% increase in applications from paid postings) and hire metrics.

**Satellite Offices (Objective 6):** Evaluate operationalization by Q2, 2026, through site visit checklists and setup invoices. Usage will be tracked via staff feedback and stakeholder input.

#### g. Future Funding

This is a temporary request, and none of the requested items will require ongoing funding that could not be handled via the regular sustainability grant.

#### h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

The total request for the Temporary Improvement Grant is **\$2,714,886**

##### A. Personnel Costs - (\$0 Total)

No new positions are being requested for this grant.

##### B. Travel and Training - (\$15,000 Total)

Recruiting & Travel - \$15,000

Expenses include travel for both office staff, and for potential candidates, LinkedIn Recruiter, Symplicity, 12Twenty, and other job posting websites, along with branding and promotional materials to increase visibility and program awareness.

##### C. Equipment - (\$57,498 Total)

###### Library and Legal Research Resources (Over \$1k per item)

Title	Publisher	Quantity	Total Price
Texas Criminal Practice Guide	LexisNexis	1	\$13,243
Texas Criminal Practice and Procedure	Thompson West	1	\$1,661
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$14,904</b>

###### Technology (Over \$1k per item)

###### i. Laptops - \$23,750

1. Long Battery Life Laptop - Asus ZenBook (\$1250 x 19)

###### ii. Portable Projector & Screen - \$1299

1. Used for Voir Dire & Trial

###### iii. Large Format Printer - \$2,545

1. Used for printing trial demonstratives and exhibits.

##### D. Supplies - (\$30,999 Total)

###### Library and Legal Research Resources- \$15,649

Title	Publisher	Quantity	Total Price
Criminal Practice Handbook	LexisNexis	1	\$229
O'Connor's Criminal Codes	O'Connor's	19	\$536
O'Connor's Texas Crimes and Consequences	O'Connor's	19	\$2,356
Texas Rules of Evidence Handbook	O'Connor's	19	\$5,301
Texas Criminal Forms	LexisNexis	2	\$456
Juvenile Law and Practice	Thompson West	2	\$1,500
Criminal Forms and Trial Manual	Thompson West	2	\$1,604
Texas Criminal Lawyer's Handbook	James Publishing	1	\$228

Texas Criminal Jury Charges	James Publishing	2	\$456
Pattern Voir Dire Questions	James Publishing	1	\$295
Charging Manual	TDCAA	1	\$200
Transportation Code Crimes	TDCAA	2	\$86
Offense Report Manual	TDCAA	2	\$68
Punishment and Probation	TDCAA	2	\$80
Prosecutor Trial Notebook	TDCAA	2	\$178
Child Sexual Abuse	TDCAA	2	\$90
Expunctions & Nondisclosure	TDCAA	2	\$70
Traffic Stops	TDCAA	2	\$66
DWI Investigation and Prosecution	TDCAA	2	\$96
Predicates	TDCAA	19	\$665
Family Violence	TDCAA	2	\$96
Asset Forfeiture	TDCAA	2	\$110
Warrantless Search and Seizure	TDCAA	2	\$90
ALR/DWI	TCDLA	2	\$98
Appellate Manual	TCDLA	2	\$195
42A	TCDLA	2	\$44
Cheat Sheets	TCDLA	2	\$240
Search and Seizure	TCDLA	2	\$86
Trial Notebook	TCDLA	2	\$130
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$15,649</b>

\*Titles, quantity, and prices are provided as an example. Actual purchases may vary, depending on availability and needs.

#### **a. Tech and Office Supplies**

##### **i. Printers - \$8,400**

1. MFPs (\$300 x 28 employees)

##### **ii. High Capacity Shredder -\$200**

##### **iii. Binding Machine - \$150**

##### **iv. Binders - \$500**

##### **v. Laminator - \$100**

##### **vi. Satellite Offices Outfitting - \$6,000**

1. Average outfitting cost for small offices: \$2,000 (desks/chairs ~\$1000 printer/tech ~\$500, amenities ~\$500) For three offices: \$2000 x 3 = \$6000. Each local county would need to identify and provide space.

#### **E. Contract Services**

a. None

#### **F. Indirect**

##### **a. Temporary Reduction of Required Sustainability Program Cash Match - \$2,611,389**

##### **i. FY 25-26 - \$1,229,112**

1. Temporary reduction of required sustainability program cash match a.k.a. 100% TIDC reimbursement for FY 25-26 for Victoria, Lavaca, Refugio, and Jackson Counties. This match amount is what TIDC has already given to Wharton and Matagorda for FY26. Using OLS funds to give the original four CxD counties the same match will incentivize expansion, and may allow us to operate under a single, streamlined sustainability grant.

##### **ii. FY 26-27 - \$1,382,277**

1. 90% TIDC reimbursement for FY 26-27 *for all six counties* (Victoria, Lavaca, Refugio, Jackson, Wharton, and Matagorda Counties).  
2. Wharton, and Matagorda estimated total budget FY26-27 = \$2,138,123  
3. Victoria, Refugio, Lavaca, Jackson estimated total budget FY26-27 = \$3,785,920  
4. Total Est. Budget for six county office = \$5,924,043. County match @ 1/3 = \$1,974,681  
10% County Match = \$592,404. Difference between new and original share = \$1,382,277 in funds from OLS.

##### **iii. Contingency**

1. This request is made contingent upon Wharton and Matagorda joining CxD. At the time of this grant submission, that is still in negotiation, and no formal agreement has been reached. If TIDC decides to approve the funding request, we believe it will strongly incentivize the formation of the unified office. If Wharton and Matagorda decide to operate their own, independent office, CxD will submit a grant modification, allowing the TIDC board to reconsider cash match reductions accordingly.

Personnel Costs		\$0.00
FTE's	0.00	
Salary	\$0.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$0.00	
Travel and Training		\$15,000.00
Equipment		\$57,498.00
Supplies		\$30,999.00
Contract Services		\$0.00
Indirect		\$2,611,389.00
Total		\$2,714,886.00
Required County Match		\$0.00
Total less County Match		\$2,714,886.00

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**2026 Texas Tech University County Improvement Grant Application Narrative**  
**Temporary Assistance Grant: Expanding Caprock Regional Public Defender Capacity**  
**Single-year**

**a. Application Form**

Counties Represented:

Fiscal Year: **2026**

State Payee Identification Number: **37337337333000**

Division To Administer Grant: **Texas Tech School of Law Clinic**

Program Title: **Temporary Assistance Grant: Expanding Caprock Regional Public Defender Capacity**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$349,090.00**

Authorized Official: **Joe Stephens**

Financial Officer:

Program Director: **Joe Stephens**

Mailing Address: **3311 18th Street #108; Lubbock, TX 79409**

**b. Introduction (Executive Summary)**

The Caprock Regional Public Defender Office requests \$349,090 in one-time TIDC funding (this covers a 23-month period, assuming a one-month lag between funding received and filling the position/procuring the vehicle) to expand indigent defense capacity across over a dozen rural counties through a temporary staff attorney position and vehicle acquisition, increasing our caseload capacity while reducing operational costs.

**c. Problem Statement**

The Caprock Regional Public Defender Office, established in 2011 as one of Texas's first regional public defender programs, serves over a dozen rural counties in West Texas (many of which overlap with the High Plains Regional PDO). Our office operates as both a full-service public defender office and a clinical education program through Texas Tech University School of Law -- the only of its kind in the nation. While our innovative model has successfully provided quality representation to indigent defendants across the region, we face significant challenges that limit our ability to meet growing demand:

**Geographic Challenges:**

- Service area spanning over a dozen counties across hundreds of miles
- Some counties require 3-4 hour round trips for court appearances, and very often there are multiple trips to geographically distant counties in the same day
- Nonexistent public transportation infrastructure in rural West Texas
- Weather conditions that can make travel hazardous

**Financial Constraints:**

- Annual mileage reimbursement costs exceeding \$25,000
- Staff using personal vehicles for thousands of miles annually (also, given the unique structure of this program and its "staff," the Chief Defender is tasked with driving the students to and from each court appearance)
- Administrative burden of processing numerous reimbursement claims

**Capacity Limitations:**

- Current staffing levels cannot meet increasing demand for services
- Eight law students provide valuable assistance but only during academic terms
- Summer and holiday periods create service gaps
- Complex cases requiring experienced counsel exceed current capacity

**Current Data:**

- Cap of 400 cases annually across all counties
- Significant increase in appointment requests over past three years (and more now, given the recent pause of appointments from the High Plains Regional PDO)
- Every court appearance requires at least a 70-mile round-trip
- A large number of potential cases (and additional county participation) declined due to capacity constraints

**d. Objectives**

The program will achieve the following measurable objectives during the grant period (September 1, 2025 - September 30, 2027), directly tied to our two funding requests:

## **Objective 1: Expand Service Capacity Through Additional Staff Attorney Position**

**Target:** Increase case acceptance and representation by at least 50% by March 31, 2026, while enhancing clinical education opportunities.

### **Specific Metrics:**

- **Case Volume:** Increase from baseline of 400 cases (FY2025) to 600+ cases by March 31, 2026
- **Case Acceptance:** Reduce case refusal rate from 25% to under 10%
- **Geographic Reach:** Expand regular attorney presence across all courthouses, with the potential to add additional counties
- **Student Education:** Increase supervision of student cases
- **Summer Coverage:** Maintain 100% service levels during student breaks (previously saw 40% reduction)

**Measurement Method:** Monthly case appointment reports from case management system tracking total cases, refusal rates, and cases by county. Student case logs showing supervised matters and mentorship hours documented through time-keeping system.

**Direct Link to Attorney Position:** The full-time staff attorney will carry a personal caseload of 100-ish cases (depending on how they are weighted) while assisting in the supervision of student work, allowing the office to accept significantly more appointments. Our office has historically received a majority of appointments at the misdemeanor level; the addition of this position would allow our office to take a select number of felony appointments as well (especially those that are attached to the misdemeanor appointments). During summer and winter breaks, this attorney ensures continuous service delivery when students are unavailable and the Chief Defender has conflicting court appearances. The attorney's mentorship expands educational opportunities by allowing students to handle more complex cases with appropriate supervision.

## **Objective 2: Reduce Transportation Costs and Improve Resource Efficiency Through Vehicle Acquisition**

**Target:** Decrease transportation-related expenses by 80% by December 1, 2025, redirecting saved funds to direct client services.

### **Specific Metrics:**

- **Mileage Reimbursement Reduction:** From \$25,000+ annually (\$2,083 monthly) to under \$5,000 annually (\$416 monthly)
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Reduce reimbursement processing time
- **Cost Per Case:** Decrease transportation cost per case
- **Resource Reallocation:** Redirect \$20,000+ annually from mileage reimbursements to direct client services (investigations, expert witnesses, etc.)
- **Staff Consideration:** Eliminate personal vehicle wear
- **Multi-County Efficiency:** Transport full legal team (attorney + 2-3 students) to distant counties in single vehicle

**Measurement Method:** Monthly financial reports comparing mileage reimbursements pre- and post-vehicle acquisition. Cost-per-case analysis using transportation expenses divided by active caseload. Documentation of redirected funds usage through budget reports.

**Direct Link to Vehicle Request:** The vehicle eliminates the current inefficient system where multiple staff may be driving personal vehicles to the same distant courthouse, often seeking reimbursement months later. A dedicated office vehicle ensures predictable transportation costs, reduces administrative burden, and demonstrates fiscal responsibility by converting variable costs into a fixed asset that serves the program for 5-7 years.

## **e. Activities**

### **Staff Attorney Recruitment and Deployment (September 2025 - January 2026)**

#### **Recruitment Phase:**

- Post position through State Bar of Texas, law schools, and public defender networks
- Conduct interviews with emphasis on rural practice experience
- Complete hiring by November 1, 2025
- Onboard attorney with comprehensive orientation by December 1, 2025

## **Implementation:**

- Attorney will carry full caseload of 100 weighted cases
- Provide mentorship to law student clinicians during academic terms
- Assist in covering all services during student breaks (December, May-August)
- Focus on complex felony cases requiring extensive preparation

## **Vehicle Acquisition and Deployment (September - October 2025)**

### **Procurement:**

- Utilize DIR state contract for vehicle purchase
- Select appropriate vehicle that will allow for the transportation of the Chief Defender and "staff" (supervised law students who are part of the clinic)
- Complete purchase and state registration by October 15, 2025

### **Operations:**

- Track all usage through electronic logs
- Establish maintenance schedule with local state-approved vendor
- Create emergency response protocols for vehicle issues

## **f. Evaluation**

### **Primary Metrics (Tracked Quarterly and Reported According to TIDC Requirements):**

- 1. Case Volume:**
  - Number of appointments accepted vs. FY2025 baseline
  - Cases per attorney (including students)
  - Case outcomes and disposition times
  - Data source: Case management system reports
- 2. Cost Efficiency:**
  - Monthly mileage reimbursement claims
  - Cost per case comparison (before/after vehicle acquisition)
  - Administrative time spent on reimbursements
  - Data source: Financial reports from County Auditor
- 3. Geographic Coverage:**
  - Attorney/student presence days per county
  - Client meetings conducted by location
  - Court appearances by county
  - Data source: Attorney time logs and calendar system
- 4. Quality Indicators:**
  - Time from appointment to first client meeting
  - Motion practice and investigation activities
  - Client satisfaction surveys (voluntary)
  - Judicial feedback forms (if necessary -- also voluntary)

### **Evaluation Timeline:**

- Baseline data collection: September - October 2025
- Quarterly reports: January, April, July, October (2026 and 2027)
- Mid-term evaluation: September 2026
- Final evaluation: September 2027

## **g. Future Funding**

While we acknowledge and understand that this grant program is specifically for one-time or temporary assistance with no renewal option, we believe the impact of the full-time staff attorney position will be so demonstrably beneficial that we anticipate incorporating this position into the office's permanent funding structure moving forward.

The two-year grant period will provide substantial data on the value of additional professional staff, including measurable improvements in case outcomes, client service, and cost efficiency. We expect this evidence will support future discussions with TIDC to sustain the position, as well as potential inclusion in future operational grant requests. The vehicle acquisition represents a true one-time expense that will provide benefits for 5-7 years beyond the grant period.

Our office has a strong track record of sustainability, having operated successfully since 2011 with a combination of TIDC grants and university support. This temporary expansion will demonstrate the critical need for increased professional staffing in rural public defense.

#### **h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form**

##### **Total Grant Request: \$349,090 (100% TIDC Funded)**

**Personnel: Up to \$135,000/yr (assuming a 23-month funding period, which accounts for a month-long delay between fund-dispersal and filling the position)**

##### **Staff Attorney Position:**

- Base Salary: \$100,000 - \$110,000 annually
- 23-month salary at \$110,000/year: \$211,667
- Fringe Benefits at 33.2%: \$70,273
  - Health insurance (employee + dependents): Variable based on coverage selection
  - Texas Tech retirement contribution: 8.5% of salary
  - FICA/Medicare: 7.65% of salary
  - Workers' compensation: 0.5% of salary
  - Life/disability insurance: Per university policy
- **Total for 23 months with maximum salary and benefits: \$281,940**
- **Travel & Training: \$3,000** (again, covering the nearly two-years this position would be funded)

This compensation allows recruitment of experienced criminal defense attorneys familiar with rural practice challenges.

##### **Vehicle and Related Costs (Equipment): \$64,650**

- **Detailed Vehicle Budget Breakdown (23-Month Period: September 2025 - July 2027):**

##### **Vehicle Purchase: \$40,000**

- Crew-cab pickup truck or mid-size SUV with 4WD capability
- Purchase through DIR state contract

##### **Tax, Title, and Registration: \$3,200**

- Sales tax, title transfer, registration, and associated fees

##### **Extended Warranty: \$3,000**

- 5-year/100,000-mile comprehensive warranty

##### **Insurance (23 months): \$5,750**

- Commercial vehicle insurance at approximately \$3,000/year

##### **Fuel Costs (23 months): \$7,700**

- Estimated 2,000 miles/month (46,000 total miles)
- Average 18 MPG = 2,556 gallons
- \$3.00/gallon  $\times$  2,556 gallons = \$7,700

##### **Maintenance and Operations (23 months): \$5,000**

- Routine maintenance (oil changes, tire rotations, filters)
- One set of replacement tires
- Basic repairs and upkeep
- Registration renewals
- Unanticipated maintenance needs
- Toll roads and parking fees

##### **Total Vehicle Package: \$64,650**

**Cost Justification:** This budget ensures all vehicle-related expenses are covered for the entire 23-month grant period. The \$40,000 vehicle price point allows us to purchase a reliable vehicle suitable for rural conditions and able to transport all clinic participants. When compared to our current annual mileage

reimbursement of \$25,000+ (approximately \$48,000 over 23 months), the vehicle investment provides immediate cost savings while establishing a transportation asset that will serve the office for 5-7 years total.

As additional context to supplement the vehicle request:

## **Current Transportation Practice - The Reality of Rural Public Defense**

### **The Unique Challenge of the Caprock Regional Public Defender Office**

The Caprock Regional Public Defender Office faces a transportation issue unique among Texas public defender offices. As Chief Public Defender, my personal vehicle has become the de facto office vehicle, accumulating over 100,000 miles in less than three years (at this office and my prior one)-an extraordinary burden that highlights the unsustainability of our current system.

#### **The Geographic Reality:**

- Service area spanning over a dozen rural counties
- Minimum 70-mile round trip to reach any courthouse
- Some counties require 200+ mile round trips
- No public transportation infrastructure

#### **My Experience Across Multiple Public Defender Offices:**

Having worked in several public defender offices throughout my career, I can definitively state that the Caprock office faces a unique disadvantage. Every other office I've worked at has provided reimbursement at or near IRS rates along with multiple potential drivers with their own personal vehicles.

At Caprock, we have none of these advantages. Instead, we have the worst combination: high travel demands placed on a single driver with low reimbursement support.

#### **The Financial Reality - A Concrete Example:**

A recent typical day involved:

- Morning: Court appearance in Floydada
- Afternoon: Docket in Plains
- Evening: Return to Lubbock
- Total miles: 247

For this essential work covering multiple counties, I was reimbursed \$84.19-approximately 34 cents per mile. The IRS rate recognizes the true cost of vehicle operation at 67 cents per mile. This means I personally absorbed over \$80 in vehicle costs for a single day of providing the services I'm employed to.

#### **The Cumulative Impact:**

- **100,000 miles in under 3 years:** My personal vehicle has essentially been donated to state service
- **Chronic under-reimbursement:** Thousands of dollars in unreimbursed expenses annually
- **Maintenance burden:** Oil changes every six weeks, multiple tire replacements, major repairs-all out-of-pocket
- **Depreciation:** My vehicle's value has plummeted due to excessive mileage
- **No alternatives:** As is the case across rural Texas, we cannot use public transit, walk to courthouses, or share rides

#### **Why This Grant is Essential:**

This one-time funding opportunity is perfectly suited to address our unique crisis:

1. **Rural Program Focus:** We epitomize the rural challenges this grant aims to address
2. **Cost Efficiency:** Converting variable, inadequate reimbursements into a fixed asset
3. **Sustainability:** The vehicle provides 5-7 years of reliable service

#### **The Bottom Line:**

The Caprock office's pioneering model of combining clinical education with rural public defense has succeeded despite these transportation barriers. This grant would finally provide the basic infrastructure that every other public defender office takes for granted: reliable, state-provided transportation to serve our clients.

## Conclusion

The Caprock Regional Public Defender Office has proven that innovative approaches to rural indigent defense can succeed. This one-time funding will allow us to address our most pressing operational challenges while demonstrating the value of increased investment in rural public defense. The temporary nature of this grant aligns with our long-term sustainability planning, as we work with counties to increase their ongoing support based on demonstrated results.

We appreciate the Commission's consideration and look forward to continuing our role as a model for rural indigent defense in Texas.

Personnel Costs		\$281,940.00
FTE's	1.00	
Salary	\$211,667.00	
Fringe Benefits	\$70,273.00	
Travel and Training		\$2,500.00
Equipment		\$64,650.00
Supplies		\$0.00
Contract Services		\$0.00
Indirect		\$0.00
Total		\$349,090.00
Required County Match		\$0.00
Total less County Match		\$349,090.00

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