



TEXAS TASK FORCE ON INDIGENT DEFENSE

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TASK FORCE ON INDIGENT DEFENSE PUBLISHES BLUEPRINT FOR CREATING A PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFICE IN TEXAS

AUSTIN – A consultant commissioned by the Texas Task Force on Indigent Defense has mapped a strategy for developing county and regional public defender offices in the state.

The *Blueprint for Creating a Public Defender Office in Texas*, prepared by The Spangenberg Group, a nationally renowned indigent defense consulting firm based in Massachusetts, includes contributions from lawyers and other professionals in the Texas criminal justice system. The study is available at the Task Force’s web site at <http://www.courts.state.tx.us/tfid>.

The study should “pave the road for counties and courts to make a meaningful decision on whether or not a public defender office is right for their community,” said Sharon Keller, the presiding judge of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals and Task Force chair.

Legislators created the Task Force on Indigent Defense in 2001 to improve court-provided criminal defense in Texas.

The study sets out legal, economic and administrative factors for counties to consider for creating public defender offices. Counties bear the costs of providing attorneys for criminal defendants facing charges punishable by imprisonment.

In Texas, only seven counties have public defender offices: Cameron, Colorado, Dallas, El Paso, Travis, Webb and Wichita.

The release of the study coincides with the Task Force’s priority to finance establishment of public defender offices with an estimated \$1.7 million the Legislature earmarked for indigent criminal-defense pilot projects. That money represents half of an estimated \$3.4 million expected from a new \$65 fee State Bar members are required to contribute for indigent criminal and civil legal services.

