

Public Defender Task Force to meet May 18

May 16, 2006

The Mississippi Public Defender Task Force will meet at 10 a.m. on Thursday, May 18, at the Mississippi Bar Center at 643 North State Street in Jackson.

Mississippi Supreme Court Justice James E. Graves Jr., recently named chairman of the Task Force, will preside over the meeting.

The agenda includes discussion of creation and funding of a statewide public defender system. Those expected to attend and participate in the discussion include: Prescious Martin, president, Mississippi Trial Lawyers Association; Tylvester Goss, president, Magnolia Bar Association; James B. Reynolds III, director of government relations, Mississippi Bar; Clay Joiner, president, Mississippi Prosecutors Association; Jim Davis, president, Mississippi Public Defender Association; and T.H. "Butch" Scipper, Quitman County Chancery Clerk.

The agenda includes reports from Andre L. de Gruy, director of the Office of Capital Defense Counsel; and Robert Ryan, director of the Office of Capital Post-Conviction Counsel. Margarette Meeks, project manager for the Administrative Office of Courts, will present survey results regarding counties' expenditures for indigent defense during 2005.

The 11-member Public Defender Task Force was created by Mississippi Code Section 25-32-71. The Task Force is charged by statute to:

- make a comprehensive study of the needs by circuit court districts for state-supported indigent defense counsel, examining existing public defender programs. Reports shall be provided to the Legislature each year at least one month before the convening of the regular session;
- examine and study approaches taken by other states in the implementation and costs of state-supported indigent criminal cases;
- study the relationship between presiding circuit court judges and the appointment of criminal indigent defense counsel.

Members of the Task Force include the president or a designee of the Mississippi Public Defender Association and the Mississippi Prosecutors Association; representatives of the Mississippi Supreme Court, the Administrative Office of Courts, the Conference of Circuit Judges, the Attorney General's Office, and the Mississippi Association of Supervisors; and the chairs or designees of the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Senate Appropriations Committee, the House Judiciary En Banc Committee, and the House Appropriations Committee.

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