



ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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**REVISED 2019 NEW ORLEANS BUDGET COMMITS TO HISTORIC SUPPORT OF
PUBLIC DEFENSE**

Inequities Still Remain Among Criminal Justice Entities

New Orleans, LA – Today, the New Orleans City Council amended Mayor Cantrell’s proposed budget, adding \$300,000 more for the Orleans Public Defenders Office (OPD). Mayor Cantrell’s initial budget initially proposed \$1,513,623 for OPD. The Council also funded the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights – the juvenile public defender for New Orleans – for the first time.

This represents a historic appropriation for public defense in New Orleans and Louisiana. However, much work remains before equity in our justice system is fully achieved and we put an end to Louisiana’s user-pay justice system. More urgent, OPD is not out of the woods yet. The prospect of case refusals, court stoppages, and court slowdowns are on the horizon for OPD without more funding. “At the same time, we are optimistic continued engagement with the Mayor and members of the Council will provide solutions which avoid a larger crisis,” said Chief Defender Derwyn Bunton. OPD remains in service restrictions with the implementation of public defender waitlists and case refusals looming.

“We are grateful to the Mayor and the Council for recognizing the importance of OPD and public defense. The Mayor and Council continue to embrace evidence-based policy making while working toward fairness in our city, as evidenced by today’s budget amendment,” said Chief Defender Derwyn Bunton. “However, we’re not out of the woods yet and must remain focused on establishing funding and resource equity in our justice system. This system can’t function if one piece is out-resourced 5 to 1 by the DA; and 170 to 1 by the New Orleans Police Department. We are simply trying to constitutionally, ethically and professionally do the work we are called upon to do.”

During the budget process, OPD made clear years of chronic underfunding and an over-reliance on fines and fees creates this cycle of crisis, bringing wrongful convictions, delays in justice, higher jail costs, and higher jail populations.

While OPD’s additional funding is a step in the right direction, the 2019 budget still remains out of balance, with substantial increases to the district attorney and the courts, as well as the elimination of many traffic cameras, which provided nearly \$1.3 million this year for OPD. The budget inequities continue to highlight the flaws in Louisiana’s user-pay justice system.

Reform advocates, stakeholders, and members-at-large of the New Orleans community (through letters of support) called on the Council and Mayor to better fund OPD and public defense. In one letter to the Mayor and Council, supporters wrote, “A commitment to equity in our criminal

ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

justice system requires inclusive recognition of the role OPD plays and equitable investment in each organization working toward fairness and justice.”

The Orleans Public Defenders Office has a vision of Dignity, Justice and Hope. OPD’s mission is “To fight for our clients by providing excellent client-centered representation, reforming the system and partnering with the community.”

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