



ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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News

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Sheriff Sued to Improve Jail System

A lawsuit was filed today in Civil District Court against New Orleans Sheriff Marlin Gusman. The lawsuit, filed by Stephen J Haedicke and Elizabeth Cumming on behalf of the Orleans Public Defenders, asks that changes be made to the way the jail operates so that defense attorneys have constitutional access to people being held in the jail.

Defense attorneys have been particularly worried about people who have mental health issues. ““I just needed to get a woman information about where she was supposed to go after she was released.” says attorney Mariah Holder. “Because of visitation conditions, I had to communicate with this mentally ill woman through someone else. I could not help her effectively and she never got to where she needed to be. It’s a shame that someone who was mentally ill had to sit in jail an extra two months because of visitation policies.” Attorneys have also reported similar difficulties with people who are terminally ill.

The Orleans Public Defenders is being represented by retired Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, Pascal Calogero, Philip Wittmann of the law firm Stone, Pigman, Walther, Wittmann, and civil rights attorneys Stephen J. Haedicke and Elizabeth Cumming. Phil Wittmann notes how much the city has saved already through jail reform. “The city has been projected to save nearly \$3 million this year because of reforms made that affect how we run our jail. This lawsuit will only help increase those savings to the criminal justice system.” The lawsuit states that attorneys sometimes wait up to four hours for people to be brought to the visiting area. At times, despite the prolonged waiting, some people are never brought to the visitation room. “You have a situation where attorneys have to go three and four times to see one person. Fixing this kind of waste is not optional. We just have to do it,” says Wittmann.

“Ultimately, we have proven that we can save money and get better outcomes for our city,” he continues. “This lawsuit is a part of continuing that progress.”