



# ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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**MAYOR LANDRIEU COMMITS TO REDUCED APPROPRIATION FOR  
OPD IN 2013 BUDGET**

*Inclusion is Good But Not Enough to Stave Off Eventual Restrictions of Services*

*New Orleans, LA* – Today Mayor Landrieu continued his commitment to the Orleans Public Defenders (OPD), though the \$800,000 recommended allocation does not ensure that OPD will be able to provide defense services to all eligible defendants in the coming year. When OPD cannot operate at capacity, the entire criminal justice system experiences delays in the administration for justice for victims, defendants and the public.

For the better part of 2012, inadequate funding forced OPD to make significant staff cuts, and required the unpaid contributions of the private bar and internal client waitlists in order to handle all cases appointed to OPD. Services were restored last month, but the office remains on the brink of service restriction. The Mayor's recommended allocation of \$800,000 is only two-thirds of the city's commitment last year.

“We are certainly grateful to the mayor for including OPD in his budget, but this funding does not meet the service demand. With only \$800,000, our office will struggle to keep up,” said Chief Public Defender Derwyn Bunton. “Public safety depends on an efficient, reliable court system that secures convictions for the guilty and protects the rights of innocent people. This can only happen when OPD is funded on par with the other entities.”

Insufficient and unstable funding have always challenged OPD's operations and the city's appropriation is especially crucial to maintain efficient and effective representation in the face of increasing caseloads. OPD currently represents more than 80% of defendants in Criminal District, Municipal and Traffic courts. In a time of difficult funding choices, the City needs to consider policies and funding formulas that decrease the cost of the entire criminal justice system – not just the budget of the Orleans Public Defenders.

“The public defender's office is an essential component in the criminal justice system and the system is only as strong as its weakest link,” said Rafael Goyeneche, president of the Metropolitan Crime Coalition. “To fund the other components of the criminal justice system at the levels that are being proposed but slashing the funding of the public defender's office will be a counterproductive policy and will only weaken the capabilities of the entire system. This will seriously undermine the investment the city is making in the police and the district attorney because the public defender will not be able to keep up with the current case demands.”

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