



ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S FIFTEEN DEFENDANT INDICTMENT
EXPOSES OPD’S LACK OF ADEQUATE RESOURCES, JEOPARDIZING THE CASE**

New Orleans – Yesterday, the district attorney handed down a 15 co-defendant indictment. The unprecedented number of group prosecutions is consistent with the Mayor’s new Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS). While the initiative is a commendable effort to address the city’s violence, it stresses an already strained public defense office and criminal justice system.

Prosecuting so many people at once creates ethical conflicts in their defense. After sustaining millions of dollars in cuts over the past two years, the Orleans Public Defenders Office (OPD) simply does not have adequate resources to handle all charged. Many of the defendants may not have attorneys when proceedings begin unless they have money for private counsel.

Mayor Landrieu spoke about justice and fairness in his press conference this morning. But justice and fairness can only be served if all agencies are able to contribute to the discussion and able to handle the outcome of the initiatives. The GVRS strategy is placing great strain on our office and resources. Additionally, failing to include and consult OPD in developing or implementing the GVRS threatens to weaken or ruin the impact of GVRS efforts.

OPD alerted all criminal justice stakeholders earlier this year that we were once again short of necessary funding to provide constitutionally-mandated legal defense for indigent defendants. The 33 percent appropriation cut from the New Orleans city budget - coupled with an otherwise unreliable, unstable and inadequate funding system for public defense – has hindered our ability to keep up with the growing and complex demands of our criminal justice system. Should all 15 defendants qualify for (and request) a public defender, the New Orleans criminal justice system will be hard-pressed to move these cases toward resolution – if they move at all.

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