



ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S NEW TWENTY DEFENDANT INDICTMENT
STRAINS OPD RESOURCES AND THREATENS JUSTICE**

New Orleans – Yesterday, the district attorney handed down another sweeping indictment, this time 20 co-defendants. This comes on the heels of the previous 15 co-defendant indictment a month ago. Court proceedings in that case are at a standstill as many of those defendants have yet to receive representation.

The Orleans Public Defenders Office simply doesn’t have the adequate resources after sustaining millions of dollars in cuts over the past two years. As OPD previously warned, should all 20 of the new defendants qualify for (and request) a public defender, many may not have attorneys when proceedings begin unless they have money for private counsel. The New Orleans criminal justice system will be hard-pressed to move these cases toward resolution – if they move at all.

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. Additionally, failing to include and consult OPD in developing or implementing the GVRS threatens to weaken or ruin the impact of the 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.

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