Dear Panel Attorneys,

As 2023 ends and we finish the first week of 2024, I want to express my gratitude for your commitment and efforts to provide effective representation to the poor. Your dedication to justice is the cornerstone of our mission and the key to our success.

In this week's newsletter, we will focus on our collective mission, share updates to enhance your practice efficiency, and highlight opportunities for growth and development. Let's continue working together to ensure that justice remains not just a principle we uphold, but a practice we continually perfect.

With warmest regards,

Jim Bethke

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

“Equal access to counsel is not merely a legal principle; it is at the very core of our country’s identity as a free and democratic society. But despite the mandate in Gideon and its progeny, the constitutional right to effective representation remains elusive in many corners of our nation. The path forward involves comprehensive reform, increased oversight, and unwavering commitment to ensuring equitable access to counsel. As we commemorated the 60th anniversary of this landmark decision, let us recommit ourselves to fulfilling Gideon’s promise and ensuring that it becomes a reality for all. Our pursuit of justice demands nothing less.”

The U.S. Department of Justice’s National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Office for Access to Justice (ATJ) just released this publication about the current state of public defense systems. *Gideon At 60: A Snapshot of State Public Defense Systems and Paths to System Reform* is available here as well as an op-ed co-written by NIJ and ATJ’s directors appears here.

NEW JUVINILE RESOURCE ATTORNEY

The MAC is pleased to announce Sesenu Woldemariam sesenu.woldemariam@bexar.org. He began his work with our office this week. He is a first-generation Eritrean-American and was born and raised in Houston, Texas. After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in English from Yale College and a Juris Doctor from Yale Law School, Sesenu returned to Texas to serve as a Staff Attorney at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid.

During his time at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Sesenu fought for the rights of children involved in or at especially high risk of involvement in the juvenile system: in addition to defending children charged with a range of different misdemeanors and felonies in juvenile court, Sesenu worked to protect vulnerable children against discrimination within and exclusion from the public education system. In doing so, Sesenu sought to address some of the root causes of juvenile involvement.
In his work at the Bexar County Managed Assigned Counsel Office, Sesenu intends to promote a holistic approach to juvenile defense that fully accounts for considerations such as race, poverty, and disability.

**PADILLA LETTER REQUESTS**

With the addition of Justin Tullius to our team, we are now capable of providing Padilla support to our panel attorneys. We are currently working on developing an easy-to-use online form for submission of requests, but until then, if you have any indigent clients in need of a Padilla letter, please email your request to Justin at Justin.Tullius@bexar.org.

Please include the following information, if possible:

- Client name
- Court
- SID number
- Case number
- Charge
- Jail Status
- Client’s phone number
- Next Court date

**IMMIGRATION CLE LUNCH AND LEARN • JANUARY 18, 2024**

Justin will be presenting *Immigration and Family Matters: Whom does a “safe plea” really protect, and how does that work in practice?* In this two-part presentation, Justin will cover the practical pathways of lawful immigration and deportation defenses, as well as those types of crimes that might bar a defendant from lawfully immigrating.

Location will be dependent upon number of expected signups. Please RSVP by emailing james.garza@bexar.org. CLE Credit Application pending. Lunch will be provided!

**eCJIS ODYSSEY RELEASE DATE**

Over the past year and a half, we have been working closely with Bexar County Information Technologies and Tyler Technologies for their implementation of the Odyssey system. We have been informed that the go-live date is scheduled to take place on February 5, 2024.

The training we are planning in coordination with BCIT for the Odyssey system in 2024 will enable you to utilize this new technology effectively, thus streamlining case management and improving your daily practice. Stay tuned for updates on how to register.

**VOUCHER SOFTWARE AND STATUS UPDATE**

As we prepare for Odyssey, we also ready ourselves for the implementation of E-Invoice to criminal vouchers. This new web software, already implemented on the civil side, will help streamline and make easier the tedious process of filling out and filing vouchers. Quick processing of vouchers aims to reduce your administrative workload, ensuring that your focus remains on client advocacy.

Presently, our new voucher inbox contains fewer than 10 vouchers, and there are fewer than 40 vouchers pending due to a range of issues or defects. We are process vouchers in less than 48 hours of receiving them from the court clerks. If you have any questions
regarding the voucher process, please email bobby.gebbia@bexar.org.

SOCIAL WORKER AND CASE MANAGER RESOURCES

The Mental Health Team has diligently engaged with a diverse range of over 50 community agencies within Bexar County over the last year. While presenting the full scope of services offered by these agencies in a succinct format is challenging, we are committed to providing a comprehensive overview.

Jose Castellanos, our dedicated Case Manager, is available to facilitate access to an array of support services for your clients. Below is a structured overview of the services we can help connect with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Category</th>
<th>Examples of Services</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Homeless shelters, group homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Security</td>
<td>Food pantries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Assistance</td>
<td>Medicaid, SSI, SNAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment Resources</td>
<td>Job placement for individuals with disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Resources</td>
<td>Behavioral hospitals, treatment programs, medication management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse Resources</td>
<td>Counseling, peer support, addiction treatment, sober living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Management Services</td>
<td>ID recovery, utility and rent assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Should you find these options align with your clients' needs or if you require assistance beyond what is listed, please don't hesitate to reach out to Jose Castellanos at jose.castellanos@bexar.org. We are here to support you in ensuring that your clients receive the essential services they require.

CLE AND PRACTICE TIME REPORTING REMINDERS

It is imperative to ensure that all mandatory professional development requirements are met. For those who have yet to submit their 12 hours of Continuing Legal Education (CLE) in Criminal Law or Procedure for the year 2023, please expedite the process by forwarding a PDF of your transcript to James Garza at james.garza@bexar.org.

Furthermore, to comply with statutory obligations, it is essential that attorneys complete the attorney practice time report. If this task remains outstanding, please promptly submit your report through the Texas Indigent Defense Commission’s online form available at https://tidc-new.ppri.tamu.edu/attorney-reporting.
Timely adherence to these submissions is not only a reflection of our collective commitment to excellence in legal practice but also a cornerstone of your ongoing professional development. Your attention to these details ensures the integrity and high caliber of our legal services.

JUSTICETEXT

JusticeText is a software platform designed to help criminal defense attorneys save hours reviewing BWCs, interrogations, jail calls, and other time-consuming aspects of case review. They currently work with 100+ public and private criminal defense offices across more than 20 states, including the Harris County Public Defender.

Fill out this form to learn more or sign up for a free trial. You can use the code BEXARMAC2023 for 15% off your first subscription period.

LEXIS LEGAL RESEARCH PILOT PROGRAM

We have slots in our Lexis Legal Research Pilot Program for panel attorneys. Eligibility criteria include maintaining a position on the misdemeanor wheel, partaking in a mentorship program if necessary, and contributing to efficacy surveys.

Your participation in the Lexis Legal Research Pilot Program will provide you with cutting-edge resources to enhance your legal research, thereby improving the quality and efficiency of your legal representation. Interested parties can email james.garza@bexar.org

Jim Bethke

Executive Director

Bexar County Managed Assigned Counsel Office

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