



MINUTES

MARCH 2, 2023

PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OVERSIGHT BOARD MEETING

1. Call To Order

The Public Defender's Oversight Board met on Thursday, March 2, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. in the Brazos County Administration Building, 200 South Texas Avenue, Suite 332, Bryan, Texas 77803 with the following members present:

Duane Peters, County Judge; Board Member
Travis Bryan, III, Judge (retired); Chairperson
Willie Blackmon, Judge (retired); Vice Chairperson, Present via video conference
Irma Cauley, County Commissioner (retired); Secretary
Michele Esparza; Board Member

The attached sheet contains the names of the citizens and officials that were in attendance.

2. Consider and discuss the update of hiring attorney and non-attorney positions.

Chief Public Defender Nathan Wood updated the Board Members on the staff he has hired thus far. His staff includes Natalie Hays, Office Manager; Chelsea Brewer, Legal Assistant; and Debbie Batten, Case Worker. He has also added attorneys Maritza Sifuentez-Chavarria, Sarah Petrus and Yasmeen Aboellhasan. Mr. Wood stated he still has two attorney positions and an investigator position to fill. Mr. Wood believes his office will be completely staffed by summer. Commissioner Cauley asked how soon he would be taking cases. Mr. Wood said he is prepared to receive cases the week of March 13th. Mrs. Esparza noted that she would like to see more Spanish speaking staff members. Mr. Wood answered he would also like to have Spanish speaking individuals within the office, but has not had anyone with that qualification to apply. The Board members also discussed diversity for his staff members and gave him suggestions on locations to place the job postings to garner a more diverse candidate pool.

3. Consider and discuss March 17, 2023 as the initial date to begin taking cases.

Mr. Wood explained that the office would begin accepting misdemeanor cases via the random assignment for court appointed attorneys. He said that would begin sometime the week of March 13, 2023 and the Public Defender's Office would be listed on the rotation wheel instead of a specific attorney. He will then assign the attorney best suited for that case. The Public Defender's Office will have several places on the wheel to comply with the grant requirements.

4. Consider and discuss the pay parity, attorney salaries, and a request for a grant modification.

Mr. Wood stated he has been working closely with the Katie Conner, County Auditor and Nina Payne, Budget Analyst in order to make competitive offers to new hires. He said he will be seeking modifications to the grant when the TIDC Board meets at the end of March in order to be more competitive in the market and parity to the District Attorney's office. He explained that once the Commissioners Court approved the COLA and Merit pay there was a larger disparity between the salaries compared to what the grant had allocated. The Board then gave Mr. Wood direction to seek adjustments to the grant with TIDC. Ms. Conner advised that the adjustments may not happen until the end of the two year period.

5. Consider and discuss the bar dues and board fees.

Mr. Wood asked for advice on how to pay the dues and fees since they are not paid by the County. Ms. Conner advised any licensing fees required for the position should go through Commissioners Court for approval. She stated that any certification fees would not be paid by the County.

6. Consider and discuss future office space.

Mr. Wood commented they are making minor adjustments to the current office space and feels it will be sufficient for the next three years. Looking ahead to future needs, he believes they will quickly outgrow the BIRD building as the Public Defender's office transitions into a regional office.

7. Acknowledgement of Gideon's Day Reception.

Mr. Wood said they have planned a reception for the opening of the Brazos County Public Defender's office along with the 60th Anniversary of Gideon's Day. The reception will take place on March 17, 2023 and invitations will be sent out. Mr. Wood said he would like to inform the community that they are here and ready to serve clients.

8. Announcement of interest items and possible future agenda topics.

Commissioner Cauley suggested Mr. Wood consider offering internships. Mr. Wood said he is definitely open to that and would hope to be able to do so this summer. Judge Peters mentioned the possibility of the Court adding a position to handle pre-indictment cases similar to the program offered by the District Attorney's office. Judge Blackmon then suggested reaching out to different Veteran's associations. Judge Peters added that Mr. Wood is on a committee along with the District and County Attorney to look at the need for Veteran's Court in Brazos County. Mr. Wood agreed that he would reach out to those organizations.

9. Adjourn



**BRAZOS COUNTY
BRYAN, TEXAS**

FILED

2023 FEB 24 P 3: 27

Carol McQueen

NOTICE OF MEETING AND AGENDA

PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OVERSIGHT BOARD MEETING

THIS NOTICE IS POSTED PURSUANT TO THE TEXAS OPEN MEETINGS
ACT (TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 551)

MEETING DATE: March 2, 2023
MEETING TIME: 1:00 PM
MEETING PLACE: Brazos County Administration Building, 200 South Texas Avenue, Suite 332, Bryan, Texas 77803. THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED BY VIDEO CONFERENCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS SET FORTH IN SECTION 551.127 OF THE TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE.

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1. Call to Order
 2. Consider and discuss the update of hiring attorney and non-attorney positions.
 3. Consider and discuss March 17, 2023 as the initial date to begin taking cases.
 4. Consider and discuss the pay parity, attorney salaries, and a request for a grant modification.
 5. Consider and discuss the bar dues and board fees.
 6. Consider and discuss future office space.
 7. Acknowledgement of Gideon's Day Reception.
 8. Announcement of interest items and possible future agenda topics.
 9. Adjourn

The Brazos County Administration Building, 200 South Texas Avenue, Suite 332, Bryan, Texas 77803. THIS MEETING

WILL BE CONDUCTED BY VIDEO CONFERENCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS SET FORTH IN SECTION 551.127 OF THE TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE. is wheelchair accessible. Handicap parking spaces are available. Any request for sign interpretive services must be made two working days before the meeting. To make arrangements, please call (979) 361-4102.

