



Orleans Parish Juvenile Court
421 Loyola Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112

CHIEF JUDGE

DAVID L. BELL

JUDGES

ERNESTINE S. GRAY
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Orleans Indigent Defender Board
2601 Tulane Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70119

March 6, 2007

Dear Members of the Orleans Indigent Defender Board:

I write to thank you for your continued commitment to providing representation to young people who appear before the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court (OPJC) and to support the Orleans Indigent Defender Board's (OIDB) decision to contract with the Juvenile Regional Services (JRS) law office for indigent juvenile defense.

As you know, OPJC is working towards becoming a model juvenile court by implementing best practices. In 1995 and again in 2001 OPJC was deemed "one of the worst juvenile courts in the country" based on assessments of access to counsel and quality of representation in delinquency proceedings. Failure to provide quality representation in our court has been one of the most significant barriers to successful outcomes for young people.

According to the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) one of the sixteen principles of a Delinquency Court of Excellence states the following:

Youth Charged in the Formal Juvenile Delinquency Court Must Have Qualified and Adequately Compensated Legal Representation – Alleged and adjudicated delinquent youth must be represented by well trained attorneys with cultural understanding and manageable caseloads.

In an effort to achieve that goal, the Judges unanimously voted to support OIDB's decision to contract with JRS at our February 7, 2007 En Banc meeting.

JRS began providing representation on February 12, 2007. I would be remiss if I did not express the incredible improvement in representation we observed in the markedly short

period of time that the legal team at JRS began representing young people before the court. OPJC staff and others have commented on the quality of advocacy and attention to clients and families throughout the process. JRS brings an unparalleled level of professionalism and spirit to the representation of its clients.

I regret that I will be in San Diego on March 7, 2007 and unable to attend OIDB's meeting; however I urge you to call me on my cell phone at (504) 701-6238 so that I may participate in this critical conversation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a vertical stroke and a horizontal line extending to the right.

David L. Bell
Chief Judge