

ATASCOSA COUNTY JUDGES REPORT

The Public Defenders Program is still, to the best of my knowledge, working well. It is an ongoing grant I learned about at a conference for judges and commissioners in College Station. We realize that with savings of about \$500,000 per year, we were spending on indigent defense appointments. I am sure you have heard about the constitution that says if you can not afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you.

On top of the savings, Atascosa County (as well as Frio, Karnes and Wilson) have a better indigent defense program for the accused. It used to take three to six months for the defendant to be appointed an attorney, and now the defendant may get one as soon as a few days. We remodeled a modular building that Pleasanton ISD gave the county (at the cost of about \$75,000), and the Public Defender program uses that as an office. They are paying the county \$1,500 a month in rent. So, the county will be paid back the cost of the building in roughly four years. Therefore, the county's costs will be covered. The county does not pay for electricity and water. Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid supervises and runs the program for the member counties previously named.

As I said, this program is a grant, but it is one that TIDC (Texas Indigent Defense Commission) wants to keep in place permanently. TIDC has as its goal to eventually bring all rural counties into a similar program. Large counties like Bexar have their own public defender programs. I take great pride in providing the initial contact and the leadership for the four counties to keep this program on task.

We have some dedicated employees doing the hard work keeping our courts running. I know our judges, both county and district, appreciate their diligence and dedication.

Thanks for listening. Your county government is getting better all the time.