



In response to the statement released by the NAACP, please find our answers below to the main issues in question.

“..legal representation by the East Baton Rouge Public Defender's office has rapidly declined since Lisa Parker was appointed as the District Defender.”

Since Chief Lisa Parker has taken office, 17 attorneys have resigned. All positions have been filled. More importantly, since July 2021, we haven't had any cases dropped, overlooked or neglected.

“The NAACP has been informed that public defenders did not attend court today. We were informed by current staff members that the Baton Rouge Office of Public Defender Office has run out of money and Chief Lisa Parker could not afford to pay them.”

All court sections had a public defender Wednesday, July 6th. Every client had adequate representation yesterday. The Public Defender's office has received funding.

A regular staff meeting was held Tuesday afternoon. During the meeting, the staff was made aware of the *possibility of a late payment. As of the time we met, money that was supposed to be received from the state had not yet arrived in our account.

Out of concern for her staff, Ms. Parker made them aware of the situation while acknowledging that the funds were on the way.

The fiscal budget for July 2021 - June 2022 had been written and submitted before Ms. Parker, and her current administration, took office. Public defense is not properly funded. That is the core issue.

Despite the low budget, the office has managed to stretch the funds and finish the fiscal year without going in the red. Wednesday, July 6th, the funds did make it to our account. All staff, and contract attorneys, will be paid on time.

-While the previous administration had 4-5 public defenders in each section of court at any given time, the current administration has 1-2 in at least some court sections.

Prior to Ms. Parker taking office, there were 4-5 public defenders across multiple court sections. The attorneys have since been assigned to specific sections. Currently, each section has at least 3 attorneys.

-Public defenders are handling caseloads “in excess of 300 cases at any given time with no increase in pay or any other compensation for this work.”

Currently, one of our capable Public Defenders has 229 cases. That attorney meets with every client and has adequate support. The average attorney has at least 130 - 150 cases or less.

-New clients assigned by the court to the public defender’s office are “now being forced to go immediately to the public defender’s office to pay a fee” and if they do not do so, “staff has been ordered at the client’s next court date to ‘shred’ their information and tell their clients they cannot represent them.”

The clients have always paid a \$40 fee for representation. That set fee is a legislative statute. This is a decision that should be handled by lawmakers and state representatives. You will see below the law states the indigent “shall pay a nonrefundable application fee...”. It is a non-negotiable state law.

*The Office of Public Defender has historically still represented clients who were unable to pay as long as they were indigent.

[LA RS 15:175](#)

“ (f) An accused person or, if applicable, a parent or legal guardian of an accused minor or an accused adult person who is claimed as a dependent on the federal income tax submission of his parent or legal guardian, who makes application to the district office certifying that he is financially unable to employ counsel and requesting representation by indigent defense counsel or conflict counsel, **shall pay a nonrefundable application fee of forty dollars to the district office or its designee**, which fee shall be in addition to all other fees or costs lawfully imposed. If the board or other appropriate official determines that the person does not have the financial resources to pay the application fee based upon the financial information submitted, the fee may be waived or reduced. An accused who is found to be indigent may not be refused counsel for failure to pay the application fee.”

-Some public defenders on staff are now taking private clients.

We do not have a rule saying they can't. They are attorneys. Public defenders are, on average, the lowest paid members of legal counsel.

[Please refer to this statement from the Louisiana Public Defender Board:](#)

“Louisiana has the highest rate of incarceration of any state in the nation. This statistic should be considered in the context of Louisiana's historic failure to provide adequate resources for its public defense function. Until 2007, Louisiana was the last remaining state to fund the majority of its constitutional obligation through court costs (a scheme that inspired the Washington Post to call it, 'the country's most bizarre'). More than 90% of all criminal defendants in Louisiana rely on a public defender, and are processed through a criminal justice system that is so overworked that trials are rare, attorney-client contact may not happen until months after arrest, local public defense systems experience high turnover and low morale, and wrongfully convicted people are being released after spending decades in prison.”

Since COVID the court system has been overloaded. Our Public Defenders are fighting daily to support the indigent community in an already overwhelmed and underfunded system.

Chief Lisa Parker is more than qualified for her role as the Chief Public Defender of the 19th Judicial District. She is so qualified, the Louisiana Public Defender board has recently named her the interim Chief of the 23rd Judicial District in Ascension parish.

Chief Parker's passion is focused on supporting her staff as they support the indigent community. Despite the funding issues, and loss of attorneys, every client has had fair and adequate representation. Again, every court section has proper attorney representation.