

FACT SHEET

Policymakers Must Ensure Public Safety and Due Process in Rural Texas



! THE PROBLEM

- On average, Texas' most urban areas have 28 lawyers for every 100 criminal cases, but rural areas have only five.
- In rural Texas, people charged with misdemeanors are four times less likely to have a lawyer than people in urban Texas.
- In 2021, no local lawyer accepted an adult criminal appointment in 65 rural counties.
- The problem is getting worse. Since 2015, Texas has lost one-quarter of its rural defense lawyers and an untold number of rural prosecutors.

Rural Texas Urgently Needs More Prosecutors and Public Defense Providers

✓ THE SOLUTIONS

1. Educational Pipelines

Texas should **adapt its "grow your own teachers" model** to recruit and retain rural criminal lawyers. Legislators should also **fund rural criminal law pipeline programs** and **create post-graduate fellowships and incubators** for prosecutors and defense providers.

2. Financial Incentives

Texas should **create incentive programs** modeled on the successful Physician Education Loan Repayment Program. Texas should also **fund the THECB's program for rural prosecutors** and expand it to **include rural public defenders**.

3. Rural Public Defender Offices

Legislators should **allocate funds to create new rural public defender offices**. They should also **invest in research** that identifies the rural areas with greatest current and emerging needs.



Read our policy brief *Greening Criminal Legal Deserts in Rural Texas*

In Texas, there are

94,347
lawyers

13,226

Criminal lawyers

2,701

Rural lawyers

846

Rural criminal lawyers

403

Rural appointed criminal lawyers



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Rural Texas Urgently Needs More Prosecutors and Public Defense Providers



! THE PROBLEM

- Rural prosecutors' offices cannot recruit and retain enough lawyers to staff their local criminal courts.
- Misdemeanor defendants in rural Texas are four times less likely to have a lawyer than defendants in urban areas.
- Some Texas counties never provide appointed counsel for misdemeanor defendants.
- The problem is getting worse. Since 2015, Texas has lost one-quarter of its rural defense lawyers and an untold number of rural prosecutors.

Texas Has a Home-Grown Solution for the Rural Criminal Lawyer Crisis

✓ THE SOLUTION




Texas' successful Physician Education Loan Repayment Program (PELRP) uses financial incentives to recruit doctors to rural areas.

- More than 70% of doctors from the PELRP's first three cohorts practiced in healthcare shortage areas for at least four years.
- In one cohort, a majority of doctors served Texas' health-shortage communities for at least eight years.

Legislators should create similar incentives for rural prosecutors and indigent defense providers.

- Using the PELRP model, Texas can recruit rural prosecutors and indigent defense providers.
- Short-term assistance on PELRP's four-year timeline can bring long-term stability and equity to Texas' rural criminal courts.



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