

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
PUBLIC SAFETY AD HOC COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 19th DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2024

The Caddo Parish Public Safety Ad Hoc Committee met in legal session on the above date at 1:00 p.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers, with Mr. Epperson, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Epperson, Gage-Watts, and Thomas (3). ABSENT: Commissioners G. Young and J. Young (2).

Mrs. Gage-Watts gave the invocation, and Mr. Epperson led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance. There were no Agenda Additions or Public Comments, so the Committee moved onto New Business.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Public Defender's Office presentation*

Michelle AndrePonte, Executive Director of the Public Defender's Office, submitted a request for funding. She thanked the Commission for their continued support over the years. She also explained that she is requesting additional funding due to the high turnover rate with her attorneys. Mrs. AndrePont said that this is due to the low salaries based off the tremendous amount of workload. She said that, aside from Jefferson and Orleans, Caddo Parish tried the greatest number of criminal jury trials in this jurisdiction.

Ms. AndrePonte said that she has lost a number of attorneys to the District Attorney's Office because they start their employees off between \$62k-\$65k. The starting salary at the Public Defender's Office is \$48k.

Ms. AndrePonte also mentioned the overcrowding at CCC due to the backlog of discovery issues, but also due to the high turnover within the Public Defender's Office. Once an attorney leaves, it takes a new attorney 3-6 months to review and prepare for the case.

She is requesting an increase in appropriations to help fund salary increase in order to retain the employees she currently has.

Mr. Thomas wanted to know if she is able to recruit attorneys from other parishes. Ms. AndrePonte said that she has a number of contract attorneys.

Attorney Frazier mentioned that the Commission is not statutorily responsibility to fund the operations of this agency.

Mr. Epperson wanted to know how much she received from the State this year. Ms. AndrePont said that she received \$2.8M in 2024. In addition to the state allotment, she also receives conviction and user fees. There's a \$45 fee assessed to every conviction. Mr. Epperson wanted to know if she has requested any extra funds from the State. Ms. AndrePont said that she is constantly requesting additional funding from the State. Attorney Frazier also mentioned that the Governor took the Public Defender's Office under his executive branch.

Ms. AndrePont said that she is willing to provide a report or summary of what she is spending the funds on. Mrs. Bryant said that this is having a negative impact on the Commission's operations. The backlog in prosecuting cases and public defender retention has caused overcrowding in CCC. Mrs. Bryant requested that a report of retention rate and reduction of prisoners at CCC be provided.

Ms. AndrePont said that it is difficult to hear one of her attorneys is delivering food on the weekends to supplement his income. She said that \$55k for an attorney is low. There is a desire to have a livable wage, she said. Mr. Thomas said that an attorney should make a livable wage and a comfortable wage. He thanked Ms. AndrePont for all of their work in the community.

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Thomas, *that an appropriation of \$254k to the Public Defender's Office* be recommended to the full body for consideration. **Motion carried**, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Epperson, Gage-Watts, and Thomas (3). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners G. Young and J. Young (2). ABSTAIN: None (0).

Mrs. Bryant said that this would be placed in the 2025 Budget, not as an ordinance amending the current budget.

- *Hazard Mitigation Plan review*

Mrs. Bryant said that they are working with the Public Works Department for a report to put in the binder.

- *War on Litter update*

Mr. Epperson suggested that Administration provide litter bags to the compactor sites that could be passed out to citizens. He then asked about the cameras and signage. Mrs. Bryant said that they are working with Solid Waste to determine the locations for signage.

Mr. Epperson also suggested that the war on litter events be scheduled quarterly. Mr. Thomas agreed with the quarterly events. He also suggested placing dumpster centrally located in urban neighborhoods. Mrs. Erica Bryant said that there is a location on Monty Street.

Mr. Cothran wanted to know if the Commission could partner with the City to host these events. Mrs. Gage-Watts agreed that the Commission could partner with the City and Shreveport Green for hazardous materials, tires, and other types of garbage.

Mr. Thomas suggested that the litter bags be left at the public libraries.

- *Disaster Committee update from Public Safety Funding Committee Chair*
- *Any Additional Reports Received*

The Clerk of the Commission said that there were no additional reports received.

- *Q&A Session from Citizens Disaster Committee*

Ms. Belinda Rose said that there are several downed trees in the right-of-ways. Mr. Epperson advised that she contact the City Council and the Shreveport Public Works Department.

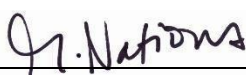
Ms. Rachel Jackson said that several people received notices saying they would be receiving credits on their SWEPCO bills. She wanted to know when that was going to be. Mr. Epperson advised that she contact SWEPCO.

The Clerk of the Commission announced that the Morningstar Baptist Church will have their grand opening for the first Community Lighthouse.

- *Summary and closing remarks: Chair and Committee Members*

Mr. Epperson announced that the next Committee date will be November 7, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:51 p.m.



Michelle Nations
Assistant to the Commission Clerk