



Delaware County Commissioners

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 5, 2020

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Delaware County Seats New Public Defender Commission

DELAWARE, Ohio —The Delaware County Commissioners, in consultation with the County's judges, have created a Public Defender Commission that will, in turn, hire the county's first-ever Public Defender and the staff needed to provide legal representation to indigent persons charged with the commission of offenses in Delaware County.

On Sept. 3, the Commissioners took the first step in creating a Delaware County Public Defender Office when they passed a resolution, establishing the five-member PDC. The decision came after many months of analyzing whether Delaware County, with an estimated population of 217,000, had grown to the point where it made financial sense for the County to run its own Public Defender Office. Currently, the County pays local attorneys assigned by the courts to represent defendants who are unable to pay for their own defense in court. A PDC had existed in the past, but was formally dissolved in February 2019 because of inactivity.

Initially, the County's new Public Defender Office will aim to manage more than half of the public-defender caseload for Delaware County, with the courts continuing to appoint private counsel to represent the rest. Over time, the goal is to add several assistant public defenders to the office's staff so that the office can handle the vast majority of cases. In 2019, 2,973 indigent-defense cases were assigned out, which resulted in billings of \$1,063,463.68 to the County. A budget has not yet been determined by the Commissioners for the new office.

The Common Pleas Court's appointees are:

- George B. Limbert, a Delaware County resident and attorney who currently serves as General Counsel for Red Roof Inns; and
- Bryan R. Faller, a Delaware County resident and attorney who is employed as Senior Counsel for Honda North America.

The Commissioners' appointees are:

- Carlos Crawford, a Delaware resident and attorney whose firm, Crawford Glanker LLC, is based in Delaware;
- Don Hunter, Senior Vice President of Acquisitions and Development at the Schottenstein Real Estate Group; and
- Melissa Knopp, an attorney who has worked with Delaware County courts to establish specialty dockets.

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Commissioner Jeff Benton noted that the PDC appointments purposefully represent a mixture of legal, administrative and business experience.

“We felt it was essential, especially in creating a new commission and office,” Benton said, “to find people who understand not only how to run a legal organization but also how to build it in a way that safeguards the interests of our taxpayers.”

Commissioner Gary Merrell said, “As our County has grown, it has become apparent that the next step in transitioning is to create a Public Defender Office. These initial Public Defender Commission members will have a very important job in organizing this office and choosing its leader. I have every confidence that these five citizens are up to the challenge and I very much appreciate their willingness to serve.”

Added Commissioner Barb Lewis, “This Commission will greatly strengthen our County’s criminal justice system and it has my full support.”

Judge David Gormley said: “I look forward to working with the new public defender and his or her staff in 2021. Having a staff of assistant public defenders working here in Delaware every day will benefit indigent persons accused of crimes and will help our local courts to operate more efficiently. I appreciate the willingness of the new commission’s members to take on the challenge of hiring a public defender and getting the new office up and running in the months ahead.”

Added Judge James Schuck: “I appreciate our County Commissioners’ efforts to reconstitute a Public Defender Commission in Delaware County. Having a group of public defenders who are dedicated to Delaware County courts will no doubt strengthen an already high-functioning public defense system in our county.”

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