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*Times-Picayune (New Orleans) May 18, 2005 Wednesday*

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**May 18, 2005 Wednesday**
**SECTION:** METRO - EDITORIAL; Pg. 6

**LENGTH:** 265 words

**HEADLINE:** Undefended

**BODY:**

The Legislature needs to do something about **indigent defense**.

Eight of 10 defendants in Louisiana criminal cases cannot afford their own counsel and rely on court-appointed lawyers, who are in short supply and are often poorly paid.

The typical public defender is responsible for far more cases than anyone could possibly handle well. The inadequacy of **indigent defense** in our state means that innocent people are being convicted of crimes -- whose real perpetrators then go free.

The state Senate is expected to take up a bill today that would at least chip away at the problem. Senate Bill 323, introduced by Sen. Lydia Jackson, would increase the size, political independence and oversight power of the Louisiana **Indigent Defense** Assistance Board, among other changes.

Right now, most authority over **indigent defense** lies in the hands of local boards. So, the quality of representation varies considerably from one judicial district to another. The level of financing varies, too -- not least because Louisiana, unlike most other states, pays for **indigent defense** with court fees rather than a legislative appropriation.

Fixing this mess is up to state legislators. As Justice Jeffrey Victory, one of the state Supreme Court's more conservative members, recently wrote, the state Constitution "explicitly places the duty of providing a working system for securing the representation of indigent defendants squarely on the shoulders of the Legislature."

Sen. Jackson's bill would not solve Louisiana's **indigent defense** problem. Far from it. But

beefing up the state board is at least a start.

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