

Indigent defense crisis not solved

Re: "Officials unveil ways to ease case backlog," Page 1, Aug. 8.

The mayor's new plan to re-inforce the shattered justice system may be better than nothing, but like a temporary patch on a leaking levee, it isn't going to hold for long.

The state's failure to come up with a permanent solution to the indigent defense crisis in Louisiana is risking the safety of residents and the state's hopes for economic recovery.

Volunteer attorneys may help with the current backlog of cases in New Orleans, but what happens when the volunteers go home? The indigent defense system needs to be considered an equal partner in the justice system and given the resources to work effectively and efficiently.

If Hurricane Katrina was the straw that finally broke the back of the criminal defense system in New Orleans, the fact remains that the system has been fractured for years — not just in New Orleans, across the state. There is not a single parish that meets minimal standards set forth by the Department of Justice and the American Bar Association.

Louisiana has been resorting to volunteers and quick-fix schemes for 30 years. It is past time for the state Legislature to adopt a permanent solution that ensures that the scales of justice are balanced, permanently, and everyone is protected.

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