

YOUR OPINIONS

Poor public defense hurts victims, defendants

Re: "Trapped in the courtroom," Other Opinions, Sept. 22.

Public defender Dwight Doskey's Point of View column tells a shocking story. What's even more disturbing is that his situation, while extreme, is not unique to Orleans Parish.

The system for providing public defense in Orleans Parish is particularly dire, but the system is dysfunctional all across Louisiana. For this, there is plenty of blame to go around.

But ultimate responsibility rests with the state government of Louisiana. For decades the

constitutional obligation to provide adequate resources to run a fair and efficient justice system has been ignored. And every resident of Louisiana, including public defenders, has suffered as a result.

What's needed is a comprehensive statewide approach for fulfilling the state's constitutional obligation to provide qualified and timely counsel for those accused of a crime. Louisiana residents deserve to know that they are protected by a well-functioning justice system. As of today, they clearly are not.

My brother was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to Death Row. His public defenders did not do an adequate job representing him, costing him more than five years of his life. While he was in prison, the killer killed again. For everyone's sake, the system should focus on getting the job done right the first time.

Mr. Doskey's recent assignment of another capital case is chilling and should remind policymakers that people's lives are at stake.

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