

Defend the Fifth

3rd Quarterly Legislative Report

In June 2025, the Mississippi legislature approved one year of funding for a pilot public defender office in the Fifth Circuit Court District. Designed to run for at least three years, the pilot brings additional public defense capacity to an under-resourced rural area. It aims to connect indigent people with public defenders within 24 hours of arrest and provide them with continuous representation until their cases conclude.

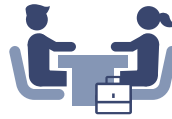
The Day One model is built on three principles.
Every arrested person should have...



Their first meeting
with a lawyer within
24 hours of arrest.



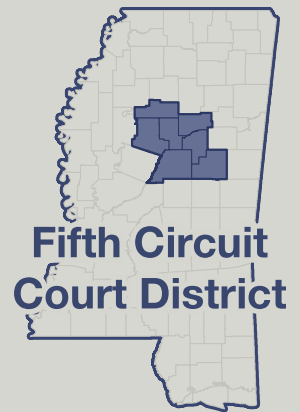
Robust representation
by counsel at their
initial court appearance.



Continuous, effective
representation from
arrest to resolution.



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Attala, Carroll, Choctaw,
Grenada, Montgomery,
Webster, and Winston Counties

THE PILOT

155
felony cases

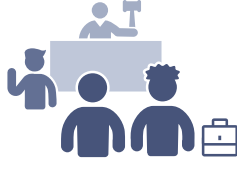
3,638
square miles

9
months

THE WORK



72
clients
represented at
initial appearance



98
contested
preliminary
hearings



106
motions
for pretrial
release



Judge **Vince Marascalco**
describes the pilot
project's impact.



THE RESULTS



117 initial jail
interviews within 24
hours of arrest



211 additional
in-custody client
meetings

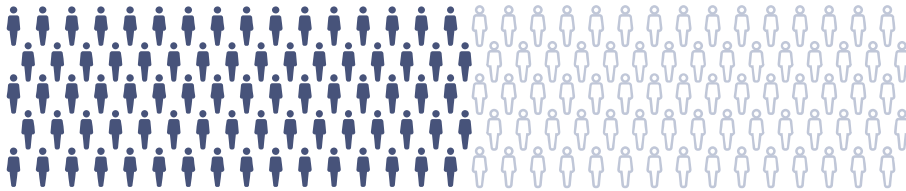


131 clients
released pretrial



98%
appearance rate

50% of 155 felony cases resolved in first 9 months



Fast

78% resolved at or
before preliminary hearing



Favorable

92% resolved without
a felony conviction



Drug Court Coordinator **Michael Ming** explains the importance of prompt representation.



Chaplain **Jonathan Moore** explains why attorney jail visits matter.



RECRUITMENT

In the pilot office's first nine months:

- Two lawyers relocated to the district to work for the office
- Three students interned with the office
 - Two law students (UMiss and USF)
 - One undergraduate (Princeton)



Student **Fikir Beyene** discusses the impact of bringing more lawyers to rural Mississippi.

