



NEWS FROM:
Office of Public Defender
Matt Shirk, Fourth Circuit
www.MattShirkPublicDefender.com

Contact: Matt Bisbee
Public Information Officer
Tel: (904)630-7350
MPB@PD4.COJ.net

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Facing State Budget Uncertainty, PD Office Expands Pro Bono Program *Participation in unique program triples; functionality allows 'more with less'*

Jacksonville, FL: As Florida lawmakers continue their 2010 legislative session, state agencies everywhere are watching carefully in hopes that potential budget cuts do not trickle down to them. In the Office of Fourth Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk, he is working with his staff to grow a unique program that is designed to relieve Florida taxpayers as well as improve client representation and assist private defense attorneys gain criminal law experience.

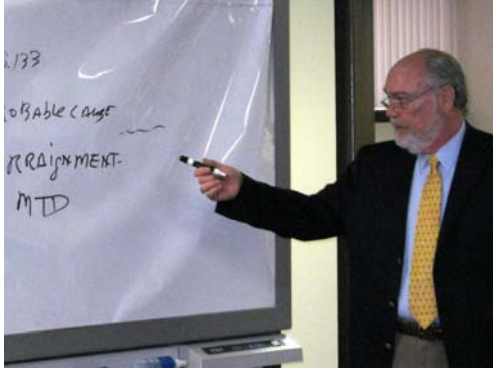
It's called Public Defender Pro Bono Opportunities which is a half-day training session followed by a case assignment to participating attorneys. The idea is to enlist local lawyers, appoint them Special Assistant Public Defenders (SAPD's) and assign them cases from the P.D. Office. In return, they receive training and experience in criminal law – a quantity that can be expensive for a private attorney to obtain. Clients whose case goes to an SAPD receive heightened attention from their attorney and the state funded P.D Office which is appointed upwards of 60,000 cases per year to be handled by 73 attorneys, gets much-needed relief.

The second training session for Public Defender Pro Bono Opportunities took place Friday March 5th; fifteen participants signed up for SAPD appointments, three times more than enlisted in the first training in January. The session included five Continuing Legal Education presentations from local attorneys. Those included; *Office Procedure* by APD Cynthia Hunold, *Misdemeanor Offenses* by APD Kelly Naik, *Criminal Procedure* by Senior Circuit Judge Michael Weatherby, *Driving Under the Influence – Start to Finish* by attorney David Robbins and *Ethics and Professionalism* by attorney Hugh Cotney.

Assistant Public Defenders, Director of County Court Unit Hunold and her Division Chief Naik, coordinate the activities and act as resources for the SAPD's. "It's a tremendous relief to our Unit; we receive thousands of misdemeanor cases to split among ten attorneys. With the SAPD's helping carry some of that load, it helps lighten the load our staff carries," said Director Hunold.

Participants in last Friday's training earned their appointments as SAPD's and are presently receiving cases. While working their cases, they are afforded resources from the P.D. Office such as secretarial and investigative assistance. Public Defender Matt Shirk indicated that he will continue to host periodic training sessions as this program has been quite successful. "We are doing everything we can reduce our costs to taxpayers; the Pro Bono Opportunities program allows us to do more with less," said Shirk.

PAGE 2: PHOTOS “Pro Bono Program”



Senior Circuit Judge Michael Weatherby presenting Criminal Procedure



Program coordinators APD Kelly Naik (L) and Director of County Court Cynthia Hunold (r)



Attorney Hugh Cotney discussing Ethics and Professionalism



Pro Bono participants gather in conference room at Fourth Circuit Public Defender's Office



Attorney David Robbins (L) presents on DUI law with APD Matt Lufano (R) assisting



Local attorneys became SAPD's and earned CLE credits