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## Commission Research Begins: Case Type Cost Analysis

One of the first major data projects our team has been working on is determining what an estimate of per-case public defense cost is for some of the case types that are reported to the Commission. This type of estimate is useful for projecting future costs, identifying cost trends across different areas in the state, and developing a more detailed understanding of when and why costs are changing.

We have pursued this goal using statistical modeling. Statistical modeling is the process of transforming complicated and difficult-to-summarize datasets into concise and useful summary numbers. For instance, we can take the full record of costs and caseloads provided to the Commission, and use statistical modeling to produce an estimate of how much it costs to provide a public defender for a misdemeanor case, on average. We can then use this summary estimate to make more informed decisions in the future.

Figuring out per-case costs presents a unique challenge because the cost of providing a public defender can be very different for different cases in the same category. For example, imagine in a particular area the typical felony case involves burglary or drug dealing, and these cases usually cost about \$900 to provide a public defender. But infrequently, there will be a more complicated case (for example, an attempted murder or an embezzlement case, or even a drug

Case Type	Estimated Cost
TPR/CHINS	\$976
Major Felony	\$1,480
Level 6 Felony	\$732
Misdemeanor	\$224
Juvenile Delinquency	\$606
Appeals	\$6,370
*Costs are adjusted to reflect overhead and other non-compensation costs	

dealing case with particularly complicated circumstances) and this type of case will cost around \$3,000 in public defense costs. If an administrator is trying to estimate costs, which number should they use? If they use only the typical case, they will underestimate the cost due to the infrequent but expensive cases, and if they assume every case is more like the expensive case they will have greatly overestimated the costs. And in reality, this issue is even more complicated, as there are not just two types of cases (cheap and costly) but a continuum of costs.

Statistical modeling can help us solve this problem. Specifically, we are interested in a particular summary number called the “expectation,” which will tell us how much we should expect cases to cost in the long run, incorporating both the typical cheaper cases and the atypical expensive cases, and also how frequently we can expect to run into each of these types. In other words, the expectation is a single number that can tell us the cost associated with a given case type, on average, on a long time scale.

We estimated this cost expectation for some types of cases, using the data reported to the Commission in 2016. These values are shown in the accompanying table. It is important to note that these values include more than pay to attorneys, as they are adjusted to incorporate overhead and other non-compensation costs. These average

costs are different in each county, depending on a variety of factors, but the values here are a useful summary of Commission county costs across the state. This bears emphasis: these values describe costs as they were in 2016, the analysis does not provide any information about what costs ought to be in order to provide effective public defense. The Commission is presently investigating appropriate workloads via the ongoing workload study, and case costs may change if the study results in changes in caseload requirements.

The estimates of costs in 2017 are still in the process of being validated, but preliminary results indicate only small changes from 2016 costs. This suggests that the rising costs from 2016 to 2017 are primarily attributable to the rise in caseloads across the state (see the following page for information on how caseloads have changed from 2016 to 2017) although increasing case costs likely also play a small role. Updates and additional details regarding costs and other data projects will be posted to our website in the future.

### Other Ongoing Projects

We are currently investigating ways in which Commission and non-Commission counties differ on public defense relevant variables such as jail population and rate of appeals. Differences in these variables could be due to a variety of factors: increases in time available per case, higher quality representation due to certification requirements, increased capability to specialize due to caseload and compensation requirements, or even pre-existing differences in counties that elect to join the commission. We are very interested in working directly with the counties in order to provide a more complete picture of what membership in the Commission changes about public defense outcomes and why.

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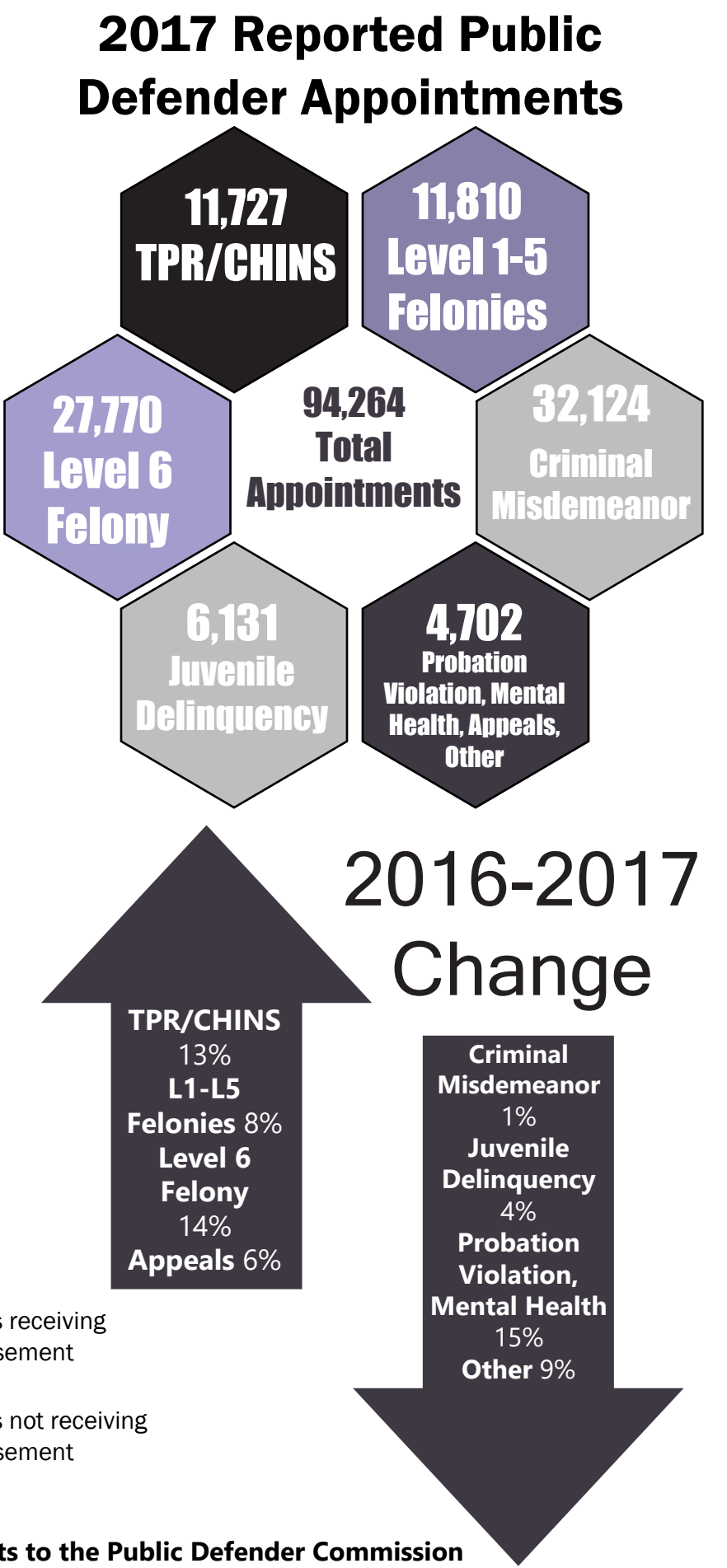
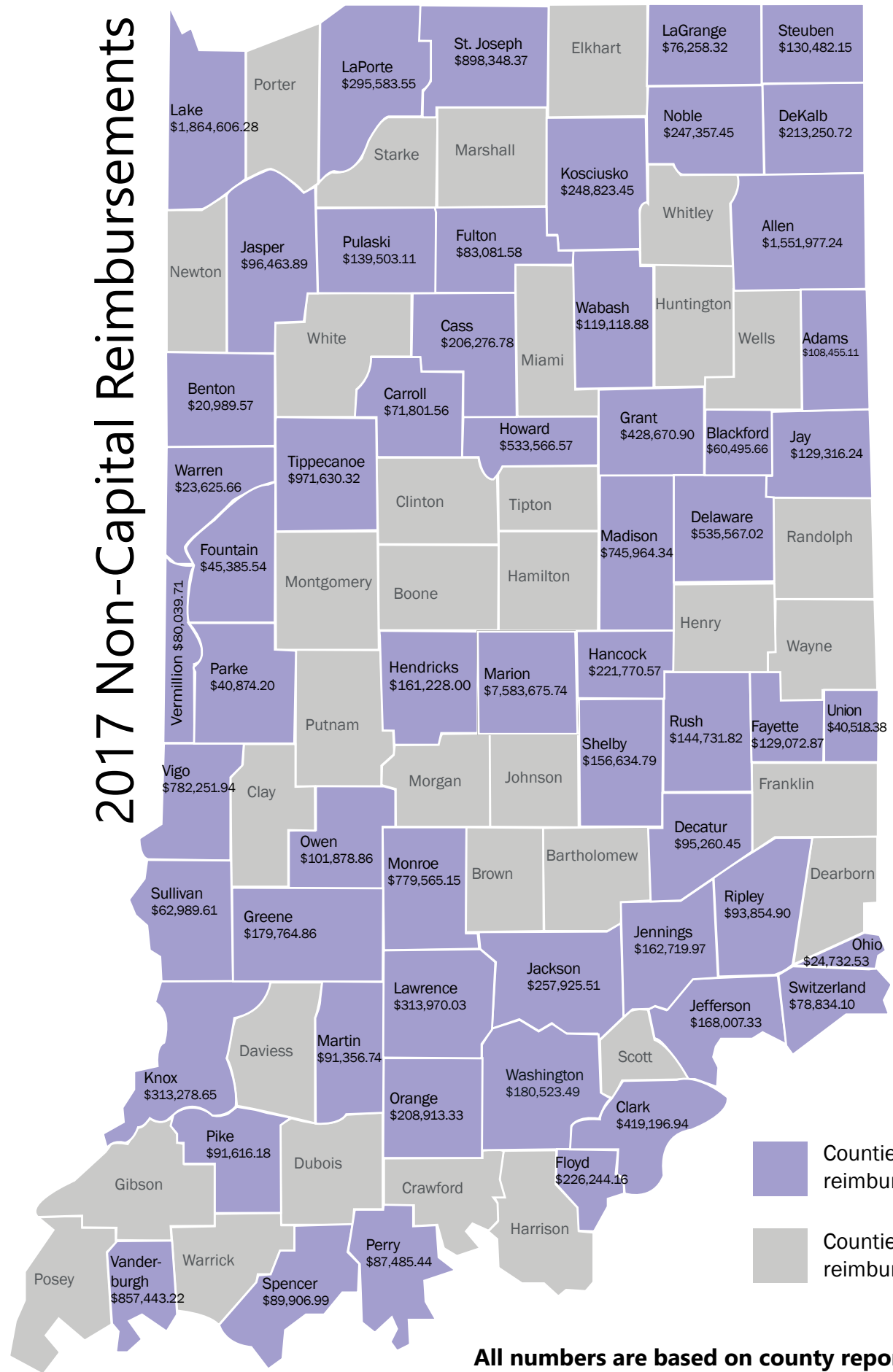
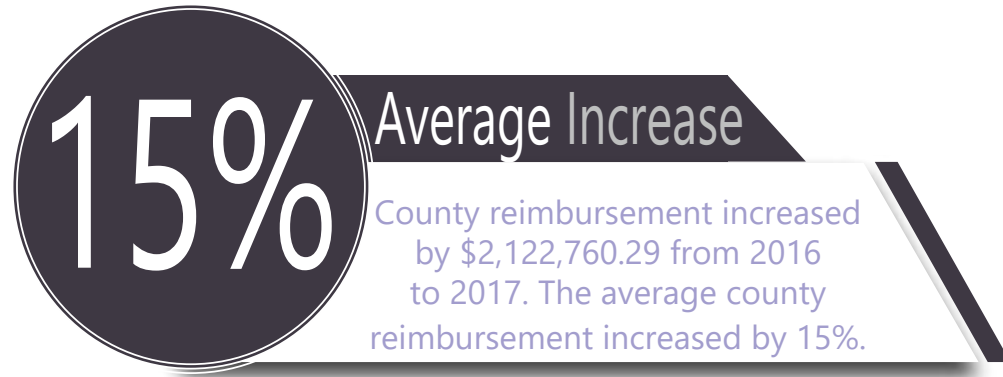
2017 Summaries of Financial and Caseload data

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Upcoming dates and deadlines

New Staff Member

Commission Subcommittee



All numbers are based on county reports to the Public Defender Commission

## 2018 Commission Meeting Dates

June 13

September 19

December 12

All meetings are scheduled to begin at 2 pm. A brief executive session may precede each meeting. Meetings are scheduled to be held at our offices (309 W Washington Street, Suite 501, Indianapolis, IN 46204)

Updates to meeting dates, times and locations are posted on our website: [www.in.gov/publicdefender](http://www.in.gov/publicdefender)



## Interested in Receiving the Newsletter Electronically?

If you'd like to start receiving our quarterly newsletter electronically, please send an email to [information@pdc.com.in.gov](mailto:information@pdc.com.in.gov) with the subject "e-newsletter" to get started.



## Commission Welcomes New Research and Statistics Analyst



In February, Torrin Liddell officially joined the Commission as the new Research and Statistics Analyst.

Torrin is in the final stages of his PhD in Psychology and Cognitive Science at Indiana University, Bloomington. His work has primarily focused on Bayesian statistics

as applied to human behavior. He has taught several undergraduate and graduate statistics courses, served as a content editor on a Bayesian statistics textbook, and most recently has spent time as a statistical consultant on academic research projects.

Since being hired, Torrin has pursued several projects, including the case cost analysis presented on page 1, projects comparing incarceration rates and appeals frequency across commission and non-commission counties, and analyzing disposition patterns for TPR and CHINS cases over time.

Torrin is passionate about data analysis and evidence-based government, and he looks forward to securing new data sources and evaluating Commission-relevant hypotheses.

Torrin can be reached at [Torrin.Liddell@pdc.com.in.gov](mailto:Torrin.Liddell@pdc.com.in.gov) and 317-618-5181.

## Commission Launches Subcommittee to Review Standards and Guidelines

The Commission has confirmed its commitment to launching a subcommittee to do deep dives into its standards and guidelines. Volunteers were taken from Commission members and the Chairman will appoint membership from outside of the Commission itself. The first meeting is expected to occur in April or May.

The first major task will be to review and update pay parity standards and guidelines for contractors and salaried public defenders – both full and part-time. Specifically, what benefits should be calculated in determining parity and what is parity for public defenders when there are not necessarily comparable deputy prosecutor positions – such as in CHINS/Termination and on appeals? When should health insurance parity or retirement parity come into play? How do we account for the overhead that a private public defender has to pay that a deputy prosecutor working out of their county office does not? As part of this process, the Commission has already begun sending out letters requesting counties verify how they are in compliance with pay parity.

Eventually, the subcommittee will look at other standards such as the definition of adequate staffing, caseload limits as part of our ongoing workload study, etc. If you have any suggestions on a particular Standard or Guideline, please tell us your thoughts or ideas. The subcommittee will be staffed by Derrick Mason and dates will be available on the Commission's website. As always, if you have any questions you can call the Commission or reach out to us at [information@pdc.com.in.gov](mailto:information@pdc.com.in.gov).

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