

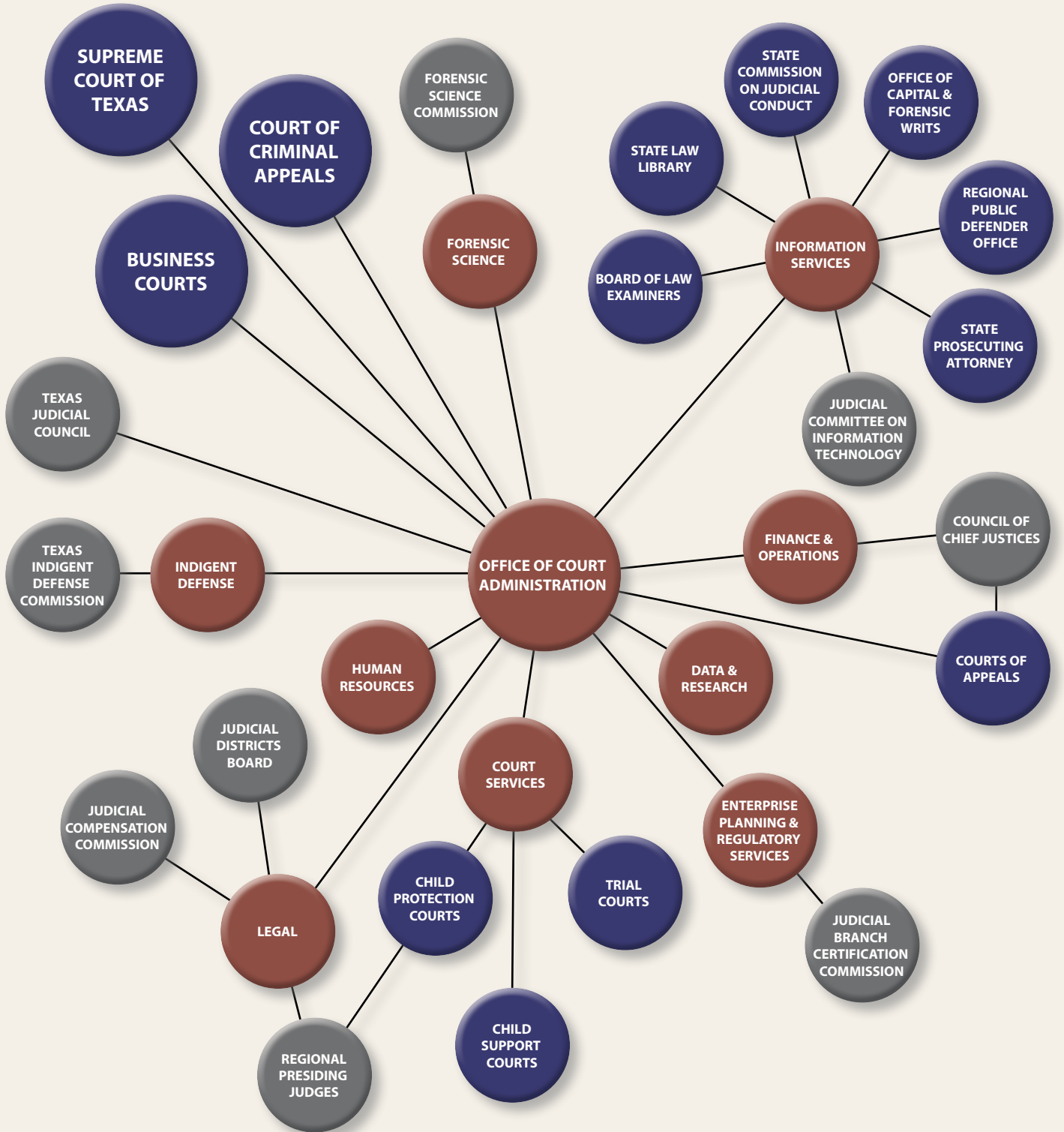
# ANNUAL REPORT OF **JUDICIAL SUPPORT AGENCIES, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**



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**FY 24**





**OCA MISSION**

To Provide Resources and Information for the Efficient Administration of the Judicial Branch of Texas.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Texas Judicial Council</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive Operations</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Court Services</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Data &amp; Research</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Information Services</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>Legal Division</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Finance &amp; Operations</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Enterprise Planning &amp; Regulatory Services</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Texas Indigent Defense Commission</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Texas Forensic Science Commission</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>The State Law Library</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Office Of The State Prosecuting Attorney</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>State Commission On Judicial Conduct</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<b>Office Of Capital &amp; Forensic Writs</b> .....	<b>75</b>







# TEXAS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

The Texas Judicial Council (TJC) was created by the 41st Texas Legislature in 1929 as the policy-making body for the state judiciary. The TJC is responsible for continuously studying and reporting on the “organization, rules, procedures and practice, work accomplished, results, and uniformity of the discretionary powers of the state courts and methods for their improvement.” To accomplish the purpose, the TJC designs “methods for simplifying judicial procedure, expediting the transaction of judicial business, and correcting faults in or improving the administration of justice.”

## MEMBERS AS OF AUGUST 31, 2024

**Hon. Nathan L. Hecht**, Chair, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Texas

**Hon. Sharon Keller**, Vice-Chair, Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals

### *Legislative Members*

**Hon. Brandon Creighton**, Senator, Conroe

**Hon. Jeff Leach**, Representative, Allen

**Hon. Reggie Smith**, Representative, Sherman

**Hon. Judith Zaffirini**, Senator, Laredo

### *Judicial Members*

**Hon. Bill Gravell Jr.**, Constitutional County Judge, Williamson County

**Hon. Claudia Laird**, Judge, Probate Court No. 1, Montgomery County

**Hon. Emily Miskel**, Justice, Fifth Court of Appeals, Dallas

**Hon. Missy Medary**, Judge, 347th District Court, Corpus Christi; Presiding Judge - 5th Region

**Hon. Valencia Nash**, Justice of the Peace Pct. 1, Place 2, Dallas County

**Hon. Kathleen Person**, Judge, City of Temple Municipal Court, Temple

**Vacant**, Judge, District Court

**Hon. Maggie Sawyer**, Justice of the Peace, McCulloch County, Brady

**Hon. Edward J. Spillane, III**, Presiding Judge, City of College Station

**Hon. Ken Wise**, Justice, 14th Court of Appeals, Houston

### *Citizen Members*

**Zina Bash**, Keller Lenkner LLC, Austin

**Kevin Bryant**, Crow Holdings, Dallas

**Jennifer Caughey**, Jackson Walker LLP, Houston

**Sonia Clayton**, Virtual Intelligence Providers LLC, Houston

**Hon. Jon Gimble**, District Clerk, McLennan County, Waco

**Rachel Racz**, Vista Proppants & Logistics, Fort Worth

### *Executive Director*

**Megan LaVoie**, Administrative Director, Office of Court Administration

## COMMITTEES

The Texas Judicial Council currently has four committees. The Committees met multiple times in FY 24 and their reports and recommendations were released in September 2024 prior to the convening of the 89th Legislature. They are published on the Texas Judicial Branch website at <https://www.txcourts.gov/tjc/judicial-council-reports/>.

### ***Civil Justice Committee***

**Charge 1:** Monitor implementation of the Texas Business Court.

**Charge 2:** Study the use of Artificial Intelligence in Texas Courts across the board—management, procedure, evidence, filings, security, etc.—and recommend any necessary reforms. (Joint Charge with Data Committee)

**Charge 3:** Study ways to improve court efficiency and recommend any necessary reforms. (Joint Charge with the Criminal Justice Committee)

**Charge 4:** Monitor the legislatively mandated study being conducted by the Office of Court Administration of the court personnel workload of the district and statutory county courts and make recommendations regarding any increased need for additional court staff. (Joint Charge with Public Trust and Confidence and Criminal Justice Committees)

**Charge 5:** Study ways to simplify the jurisdiction of the courts of Texas and to make jurisdiction uniform by court level and across the State.

**Charge 6:** Study whether extending judicial terms from 4 to 6 years for trial courts and from 6 to 8 years for appellate courts would materially improve the courts' ability to discharge their judicial function, would provide greater stability in the judiciary, and would allow greater participation by voters because of the decrease in the number of judicial positions up for election at any given time. (Joint Charge with the Criminal Justice and Public Trust and Confidence Committees)

**Charge 7:** Continue to study the landscape of the Texas Civil Justice System and recommend any other necessary or desirable reforms to improve access to justice in Texas Courts.

### ***Criminal Justice Committee***

**Charge 1:** Study ways to improve court and personal security for judges and court staff and recommend any necessary reforms.

**Charge 2:** Study ways to improve court efficiency and recommend any necessary reforms. (Joint Charge with the Civil Justice Committee)

**Charge 3:** Continue to evaluate and monitor Texas' pretrial bail system for improvement and recommend any needed statutory and non-statutory changes.

**Charge 4:** Monitor the Judiciary's role and work with Operation Lone Star.

**Charge 5:** Monitor the legislatively mandated study being conducted by the Office of Court Administration of the court personnel workload of the district and statutory county courts and make recommendations regarding any increased need for additional court staff. (Joint Charge with Civil Justice and Public Trust and Confidence Committees)



**Charge 6:** Study whether extending judicial terms from 4 to 6 years for trial courts and from 6 to 8 years for appellate courts would materially improve the courts' ability to discharge their judicial function, would provide greater stability in the judiciary, and would allow greater participation by voters because of the decrease in the number of judicial positions up for election at any given time. (Joint Charge with the Civil Justice and Public Trust and Confidence Committees)

**Charge 7:** Study the effective use of Associate Judges in Texas Courts.

### ***Data Committee***

**Charge 1:** Continue to work on guiding the revisions of the court activity reporting requirements to collect case-level statistical data.

**Charge 2:** Study the use of Artificial Intelligence in Texas Courts across the board—management, procedure, evidence, filings, security, etc.—and recommend any necessary reforms. (Joint Charge with Civil Justice Committee)

**Charge 3:** Study ways to improve public access to all court filings, docket entries, and other information comparable to PACER.

**Charge 4:** Study the feasibility of and make recommendations regarding alternative methods for submitting the clerk's record on appeal.

### ***Public Trust & Confidence Committee***

**Charge 1:** Study ways to improve access to courts and recommend any necessary reforms.

**Charge 2:** Monitor the legislatively mandated study being conducted by the Office of Court Administration of the court personnel workload of the district and statutory county courts and make recommendations regarding any increased need for additional court staff. (Joint Charge with Civil Justice and Criminal Justice Committees)

**Charge 3:** Review comprehensive all-hazard emergency management plans for the judiciary and recommend any necessary reforms.

**Charge 4:** Study judicial profession shortages and recommend methods to increase recruitment and any necessary reforms.

**Charge 5:** Study whether extending judicial terms from 4 to 6 years for trial courts and from 6 to 8 years for appellate courts would materially improve the courts' ability to discharge their judicial function, would provide greater stability in the judiciary, and would allow greater participation by voters because of the decrease in the number of judicial positions up for election at any given time. (Joint Charge with the Civil Justice and Criminal Justice Committees)

**Charge 6:** Continue to monitor public trust and confidence in the Texas Judiciary and recommend any necessary reforms to increase public support and respect.

**Charge 7:** Study ways to expand, improve, and strengthen the Centers of Excellence.

**Charge 8:** Study ways to improve transparency, due process, and efficiency of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct.



### ***Administrative Director Responsibilities***

- Leadership and strategic direction
- Represents the agency to the legislature, other agencies and interest groups
- Agency's performance
- Staffs the policy-making function of the Judicial Council



# EXECUTIVE OPERATIONS

The Office of Court Administration (OCA) provides resources and information for the efficient administration of the Judicial Branch of Texas.

The OCA has been led Megan LaVoie since December 2021, the Administrative Director of OCA and the Executive Director of the Texas Judicial Council. The Administrative Director is supported by a Special Projects Manager/ Executive Assistant, a Director of Government Relations, Communications Staff, and a team of Division Directors.

Executive staff presents at Board, Commission, and Council meetings. In addition, Executive staff prepare and present testimony to numerous legislative committees.

In FY 24 the Executive Division served as staff to the Texas Judicial Compensation Commission. The Commission's Report to the Legislature was released prior to the convening of the 89th Legislature and the Chair testified during the Legislative session on matters regarding the Commission's report.

## OPERATION LONE STAR

In July 2021, OCA began supporting local court systems impacted by Operation Lone Star (OLS). This ongoing support includes facilitation of central magistrations at two processing facilities in Val Verde and Jim Hogg Counties. Sixteen visiting judges appointed by the Supreme Court conduct magistrations at the temporary processing facilities. These Judges have conducted **16,038** magistrations since July 2021. OCA provides administrative support for the proceedings, including court interpretation services. Support staff consists of seven administrative assistants (four full-time, three part-time) and seven court interpreters, as well as a special projects manager, and a court services manager who liaise between various court system participants to ensure daily dockets are processed. OCA has focused on problem solving with over 162 onsite visits in OLS counties.

## TEXAS BUSINESS COURT AND FIFTEENTH COURT OF APPEALS

The 88th Legislative Session enacted the Texas Business Court and Fifteenth Court of Appeals, created by House Bill 19, the courts became operational on September 1, 2024. The Texas Business Court is composed of eleven geographical divisions consistent with the existing Administrative Judicial Regions. Five of those divisions are now operational. Each Division has two Judges. The Texas Business Court, inclusive of all eleven divisions, is served by one Clerk of Court, located in Austin, Texas.

The Fifteenth Court of Appeals is composed of a Chief Justice and two Justices. The Court has statewide civil intermediate appellate jurisdiction and exclusive intermediate appellate jurisdiction over matters arising out of or related to a civil appeals brought by or against the state or a board, commission, department, office, or other agency in the executive branch of the state government, including a university system or institution of higher education as defined by Section 61.003, Education Code, or by or against an officer or employee of the state or a board, commission, department, office, or other agency in the executive branch of the state government arising out of that officer's or employee's official conduct (subject to certain exceptions). In addition, the Fifteenth Court has exclusive jurisdiction over appeals from the Texas Business Court, involving cases dealing with business disputes valued at more than \$10 million.



### ***Court Services Duties and Responsibilities***

- Provide resources, services and guidance for the efficient operation of the Texas judiciary.
- Provide remote language interpretation, document translation and court reporter services.
- Assist courts with security and emergency preparedness programs and procedures, and supports the implementation of privacy protections for judicial officers.
- Support work in the area of bail and the public safety report system.

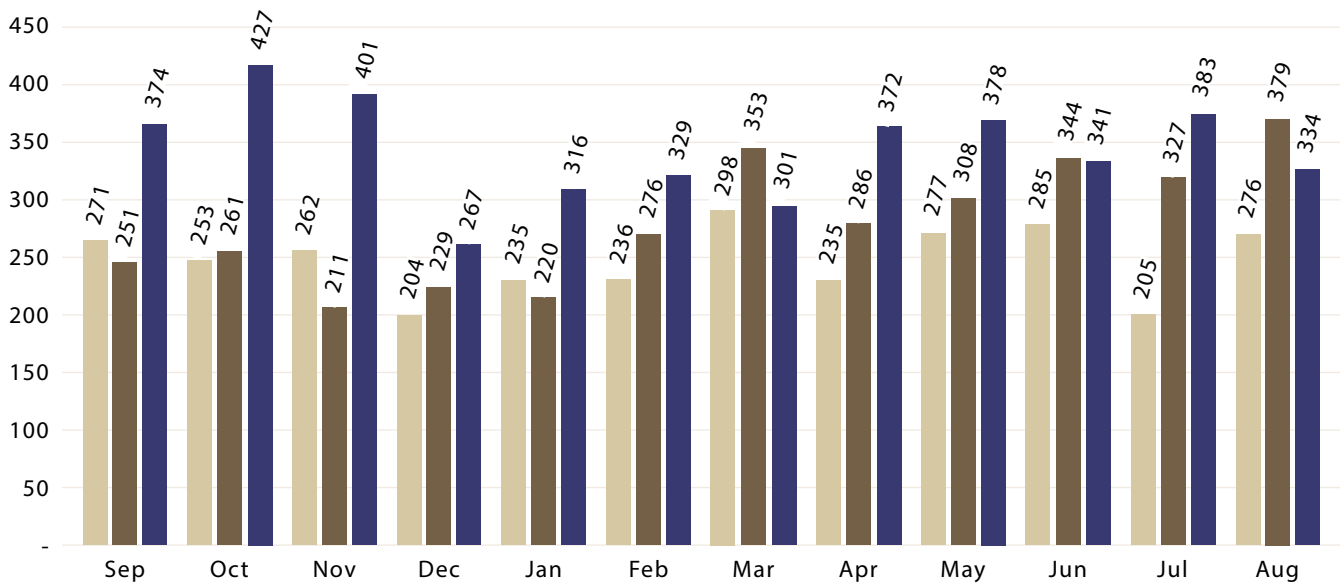


# COURT SERVICES

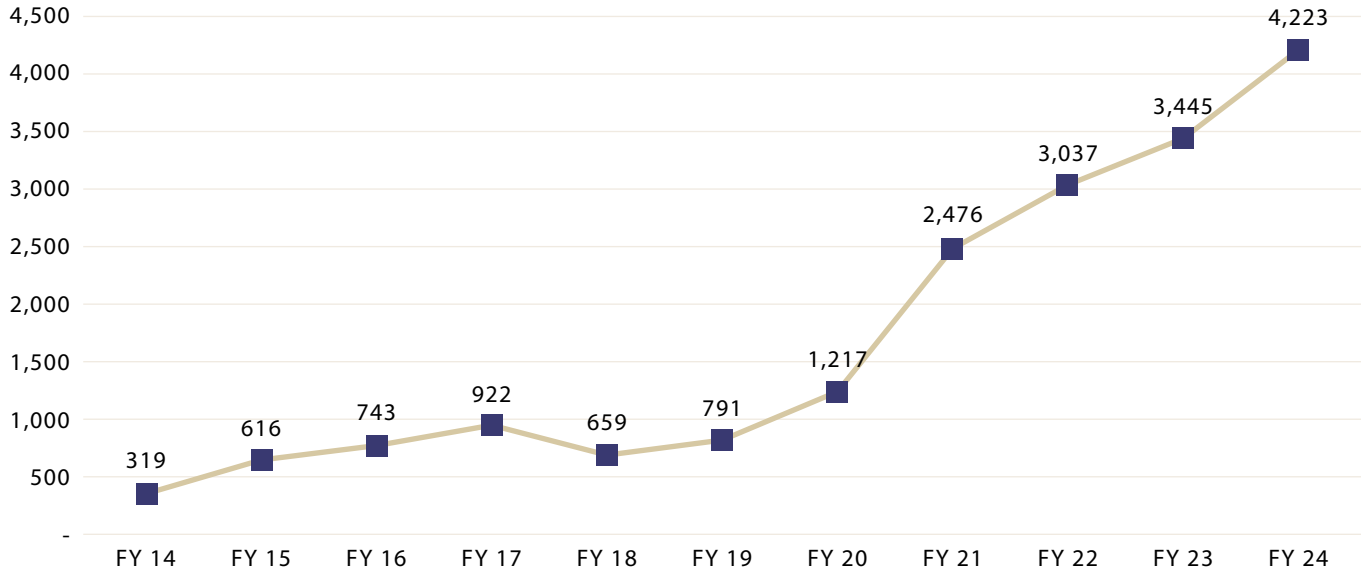
## LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

OCA’s Language Access Program provides assistance to courts in communicating with defendants or parties with limited English proficiency (LEP), giving these individuals meaningful access to their legal proceedings using the court’s existing audio or video technology. Remote interpreting services are provided by the Texas Court Remote Interpreter Service staff for uncontested matters lasting 30 minutes or less. They are available for same day, on-demand requests –a vital solution for local courts facing the need for interpreters– or with advanced scheduling. After a sharp increase of **over 100%** in requests from courts to utilize our interpreters in FY 21, OCA has seen a steady increase of **18%** each fiscal year after that. Even after OCA made use of American Rescue Plan Act funding to hire two temporary FTE positions in FY 23 to assist with court case backlogs, the demand for OCA’s remote interpreting services continue to grow, revealing the need in the Texas Judiciary for more qualified court interpreters. The five OCA remote interpreters provided free Spanish, French and Portuguese interpretation services in **4,223** hearings serving **120** counties across Texas.

**Number of Interpreted Sessions by Month**



### Interpreted Sessions by Fiscal Year



This department provides interpreting services in magistrations generated by the Governor’s Border Initiative under Operation Lone Star. This duty began at the end of July of 2021. During FY 24, this department scheduled contract court interpreters from selected vendors for dockets which are scheduled seven days a week. At times, multiple interpreters in different languages are needed for the same docket. A total of **3,144** remote magistration hearings were conducted via videoconference, with interpreters for Spanish, French, Portuguese and Q’eqchi.

In addition to providing interpreting services to Texas Courts, the Language Access Program also provided document translation services to the Judicial Branch Certification Commission, IV-D Child Support Court #8, Robertson County Courts at Law, Caldwell County Courts at Law, and Operation Lone Star. Such projects included, for example, the translation of the updated Guardianship Bill of Rights, criminal plea documents, and template courtroom notices.

Leo Perales (Court Services Manager, Court Reporters and Interpreters) hosts an OCA exhibitor table at the November 2023 TACA Conference in Frisco, TX. Leo is pictured with Montgomery County Court at Law 6, Court Administrator, Julissa Valadez and Court Coordinator, Kayla Argueta.



## COURT SECURITY DIVISION

New and enhanced laws in court security are designed to improve the security of judges at all levels, both in their courthouses and at their homes. These laws do the following:

- Provide for the suppression of the residence address of a judge and judge's spouse in records maintained by the Texas Ethics Commission, a county registrar, and a county appraisal district. The law also allows a judge and judge's spouse to replace their home address on their driver's license with the address of the courthouse in which the judge serves.
- Requires county clerks, upon the written request of a judge, to omit or redact personal information from an online database that is made public.
- Requires that a courthouse security committee be established by the presiding judge of a municipality or the local administrative district judge in each county, respectively.
- Transfers responsibility for reporting security incidents to OCA from the local administrative judge to the law enforcement official responsible for providing court security.
- Requires any person providing security to hold a court security certification issued by a training program approved by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement; and
- Authorizes any commissioned peace officer in the state to provide personal security to a judge, regardless of the location of the law enforcement agency that employs or commissions the peace officer.

The purpose of the Court Security Division is to:

- Support the establishment of court security committees through training and technical assistance.
- Assist courts with conducting and reviewing security and emergency preparedness assessments and developing improvement plans.
- Support the implementation of privacy protections for judges by facilitating the restriction of public access to the residence address of a judge or judge's spouse.
- Oversee the collection of court security incident reporting; and
- Serve as a clearinghouse of information regarding the new law and judicial and court security best practices.

In FY 24, the Court Security Divisions' efforts to assess court facilities and provide court security training increased as courts largely resumed in-person hearings. The Division has been able to proceed with addressing the courthouse assessment backlog created by the pandemic, provide tailored judicial and court staff trainings, and facilitated assistance and guidance as court security committees were reconstituted. There was a marked increase in judicial threats and reported courthouse related incidents this fiscal year.

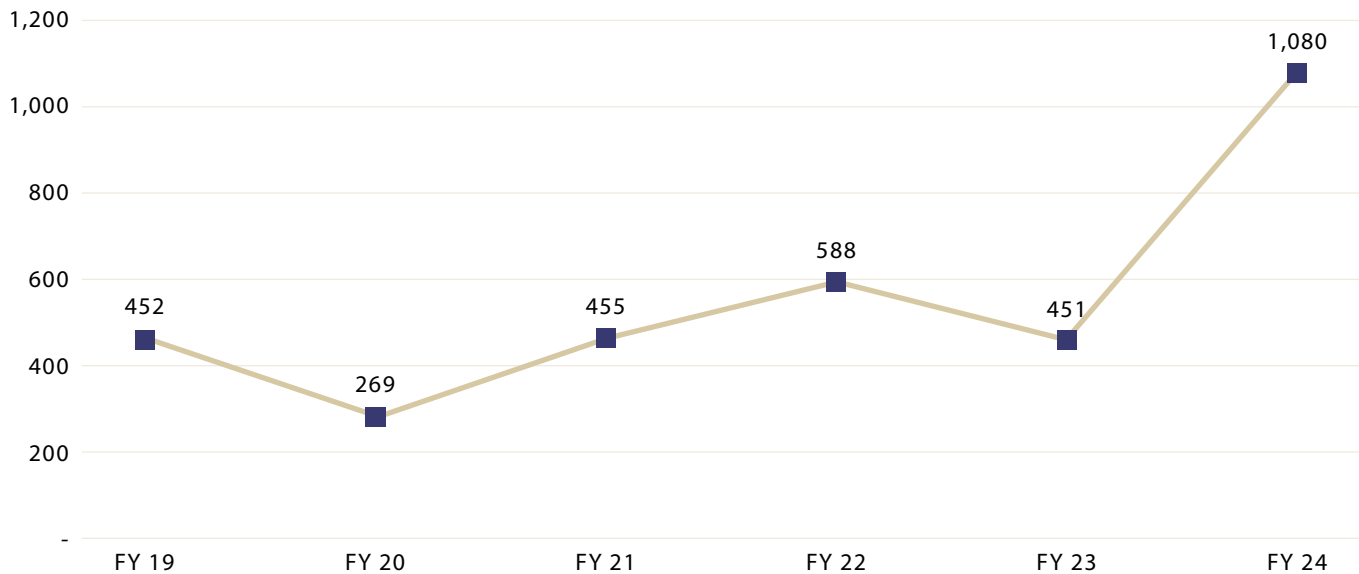
To maximize OCA's outreach promoting awareness of the privacy protections afforded pursuant to SB 42 (85<sup>th</sup>-(R) Session), OCA staff provided numerous in-person presentations for Judicial, Court Professional and Court Partnership Conferences. OCA has provided the judiciary and court staff with on-site courthouse violence mitigation training and continued to provide personal security related information and recommendations with the ability for judges to submit on-site their privacy questionnaire, and address court security related concerns or questions with staff. The 88<sup>th</sup> Regular Legislative Session provided the Division with an increase of two additional Court Security Specialists to meet the increasing needs of court security services to the Texas judiciary.

Incident reporting into OCA reflected a total of **1,080** incident reports submitted in FY 24, a **141.6%** increase over



FY 23. To date, **1,716** judicial officers have taken advantage of having their personal and residential information suppressed from public view.

**Total Reported Incidents Year over Year**



Additionally, during this period, the Court Security Director will facilitate the Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on Judicial Emergency Preparedness and Court Security as well as the Annual Report to the Legislature on Court Security.

Courthouse vulnerability assessments continued to encompass the workload of the Court Security Division. In addition, judicial home assessments continue to be part of the landscape in addressing the judicial threat environments. Courthouses have continued to express a need for evaluation and consultation, and the Division expects FY 25 to be engaged addressing the backlog of courthouse assessment requests as normal activities resume.

The Division has identified a void in focused training for judicial and courthouse employees. OCA has embarked on a strategy to provide tailored judicial and court staff training specifically focusing on violence mitigation strategies, workplace violence, de-escalation tactics, active shooter, shelter in place, suspicious mail and bomb threat mitigation and identification. Training was provided in FY 24 in Wise, Uvalde, Dimmit, Williamson, and Fort Bend Counties to a broad audience of county, municipal, and state employees. These trainings will continue to evolve and will expand throughout Texas as the threat environment continues to be of importance to the judiciary and court staff.

The Court Security Division welcomed the addition of two Court Security Specialists with extensive experience in judicial threat management and court security operations. This increase brings staffing at four specialists capable of leveraging their depth of knowledge, experience, and law enforcement partnerships to effectively address emerging threats, assessment requests, and institution of recommended best practices in judicial and court security throughout the state. The Division has experienced improved incident reporting in FY 24 principally due to an enhanced reporting platform and expanded messaging to court security stakeholders as illustrated by the referenced incident reporting graph.

The Division has engaged with the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) to develop and tailor emergency preparedness planning strategies to assist the judiciary with local emergency preparedness planning to address environmental, weather, and all-hazards planning.

U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced S. 3984, *Countering Threats, and Attacks on Our Judges Act*. This legislation would amend the State Justice Institute (SJI) Act of 1984 to authorize the SJI to provide awards to certain organizations to establish State Judicial Threat Intelligence and Resource Centers.

Bill proposals include:

- Providing technical assistance concerning judicial security.
- Providing physical security assessments for court, homes, and court related facilities.
- Coordinate research and advance best practices around judicial security.

## **CHILDREN'S COURTS PROGRAM**

The Children's Courts program is comprised of **73** operational courts - **30** child protection and **43** child support courts (CPC and CSC respectively). The CPCs cover **148** predominantly rural counties. The CSCs cover **233** predominantly rural counties. Each court has an associate judge appointed by the Presiding Judges of the Administrative Judicial Regions and a court coordinator. The judge and court coordinator are employed by the OCA. One CPC also has a court reporter. The Children's Courts Program Manager staffs the program, serving as point-of-contact for the courts, coordinating with OCA divisions in servicing court needs, i.e., equipment, supplies, travel, and HR-related issues.

During the last fiscal year, the Children's Courts personnel had several changes. The CSC program hired two new Associate Judges to replace others who retired. Six new court coordinators were onboarded for the CSC program for those who departed during the fiscal year. Additionally, two CSC associate judges were elected to district courts and will take office in January 2025. The CPC program saw six new court coordinators onboarded for those who departed, and there were no changes to the associate judges. As of the conclusion of FY 24, all the CPC and CSC courts are fully staffed.

The CPC and CSC courts continue to conduct virtual and in-person hearings. During the last fiscal year, the CPC courts conducted **31,375** hearings, while the CSC courts conducted **54,392** hearings.

A new Children's Court Program Manager was hired on July 1, 2024. He previously worked as a court coordinator for the CPC court in Waco for eight and a half years and has previous experience working for both the Department of Family and Protective Services and the Office of the Attorney General: Child Support Division.

The Early Intervention Court Liaisons (EICLs) continue to research and engage with community resources so families can access services to help avoid a formal removal or achieve family reunification as soon as reasonably possible. The EICLs hold regular brown bag events to educate and provide information about community resources to caseworkers, parents' attorneys, children's advocates, and other stakeholders in the child welfare system. They also routinely send out information about employment opportunities, job fairs, access to health services, free and low-cost family events, and much more.



Child Protection Judges Katrina Griffith, Charles Griffin, and Delia Gonzales participated in a panel session, *All Things Permanency*, at the Advanced Child Protection Law Conference in Dallas, Texas.

On August 15, 2024, Texas A&M University provided its Final Early Intervention Court Liaison Evaluation Report. The Report evaluates the EICL program and the benefits the EICLs have provided in the courts they serve. The report compiled survey data from organizations and individuals interacting with the EICLs and interviews with organizations. Additionally, the EICLs were interviewed along with judges from the courts to whom they help provide services.

The OCA received funding from the 88th Legislature to begin providing equipment to the CSC judges and staff effective September 1, 2023, taking over the responsibility from the Office of the Attorney General. The OCA IT division has completed providing new PCs and laptops to CSC staff. However, during the transition, it was learned that peripherals (printers, monitors, etc.) would also need to be replaced. The OCA IT division continues to work with CSC courts to replace those items.

## SPECIALTY COURTS

April 2024 marked the start of the Specialty Courts Program Manager, a position that was funded by the 88<sup>th</sup> Legislature. The first endeavor involved establishing lines of communication and building collaborative relationships with statewide stakeholders serving specialty courts, including the Office of the Governor’s Criminal Justice Division (CJD), the Specialty Courts Advisory Council (SCAC), the Texas Association of Specialty Courts (TASC), the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), the Specialty Court Resource Center (SCRC), and the Judicial Commission on Mental Health (JCMH) among others. Representatives from each of these entities will continue to be involved in conversations and planning around the future of oversight and support of specialty court programs across Texas. Additionally, the program manager attended state and national conferences including All Rise, NACM, and JCMH’s Mental Health Summit, which resulted in fruitful collaboration with counterparts in other states and jurisdictions with similar objectives.

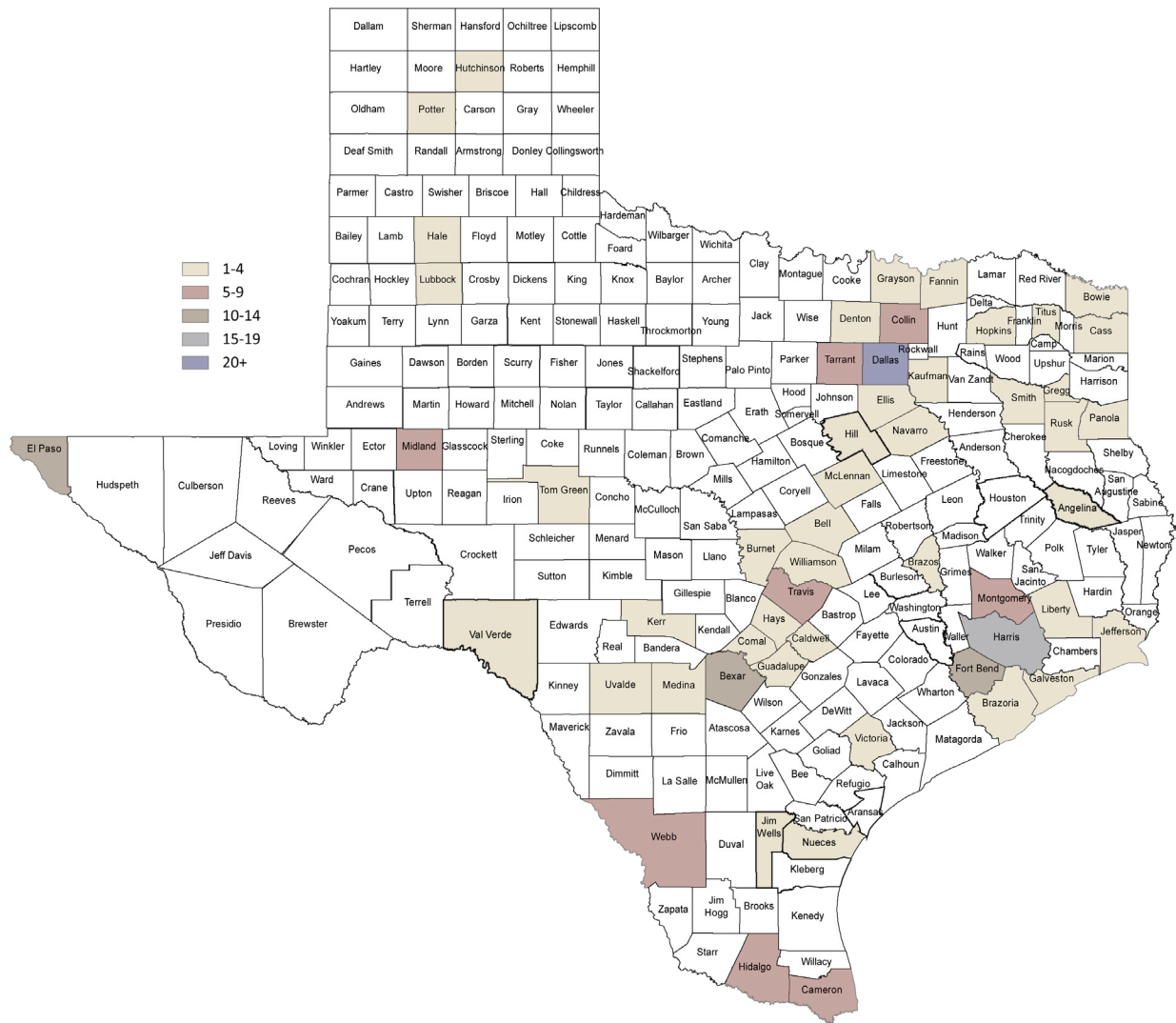


Judge Elaine Brown and her team celebrated five participants completing the court program at the Hays County Mental Health Court’s third commencement ceremony in August 2024.

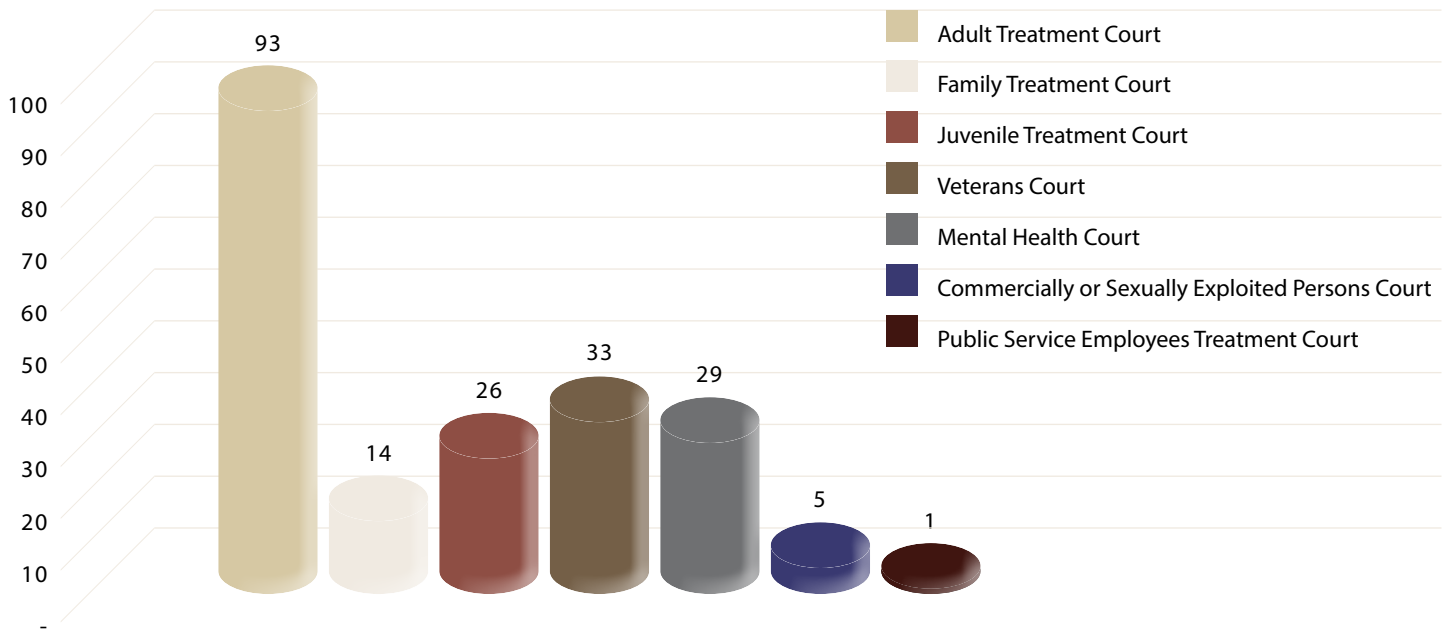


Each court on the registry was contacted to verify continued operation and current contact information for the judge and the coordinator. Ultimately, **201** specialty courts were confirmed to be in operation statewide. These include courts authorized by Title 2, Subtitle K of the Texas Government Code: [Family Drug Courts](#); [Adult and Juvenile Drug Courts](#); [Veterans Treatment Courts](#); [Mental Health Courts](#); [Commercially Sexually Exploited Persons Courts](#); [Public Safety Employees Treatment Courts](#); and [Juvenile Family Drug Courts](#). The distribution of registered courts by county and by court type are depicted below.

### OCA Registered Specialty Courts per County



### OCA Registered Courts by Type



In addition to shoring up the existing registry, improvements were made to the process by which new programs will register. The registration form used previously was converted into an online registration portal which requires more detailed programmatic information to be provided prior to being documented as a registered specialty court.

As the Court Services Division continues to have direct responsibility to provide technical assistance and monitor adherence to programmatic best practice standards, the program manager prioritized visiting courts to observe staffing and review hearing proceedings to gauge the level of support needed in the field. Specifically, observations were completed in nine counties and included each of the seven types of courts. During the visits the teams were surveyed about available resources, support needs, and data collection practices. This effort is ongoing.

A survey was fielded to all registered specialty courts in an effort to obtain high-level data to provide the legislature and other stakeholders regarding the value and effectiveness of these programs. The survey has not yet closed, so the results are not yet available. In anticipation of the challenge of obtaining solid, useful data on outcome and output measures of these courts, funding for a statewide case management system to serve specialty courts was requested in the OCA's LAR for the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session. Several vendors provided informal demonstrations to better inform that request.

The [Specialty Courts webpage](#) was updated with current court information, resource links, statute references, and funding opportunity links. The aim is to eventually include a section highlighting courts and teams in action, nationally recognized programs, and mentor courts.

The program manager has been involved in the implementation of the peer review process being led by the SCRC and NPC Research. These reviews are being completed at the request of the SCAC as a condition of CJD grant funding. There are currently **14** courts identified as Priority 1, with seven of those already scheduled for completion prior to the end of the calendar year.

Ongoing projects include drafting and vetting with stakeholders a document outlining Texas-specific best practice standards for operation and data collection, developing a system of accreditation for courts that will include ongoing evaluation that can be reported to the Office of the Governor when making funding decisions, increased involvement in new program implementation, and establishing a quarterly virtual meeting for specialty court coordinators to strategize, problem-solve, and brainstorm.

## CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

In FY 24, two justice of the peace courts successfully completed the Centers of Excellence Program—Judge Evelyn MacLean, Williamson County Justice of the Peace Precinct 3 and Judge Sylvia Holmes, Travis County Justice of the Peace Precinct 3; with a third Justice of the Peace—Judge Valencia Nash, Dallas County Justice of the Peace Precinct 1, Place 2, recognized before the Texas Judicial Council in November of FY 25.

The program goals for FY 24 were to grow interest and participation in the program and bring in more courts from the district court and county court at law benches. This goal was achieved thanks to the commitment of the Texas Judicial Council, agency leadership, and from recognized courts who advocated for the program amongst their peers. In 2024, the [program](#) brought on ten new courts into the program, with fifteen more courts expressing interest in beginning the program.

FY 2024-2025 Centers of Excellence Courts	Judge
Williamson County Justice of the Peace Precinct 2	Judge Angela Williams
57th District Court	Judge Antonia Arteaga
Hopkins County Justice of the Peace Precinct 2	Judge Brad Cummings
Lewisville Municipal Court	Judge Brian Holman
81st District Court	Judge Jennifer Dillingham
El Paso County Justice of the Peace Precinct 3	Judge Josh Herrera
250th District Court	Judge Karin Crump
414th District Court	Judge Ryan Luna
Dallas County Criminal Court at Law No. 11	Judge Shequitta Kelly
181st District Court	Judge Titiana Frausto

The Centers of Excellence Program evaluates each court across four key performance areas and five key compliance areas.

Performance Area	Compliance Area
Governance	Judicial Reporting
Caseflow Management	Caseflow Management
Court Operations	Guardianship Abuse, Fraud, and Exploitation Deterrence Program
Access and Fairness	Texas Indigent Defense Commission
	Court Security Reporting and Security Committee Compliance

In FY 24, the Centers of Excellence Program began a review of its procedures and processes, focusing on identifying



refinements and expanding the program to better capture the specific jurisdictions of participating courts. Courts currently seeking to become Centers of Excellence will now begin to be assessed by the program based upon their court level and jurisdictions, as well as against mandatory compliance areas identified in statutes, rules, and various state legal codes.

## **JUDICIAL STAFF WORKLOAD STUDY**

In April 2024, the Court Services Division in coordination with the Data and Research Division, began the Judicial Staff Workload Study with our research partner—the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University. The aim of the study is to support local stakeholders and state level policy makers with information regarding the current pay and staffing levels of court administrative staff across Texas and provide a tool for local courts and clerks offices to quantify staffing needs.

The study is broken into three stages. The first stage was conducted from April through July of 2024 and involved aggregating data from all 254 counties regarding the pay levels and staffing for all administrative staff at district and county courts at law. The study also included district and county clerk’s offices, as they directly support the administration of justice as the keepers of records. The PPRI team received data from **180** out of 254 total counties and is currently aggregating and analyzing that data for inclusion in the final analysis.

The second stage of the study involved a multi-disciplinary workload study, conducted from July to September 2024, of courts and clerk’s offices—which included a process survey of court and clerk administrative staff, a series of targeted interviews from a random sample of court and clerk staff from across Texas, and a series of Delphi Panel sessions conducted with key court administrative staff to identify key tasks and workload areas. The survey was sent to **over 1,200** court staff and all elected district and county clerks in Texas. The interviews and Delphi groups were conducted with administrative staff and coordinators from rural, mid-sized, and urban counties.

The final stage of the study involves the development and refinement of a court staff workload model, not dissimilar to the Weighted Caseload Model developed by the Weighted Caseload Study conducted by OCA in 2023. This model is aimed at providing local county stakeholders with a discrete figure for the total workload of court and clerk staff, as well as a forecast of the total needed full-time employee count based the data collected during the study. The PPRI team submitted a draft of the workload model in October 2024 and is currently analyzing the collected data in preparation for an onsite meeting with OCA to finalize the workload model and round out the study. The final report is due on December 1, 2024.

## **CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION SYSTEM AND NATIONAL INSTANT BACKGROUND CHECK REPORTING PROJECT**

In the fall of 2023, the Office of Court Administration was awarded a grant to support and improve the reporting of firearms prohibitions into the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) and National Instant Background Check System (NICS). The grant provides the Court Services Division with resources to conduct two key activities with partnering counties—a review of district and county clerk records for all cases where CJIS/NICS reporting may be required, and a series of training centered around CJIS/NICS reporting and best practices.

The program is largely targeted at rural and mid-sized counties who may not have the resources to conduct an independent file review. Throughout the review process, the program team identifies opportunities for process improvement—supporting clerks in their efforts to accurately maintain records of the court and ensure compliance with federal reporting requirements.

Throughout December 2023, and January 2024, the Court Services Division reviewed **over 400** relevant civil and criminal cases from the Tom Green District and County Clerk offices. The cases included relevant guardianship cases, and criminal matters involving a potential finding of incompetency to stand trial. In February of 2024, the grant team travelled to San Angelo to support the clerks in identifying cases where additional reporting may be needed and provided technical assistance to clerk staff related to ongoing CJIS/NICS reporting.

In April, the Research Division conducted a series of trainings in support of the project at the County and District Clerks Association of Texas regional meetings. These trainings provided information around maintaining compliance with CJIS and NICS reporting requirements, and best practices identified during the file review conducted with Tom Green County. The program is currently planning next steps into 2025.

## PROTECTIVE ORDER EFFICACY STUDY



In October of 2023, the Legal Division—with the support of Court Services—launched a mandated study focused on the efficacy of protective orders in Texas. The study was broken into three parts. The first part analyzed the complex legal framework surrounding protective orders in Texas. The second part reviewed and analyzed the data being entered into the Protective Order Registry maintained by OCA. The third part of the study surveyed **over 10,000** justice system partners across the state about the protective order process, challenges, and successes.

The study found that from FY 21 to FY 23, an average of **77%** applicants seeking a final protective order from district and county courts at law in Texas received one. It further found that, those who began the protective order process seeking a temporary ex parte order only needed an average of one extension before receiving that final order, with **93%** of the temporary ex parte orders being issued for less than 30 days total.

The findings also revealed that there are high levels of coordination between various justice system stakeholders regarding the safety of applicants and the reporting of protective orders into court and law enforcement systems. **Over 90%** of prosecutors surveyed reported supporting applicants in the filing of protective orders—ensuring that victims of domestic violence can access the court and appropriately file complex legal paperwork with the support of the legal system.

Only **36%** of district court judges surveyed reported making a finding of family violence in all cases. Indicating a high level of cases where family violence protective orders are not being contested before a judge, but instead being resolved between the parties. A positive indication that cases family violence protective orders are being heard efficiently before the court and moving forward, while parties and victims are being provided the relief sought from the legal process.

Finally, the [report](#) produced a set of recommendations centered around supporting further research conducted by relevant institutions, as well as improvements to the Protective Order Registry to better support law enforcement agencies in the enforcement of protective orders and provide justice system partners better data around the protective orders themselves.

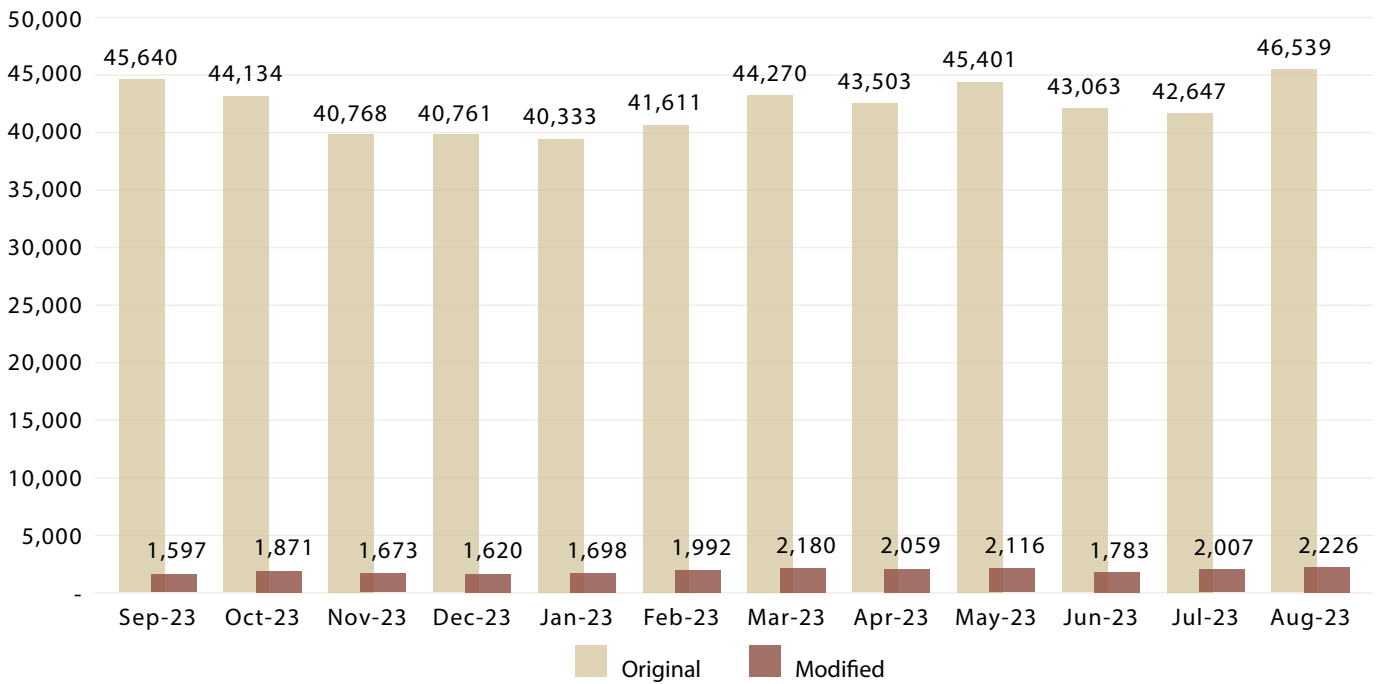
## PRETRIAL AND BAIL

Senate Bill 6 (the Damon Allen Act) was enacted in September 2021 during the Second Called Session of the 87th Legislature. The Damon Allen Act established procedures for setting bail and the reporting of bail information, set requirements for charitable bail organizations, amended procedures regarding cash bail bonds, and specified additional training requirements for judges and other positions setting bail. The bill also required the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to implement a public safety report system for statewide use no later than April 1, 2022.

The Public Safety Report System (PSRS) has been operational since April 1, 2022, as required by legislation. As of the end of FY 24, there were **7,174** active users and **240** counties that have completed magistrations in the system. A total of **541,492** bail forms were completed from September 1, 2023, through August 31, 2024. Note that multiple offenses may be included on one bail form as there were **724,921** offenses represented in these bail forms. The users are also able to modify original bail decisions in the system. The following chart indicates a monthly breakdown of the completed bail forms, both original and modified decisions

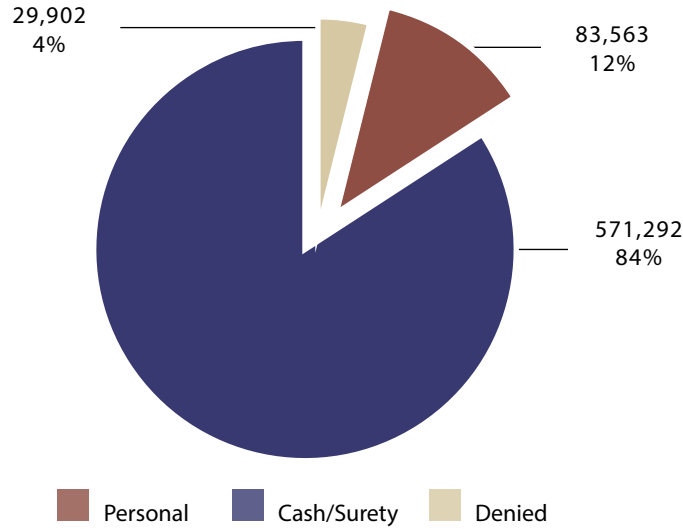
The Public Safety Report System reports three different bail decision types: Cash/Surety Bail, Personal Bail, and Bail Denied. The following chart details the breakdown of the different bail decisions for FY 24.

**Completed Bail Forms**



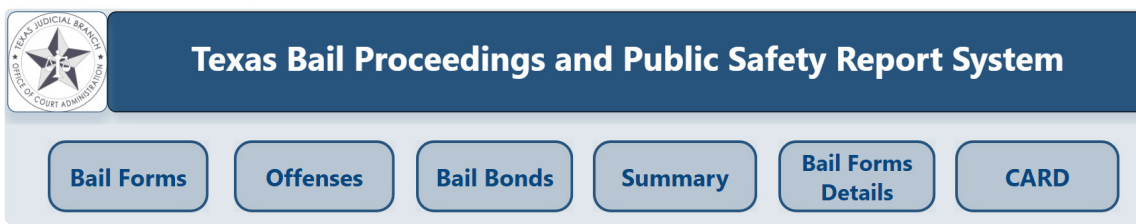


### Bail Decisions



OCA through the vendor, Catalis, has implemented multiple enhancements to the PSRS. Recent enhancements include two Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) which allow courts to electronically send information from their case management systems (CMS) to the PSRS, reducing the workload of inputting the same information in both systems, thus freeing-up personnel resources. One API involves taking arrest information from the user’s CMS and entering it in the PSRS. The other API allows users to submit bail forms from the CMS to the PSRS or from the PSRS to the CMS. Other enhancements include the availability of additional reports, change to date format, ability to enter cause numbers for each offense instead of by arrest incident, and updates in conditions showing on the bail form. Additional enhancements are in the works, including an upgraded query builder which will allow administrators to produce needed statistical reports.

The Pretrial and Bail Section continues to provide technical assistance to users through our website at [Public Safety Report System](#), the pretrial inbox at [bail@txcourts.gov](mailto:bail@txcourts.gov), monthly Q&A sessions, attendance at various statewide conferences, a quarterly newsletter, the PSRS help center, and the vendor’s technical support at [support@automon.com](mailto:support@automon.com). The vendor, [Catalis](#), formerly AutoMon, has responded to **372** support tickets during FY 24 which is a significant decrease from previous years. The drop is attributed to the users becoming more comfortable and proficient with the system.



SB 6 mandated the reporting of additional data elements, bail, and pretrial release information. The Office of Court Administration is required to post the information in a publicly accessible place. The information is found on OCA’s Topics website. OCA has further developed a set of dashboards at [Bail Dashboard \(txcourts.gov\)](#) to display the

required reporting elements and other data which were being gathered in the PSRS. This data is updated daily to reflect the most recent information.

SB 6 requires charitable bail organizations to submit a report to the sheriff of a county in which the organization paid a bail bond for a defendant. This report must be submitted by the 10th of each month. The sheriff then should provide a copy of the report to the OCA.

There has been a significant decline in the number of charitable bail outs reported. Two counties have provided charitable bail reports to OCA this fiscal year – Bexar and Harris. Texas Organizing Project posted **78** bail bonds in Bexar County. Grassroots Leadership posted **5** bail bonds in Harris County. There have been no reports submitted since May 2024.

SB 6 required OCA to develop statewide procedures and forms to be used by courts to facilitate the refund of funds paid toward monetary bonds and/ or application of the cash funds towards the defendant's outstanding court costs and other fees. These forms are available on the OCA website for courts and clerks to access.

Judges who set bail for defendants charged with Class B misdemeanors or higher offenses are required to complete 8 hours of judicial education on the duties of magistrates and setting bail, per SB 6. The legislatively required judicial education is provided through the Texas Center for the Judiciary, Texas Municipal Court Education Center, Texas Justice Court Training Center, and Texas Association of Counties. To date, **3,195** Judges have been reported as completing their required training.

### ***Additional Court Services and Court Consultant Activity:***

Court Services and the Court Consultant continues to assist the judiciary in a number of ways, which includes collaboration, the sharing of information, and local/regional training on topics pertinent to the efficient operation of our courts.

- Participation in the state Criminal Justice Planners Committee with court administrators from the Texas urban counties.
- Assist with the study and analysis of virtual child welfare hearings, in partnership with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).
- Presentation of the PSRS and bail data at the 2024 Texas Association of Pretrial Services Conference in Round Rock.
- Attendance at the 2nd Annual National DEI Summit, sponsored by NCSC, held in Washington, DC.
- Implementation of Court Confidential Policy.
- Numerous presentations at regional Texas Municipal Court Education Center conferences on communication issues within Texas courts.
- Attendance at the 2024 AllRise Conference in Anaheim, California on specialty courts from around the country.
- Attendance at the South Regional Effective Criminal Case Management training in Charleston, South Carolina.
- Co-Presented a webinar entitled, Increasing Court Appearances, with ideas42.
- Assisted with team planning for the implementation of the newly created Business Courts, and more specifically the hiring of OCA Court Reporters.

- Assisted with the development of an RFP for the procurement of remote court reporters.
- Participated in a number of demos of specialty court case management systems.
- Attended and presented at, the 2024 NACM Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.
- Provide assistance with the NICS grant project for no-consequence audits including assisting team with:
  - Developing an audit procedure;
  - Conducting an audit with a pilot county, including reviewing **over 2,000** cases;
  - Developing a Final Review report;
- Developing NICS training for Regional/Area clerks' meetings and conferences.
- Answer Mental Health related questions and provide updates to the [NICS Mental Health Reporting Manual](#) as needed.



Michael Smith and Caroline Boyd traveled to the South Texas JPCA Regional Conference to give a presentation on the Centers of Excellence, along with Judge Mark Russo, and the Public Safety Report System in Del Rio, Texas.



Al Lujan provided on-site scenario-based court security training to the court staff and employees in Starr County (Rio Grande City). (Pictured: 229th District Judge Baldemar Garza and Starr County judicial staff.)

Galveston County Early Intervention Liaison, Barbara Bischoff collaborated with the Galveston County Children's Services Board to present the 2nd Annual Resource Fair.







### ***Data & Research Duties and Responsibilities***

- Provide resources, guidance, and assistance with OCA reporting requirements.
- Assist clerk offices and courts with reports and case management system assessments to ensure data accuracy and compliance.
- Provide in-person and remote education on reporting.
- Support internal divisions with data analyses and visualizations, research and survey developments.



# DATA & RESEARCH

OCA's Data & Research Division was created September 1, 2023. The Judicial Information program exists within the division and collects and maintains information from courts at all levels, analyzes court data, produces reports, and provides data support to various internal and external entities. The division is also responsible for implementing, providing guidance, and overseeing new reporting requirements. A significant portion of staff time is devoted to providing support to the trial courts and clerks and addressing reporting issues to promote data quality and completeness.

In FY 24 program staff were involved in the following activities:

## ***Report Production and Updates:***

- Implementation of [HB 1182](#): Monthly collection, validation, and publication of district and county court-level reports and [dashboard for counties](#) with a population over 1 million
- Implementation of [HB 2384](#): Collection of annual statewide district and county court-level reports
- Implementation of [SB 380/ HB 3474](#): Collection of annual reports on court-ordered interpretation services
- [2023 Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary](#), which includes statistics for appellate and trial courts and analyses of case activity and trends in filings and other measures of court workload
- [2024 Texas Judicial System Directory](#)
- [2023 Annual Report](#) on Disposition of Judicial Bypass Cases by Trial Courts
- [2023 Presiding Judges Annual Report](#)
- [2023 Writs of Attachment Annual Report](#)
- [2024 Judicial Workload Analysis for 30 Most Populous Counties](#)
- [Profile of Judges Report as of September 1, 2024](#)
- Routine updates to the lists of Appointments and Fees, Hate Crimes, Jury Charges and Sentences in Capital Cases, and Vexatious Litigants
- Updates to the Court Structure Chart, Complexities in the Geographical Jurisdictions of District Courts, and maps due to the implementation of new district courts and county courts at law
- Compilation of Texas' calendar year 2023 statistics for the National Center for State Court's Court Statistics Project
- Data collection and analyses for the [Judicial Salaries and Turnover Report](#) for FYs 22 & 23, judicial turnover surveys for judges leaving in FY 24
- Maintenance of [bail data dashboards](#) from the Public Safety Report System and from Judicial Council Court Activity Reports
- Reporting and analyses related to statewide trends with focus on improvement of backlogs
- Quarterly and monthly data posted to the Department of Information Resources' Open Database Portal
- Quarterly Performance Measures reports on reports processed across all court levels

## ***Data collection, analyses, information requests, and support to:***

- The Texas Judicial Council and the Office of Court Administration
- The Supreme Court for its courts of appeals docket equalization program

- The Council of Presiding Judges
- Judicial Districts Board
- The Council of Chief Justices
- Judicial Compensation Commission
- Texas Indigent Defense Commission
- Data requests from Child Protection Courts Management System
- Data requests from Public Safety Report System
- External customers related to legislative sessions, including requests for analyses for new district courts or county courts at law, or other major issues in the judicial system
- Trial courts and clerks and their information technology staff or case management system vendors
- Creation and maintenance of [Clerk Resources Webpage](#)

***Research Projects:***

- Assistance with research, data analysis, and survey development of [Protective Order Efficacy Study](#)
- Research on business court practices across the country
- Bail research related charitable bail organizations

***Meetings Trainings and Presentations:***

- Roundtable meetings with case management system vendors
- Individual meetings with case management system vendors
- Regional County and District Clerk meetings and presentations on current and new reporting requirements
- Annual County and District Clerk conferences and presentations on current and new reporting requirements
- Justice of the Peace conferences and presentations on judicial data and current reporting requirements
- Meetings with individual counties, data review, and discussion of new reporting requirements
- County site visits, review of current reporting practices and reports, and training/assistance with report corrections and submissions





### ***Recipients of Direct Technology Services***

- Supreme Court of Texas
- Court of Criminal Appeals
- 14 Intermediate Courts of Appeals
- State Law Library
- State Prosecuting Attorney
- State Commission on Judicial Conduct
- Texas Indigent Defense Commission
- Office of Capital and Forensic Writs
- Board of Law Examiners
- Regional Public Defender Office



# INFORMATION SERVICES

The Information Services Division works to foster technological innovation with its Judicial branch partners in a secure environment. The division supports Internet services, networks, cloud services, servers, workstations, and mobile devices for **approximately 1,200** users spread across Texas.

The division manages the statewide eFiling contract which is comprised of eFiling, document access (re:SearchTX), forms assembly (Guide and File) and document redaction. Additionally, IT guidance is also provided to other statewide technology contracts such as the bail system (PSRS), digital evidence (Case Center) and remote hearings (Zoom).

IT staffs and coordinates the activities for the Judicial Committee on Information Technology and its subcommittees. It also provides assistance along with the legal division and other divisions on agency procurements of cloud-based systems and services.

## eFILE

Tyler Technologies operates and maintains the statewide electronic filing system. OCA works closely with Tyler Technologies to ensure that production issues are addressed in a timely manner. OCA is also working with Tyler to continually improve the eFiling system for the attorneys and the clerks. Tyler has phased OCA requests into four phases and completed most of phase two in FY 23.

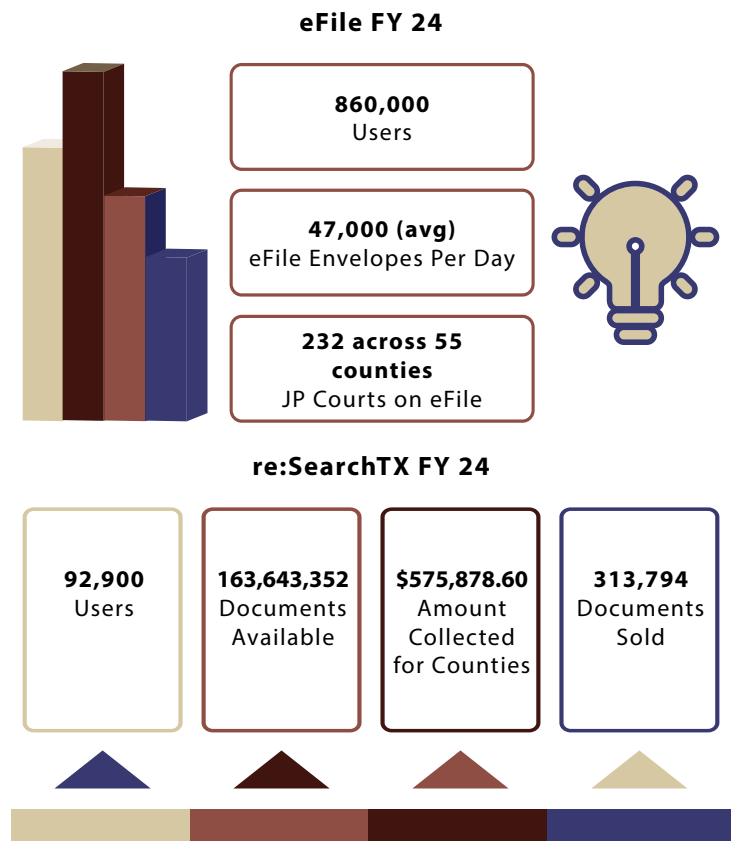
## Re:SearchTX

Re:SearchTX aims to provide a single statewide view of electronic court documents. The system currently includes **more than 160 million** documents filed in civil cases across the state. Any of the **more than 92,000** users can purchase publicly available documents (\$0.10/page with a minimum of \$1 per document) and the money collected goes to the county of origin. This year **more than \$575,000** was collected and distributed to more than half of the counties in the state.

In May, the Supreme Court mandated that all counties integrate their local case management systems with re:SearchTX in a graduated schedule starting on October 1, 2024 through November 1, 2025. This will ensure that the case file presented on re:SearchTX in civil cases is always accurate and complete, including orders and judgements for cases. In some cases, upcoming hearings will also be transmitted from the local case management system. OCA is working with Tyler Technologies to enable free case alerts for attorneys on the case as well.

## CONTINUING EFFICIENCIES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Although the pandemic continues to wind down, OCA continued with technologies that greatly improved the courts. OCA renewed Zoom for all judges in Texas in March 2023. In addition to Zoom, OCA with also renewed zConnect.io to provide an additional layer to Zoom that allows judges to manage mass docket calls. It allows judges to upload a copy



of their docket and groups participants based on the case that they are involved with. zConnect is available to any judge with an OCA provided Zoom account.

This year, OCA contracted with Thompson-Reuters to provide Case Center to **100** judges in Texas. This tool allows litigants and attorneys to upload exhibits ahead of a hearing or trial and then allows the judge to share them in a hybrid hearing environment.

## **SELF-HELP**

In working with the eFiling vendor and legal services, the included self-help features of eFiling continued to expand usage. On average, the system is seeing **approximately 6,500** sessions per month. Approximately two-thirds sessions result in the document prepared being electronically filed, with the other portion being printed and filed on paper. There are **46** different interviews on the website with six of them enabled for electronic filing.

## **JUDICIAL COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

The mission of the Judicial Committee on Information Technology (JCIT) is to promulgate standards and guidelines for information technology in the Texas Judiciary. In FY 24, JCIT met four times and discussed a variety of topics including:

- Providing recommendations to the Supreme Court on including orders/judgements in re:SearchTX
- Expanding re:SearchTX to include criminal case documents as appropriate
- Reviewing and revising the Technology Standards as appropriate

### ***Committee Members***

Justice Simmons serves as Chair and Mr. Wessels as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The Honorable Jeffery S. Boyd, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, and the Honorable Kevin Yeary, Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, serves as the Courts' liaisons.

### ***Voting Members.***

**Hon. Rebecca Simmons**, Former Justice, Fourth Court of Appeals, San Antonio

**Bob Wessels**, Former Criminal Courts Administrator, Harris County

**Hon. Lawrence Doss**, Justice, Seventh Court of Appeals, Amarillo

**Hon. David Escamilla**, County Attorney, Travis County

**Hon. Roy Ferguson**, Judge, 394th District Court, Brewster, Culberson, Jeff Davis, Hudspeth Counties

**Hon. Dan Hinde**, Dan Hinde PLLC, Houston

**Hon. Laura Hinojosa**, District Clerk, Hidalgo County

**Tracy Hopper**, IT Administrator, Harris County District Clerk's Office

**D. Todd Smith**, Attorney, Butler Snow LLP, Austin

**Carlos R. Soltero**, Attorney, Soltero Sapire Murrell PLLC, Austin

**Dean Stanzione**, Director of Court Administration, Lubbock County

**Mark Unger**, The Unger Law Firm, San Antonio

**Hon. John Warren**, County Clerk, Dallas County

**Edwards E. Wells, Jr.**, Court Manager, County Criminal Courts, Harris County

***Non-Voting Members.***

**Hon. Jeffery S. Boyd**, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin

**Hon. Kevin Yeary**, Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

**Amy Befeld**, Texas Association of Counties, Austin

**Hon. David Canales**, Judge, 73rd District Court, Bexar County

**Michael Cruz**, Deputy Clerk, Supreme Court of Texas

**Michael Cuccaro**, Executive Director, El Paso County Council of Judges, El Paso County

**Annie Elliott**, Court Coordinator, 434th District Court, Fort Bend County

**Doug Gowin**, Operations Manager, Tarrant County

**Jessica Griffith**, JP Functional Analyst, Collin County

**Hon. Blake Hawthorne**, Clerk, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin

**Hon. Patty Henry**, District Clerk, Chambers County

**Roland Johnson**, Attorney, Fort Worth

**Megan LaVoie**, Administrative Director, Office of Court Administration, Austin

**Clint Ludwig**, Chief Deputy Clerk, Tarrant County

**Hon. Velva Price**, District Clerk, Travis County

**Hon. Russ Ridgway**, Former JP, Harris County

**Hon. Nancy E. Rister**, County Clerk, Williamson County

**Sian Schilhab**, General Counsel, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

**Hon. David Stith**, Judge, 319th District Court, Nueces County

**Aaron Varner**, Staff Attorney, Texas Legal Service Center, Austin

**Jennifer Williams**, Vinson and Elkins, Austin

**Hon. Deana Williamson**, Clerk, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

**Hon. J.R. Woolley**, JP Precinct 2, Waller County



### ***Legal Staff Liaison Support***

- Texas Judicial Council
- Conference of Regional Presiding Judges
- Council of Presiding Judges
- Board of Regional Judges for Title IV-D Account
- Judicial Districts Board
- Judicial Compensation Commission
- Judicial Branch Certification Commission



# LEGAL DIVISION

## RULE 12 APPEALS

The Division provides support to the special committees composed of regional presiding judges who issue decisions in appeals filed pursuant to Rule 12 (denial of access to judicial records) of the Rules of Judicial Administration. In FY 24, the Division processed **19** appeals. **Sixteen** of the appeals were disposed of during the fiscal year, **11** of which resulted in the issuance of a formal published decision.



Regional Presiding Judges with Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht and Presiding Judge Sharon Keller - February 2024



**Sharon Keller**, Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals  
**Nathan L. Hecht**, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Texas  
**Mena Ramón**, OCA General Counsel/Legal Division Director





### ***Finance & Operations Support Responsibilities***

- Accounting
- Budgeting
- Facilities
- Management
- Financial Reporting
- Accounts Payable
- Travel
- Payroll
- Property & Surplus
- Purchasing
- Time & Leave

# FINANCE & OPERATIONS

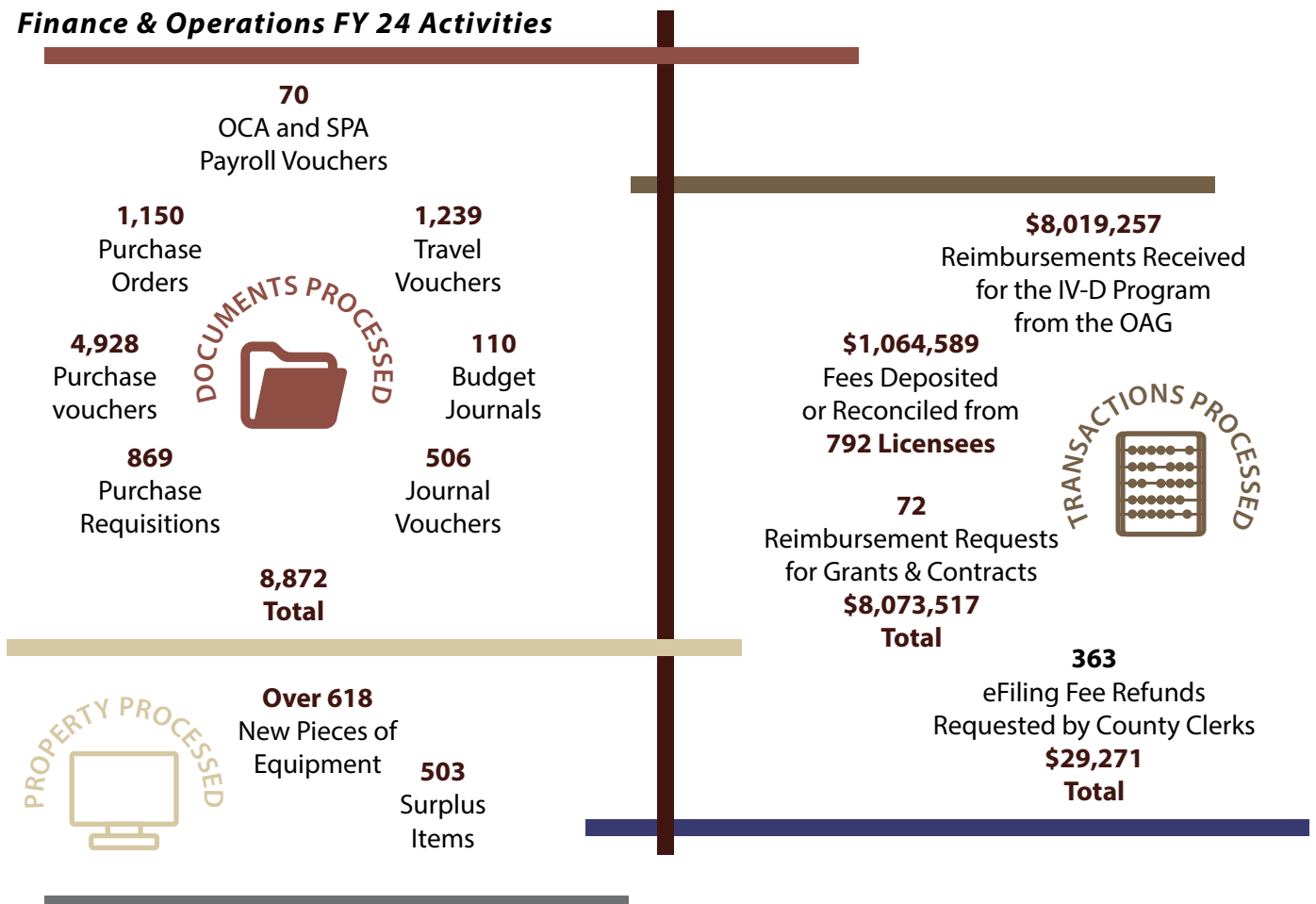
The Finance and Operations Division manages the fiscal and operational support activities of OCA.

Division staff members consult with OCA program managers on a variety of financial and contractual issues, and answer questions from the Legislature, the public, and other interested parties on judicial funding and state appropriations to the courts and judicial agencies. The division coordinates the preparation of the agency's legislative appropriations request, operating budget, quarterly performance measures, and annual financial report.

Finance and Operations staff work with the clerks of the appellate courts on issues related to accounting, budgeting, purchasing, and financial reporting. The division also provides support to the chief justices of the appellate courts and the presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions regarding legislative and budgetary issues.

The division provides administrative support to the Office of the State Prosecuting Attorney (SPA) via an interagency contract. OCA provides **100%** of the processing for SPA's purchases, payments, budgeting, and other accounting functions including the legislative appropriations request, performance measure reporting, and the annual financial report. OCA also provides support for the facilities functions of the SPA.

## Finance & Operations FY 24 Activities



## 89th LEGISLATIVE SESSION APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026-2027

The Legislative Appropriations Request for the 2026-2027 biennium was submitted to the Legislative Budget Board and Governor's Office on August 3, 2024. The total baseline budget request for 2026-2027 totaled **\$294.5 million**. Exceptional Item requests totaled **\$137.9 million**; **\$34.1 million** for OCA and **\$103.8 million** for TIDC. OCA's Exceptional Items, excluding TIDC, are as follows:

- **Improve Data Reporting Accuracy - \$1,901,485.**

OCA is requesting the addition of eleven FTEs, Regional Data Coordinators (RDCs) to ensure the accuracy and reliability of judicial data reported by trial courts. The 11 FTEs will coincide with the 11 Administrative Judicial Regions. The demand for more detailed data has significantly increased, driven by a growing number of data requests and the necessity for precise information to inform policy decisions and recommendations. As we continue to expand the detail of the data collected including data by individual court, accuracy and uniformity is imperative. Individual reviews of each county's data will be crucial to maintain the integrity of our new case level data reporting system. The RDCs will focus on assessing and verifying county data collection practices, offering tailored guidance to improve reporting accuracy and training. This role will bridge the gap between routine data checks and the detailed assessment needed to enhance data quality. By implementing these positions, we will significantly improve the state's transparency with judicial data and the ability to provide reliable data that supports informed decision-making and public trust. With improved data, the judiciary at both the local and state level will be able to make better decisions about case management and docket practices.

- **Business Court Operational Expenses - \$10,734,838.**

As OCA worked on the implementation of the Business Court in FY 24, a number of needs were identified that were not included in the Fiscal Note for HB 19. The identified needs include court reporters, law clerks, electronic recording equipment, and security. The exceptional item includes funding requests for these additional expenses, plus provides funding for six judges, their staff, lease costs and other operating expenses in the event the legislature authorizes the creation of the six additional business courts. The salary for the six additional judges will be appropriated to the Comptroller Judiciary section.

- **Judiciary-wide Inflation Relief and Staff Retention and Recruitment - \$2,909,802**

The Article IV Courts and Agencies remain impacted by increasing costs due to inflation and the draw of more lucrative employment opportunities in state governmental entities outside the judicial branch, the federal courts, and the private legal sector.

The OCA staff provide highly technical assistance to judicial officers, clerks, county leadership, and other elected officials that require our employees to be experienced and credentialed to provide expert guidance. Retention of employees with institutional knowledge and recruiting of highly skilled candidates are of utmost importance and training of new staff is costly, not only because of the caliber and complexity of work the OCA and its staff handle, but also because of the added pressures of high ethical and confidentiality standards and risk to personal security and privacy that accompany working in the judicial branch.

OCA in concert with the other Article IV Courts and Agencies is requesting a 6% salary increase for staff to maintain and recruit a strong, experienced, and efficient judicial workforce.

- **Court Coordinator Salary Increases - \$1,167,852**

The Children's Courts court coordinators are paid on a two-tier system approved by the Regional Presiding



Judges. The two-tier system, after the 9/1/24 salary increase, consists of an annual salary of **\$51,925.56** for year one (Tier 1) of employment to an annual salary of **\$53,365.20** for year two (Tier 2) of employment and beyond. The salaries of the coordinators are the same, regardless of what county the court resides in. The Office of Court Administration, with the full support of the Conference of Regional Judges, requests to increase the salaries of the court coordinators, across the board, in the amount of **15%**. Doing so would increase the annual salaries of the court coordinators in Tier 1 to **\$59,714.39** and in Tier 2 to **\$61,369.98**. Court coordinators regularly leave to take employment with the counties, which can afford to pay their court coordinators much more. OCA is seeking to bring the children's court coordinators closer to an equitable level of the county court coordinators.

- **SB 30/HB 1 Salary Increase Funding for Vacant Positions - \$797,720**

Senate Bill 30 provided a salary increase in July 2023 and HB 1 provided a **5%** salary increase in FY 24 for employee positions of state agencies. OCA currently has 40 vacancies at the time of submitting the Legislative Appropriations Request, many of which are associated with the Business Court. Since the agency did not have the opportunity to draw the funds from the CPA in order to be included in the GR limit calculation, OCA is seeking the **10%** salary increase for these vacant positions to maintain equity with like positions.

- **Forensic Science Commission Staffing and Forensic Analyst Training - \$538,868**

The complexity and volume of scientific issues the Commission is required to review due to laboratory self-disclosure of nonconformities, non-consensus proficiency monitoring and other issues identified during accreditation activities has increased significantly because of increased transparency expectations by the Commission and accrediting bodies alike. The Commission is requesting one FTE scientist position to assist with this work. By working with laboratories as soon as potential problems are flagged, the volume of criminal cases impacted downstream is significantly reduced, which is ultimately a cost savings for the criminal justice system. The national accrediting bodies recognized by the Commission have increased their requirements for accredited labs to disclose nonconformities and non-consensus proficiency results to their state oversight body, increasing the Commission's volume of work and scientific assessment/investigative needs significantly.

The Commission is also requesting **\$250,000** for the creation of a training program for the following disciplines: DNA, seized drugs, toxicology, firearms/toolmarks, materials (trace), friction ridge, digital, crime scene, and anthropology. Code of Criminal Procedure, Chapter 38, Section 14 authorizes the FSC to use appropriated funds for training and education of forensic analysts.

- **Maintain Court Interpreters - \$501,011**

The OCA currently employs two court interpreters who are funded by the American Rescue Plan Act funding. This funding is temporary and will be depleted by the end of Annual Year 2025. OCA wishes to retain these court interpreters as employees and is requesting funding to maintain the interpreters on staff. Contracting for these services is not economically prudent as our current contracted interpreters charge \$100-\$125 an hour, well more than the salaries of staff currently employed. These two FTEs have interpreted in **over 1,000** hearings over the last six months, an amount of work that could not be absorbed by the other interpreters on staff. In addition, we are requesting a 3rd FTE to fill the court interpreter position that was reclassified as a manager overseeing the Court Reporter program for the Business Courts. The duties assigned to manage the new program for the Business Courts will not allow the manager to also work as a court interpreter. It is critical that we retain these valuable employees and positions as the Texas Judiciary faces a shortage of qualified court interpreters.

- **Specialty Court Case Management System - \$3,943,685**

The 88th Legislature provided OCA with funding for two staff members to manage the specialty court program, formerly assigned to the Office of the Governor. The specialty courts in Texas typically prescribe actions to be taken by the litigant to satisfy or reduce a person’s sentence in a specialty case type. This includes Texas’ mental health courts, veteran’s courts, and drug courts. These courts use varying systems to track the actions to completion and to provide statistical reports on those outcomes. The variety of systems in place today at the specialty courts ranges from sophisticated computing systems to a simple Excel spreadsheet. A specialized case management system is necessary to track supervision activities, judicial interactions, and treatment engagement with the specialty courts. The case management system would provide simplified reporting activities and validation of adherence to best practice standards. With the addition of the specialty court program, the business court division and continuation of the child support and child protection court divisions, OCA is requesting a director level position FTE to provide technical support for all OCA court activity.

- **Replace Judicial Branch Legacy System, Texas Appellate Case Management System - \$11,942,000 Million.**

This project replaces the legacy system that provides case management of the appellate courts of Texas. The current system in production was last upgraded in 2010. Additionally, the new system also replaces the external interfaces to appellate attorneys, trial court clerks, and the public in general who want to review case documents at the appellate courts.

In Summary, the Office of Court Administration requested a total of **\$294,538,358** (excluding exceptional items) for the 2026-2027 biennium compared to **\$296,928,007** appropriated for the 2024-2025 biennium. If the request as submitted is appropriated, the budget will have decreased by **\$2,389,649 million**, or a **0.8% decrease** from the 2024-2025 biennium, due the elimination of the 15<sup>th</sup> Court of Appeals funding from the budget.

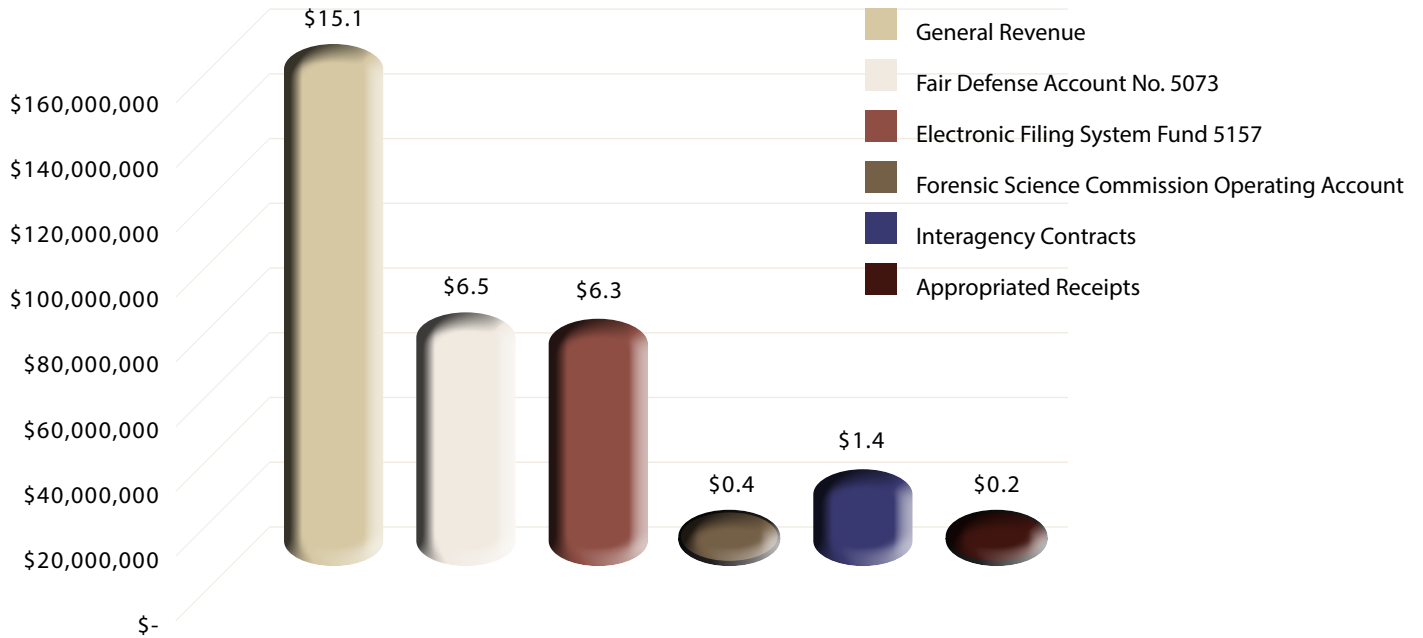
Method Of Finance	2024-2025	2026-2027	Increase/(Decrease)
General Revenue	\$155,261,055	\$151,032,602	(\$4,228,453)
Electronic Filing System Fund	\$52,542,505	\$63,007,660	\$10,465,155
Forensic Science Commission Operating Acct	\$661,001	\$400,000	(\$261,001)
Fair Defense Account	\$75,046,278	\$65,046,278	(\$10,000,000)
Appropriated Receipts	\$286,894	\$259,386	(\$27,508)
Interagency Contracts	\$13,130,274	\$14,792,432	\$1,662,158
Federal Funds/Oog Grant	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$296,928,007</b>	<b>\$294,538,358</b>	<b>(\$2,389,649)</b>

Finance staff attended the National Center for State Courts Financial and Human Resources Summit, November 2023, in Kansas City, Missouri.



Finance staff attended the Texas State Agency Administrators Association 2024 Mid-Winter Conference in College Station.

### OCA Legislative Appropriations Request



The 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Appropriations Request can be viewed here:

<https://txcourts.gov/media/1459026/oca-legislative-appropriations-request-fy-2026-2027.pdf>

Celeste Rodriguez traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs (OJP) 2024 Basic Financial Management Training Seminar. OCA is a recipient of a National Criminal History Improvement Program grant and will use the funds to implement improvements to CJIS and NICS reporting in Texas by providing guidance and training to staff working in courts and the clerks' offices across the state.





### ***Commission Duties and Responsibilities***

- Protect and serve the public
- Share information on each program's processes
- Streamline and standardize procedures and day-to-day operations

### ***EPRS Duties and Responsibilities***

- Provides uniform agency-wide project and portfolio management services
- Provides quality project planning, execution, and delivery of successful projects



# ENTERPRISE PLANNING & REGULATORY SERVICES

## REGULATORY SERVICES-JUDICIAL BRANCH CERTIFICATION COMMISSION (JBCC)

The Texas Legislature established the nine-member Judicial Branch Certification Commission (JBCC) during the 83rd Regular Session. The commission is appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas and has the core responsibility for overseeing the certification, registration, and licensing of approximately **6,868** court reporters and court reporting firms, guardians, guardianship programs, guardianship registrations, process servers, as well as licensed court interpreters. Hon. Sid Harle serves as the Chair of the commission.

### **Commission Members**

**Hon. Sid L. Harle**, Chair, Presiding Judge Fourth Administrative Judicial Region, San Antonio

**Hon. William C. Sowder**, Vice-Chair, Judge 99th District Court, Lubbock

**Hon. Victor Villarreal**, Judge County Court at Law II, Webb County, Laredo

**Hon. Glen Harrison**, Judge 32nd Judicial District Court, Sweetwater

**Hon. Polly Jackson Spencer**, Judge, Bexar County Probate Court No. 1 (Retired), San Antonio

**Mark P. Blenden**, Attorney, Bedford

**Don D. Ford III**, Attorney, Houston

**Ann Murray Moore**, Attorney, Edinburg

**Velma Arellano**, Official Court Reporter 430th District Court, Corpus Christi

### **JBCC Certification, Registrations, Licenses and Examinations**

FY 24, the total number of active licenses is **6,868**.

**2,233** court reporters, **253** court reporting firms, **3,444** process servers, **449** guardians, **35** guardianship programs, and **454** court interpreters.

The JBCC certification staff administers the examinations for the Guardianship Certification written examination and the Licensed Court Interpreter written and oral examinations. A vendor administers the written and skills examination for the Court Reporters Certification.

### **FY 24 Activity:**

- The licensing team processed **1,302** new certifications and **2,619** renewals.
- **341** licensed court interpreter exams administered-**188** written and **101** oral exams.
- **78** certified guardian examinations administered.
- **587** court reporter examinations were administered by vendor- **304** of which were oral exams, and **283** were written exams.

## **Registration of Guardianships**

SB 1096 (Zaffirini/Smithee) created a safety net to ensure guardians are registered, properly trained, receive a criminal history background check, and guardian contact data is provided to DPS and its Law Enforcement Terminal System (TLETS) to identify persons under guardianship if law enforcement contact is made with them.

During FY 24, the registration team processed **2,435** background checks, provided **6,518** guardianship trainings and received **7,672** guardianship registrations.

## **GUARDIANSHIP ABUSE, FRAUD EXPLOITATION DETERRENCE PROGRAM (GAFEDP)**

The Guardianship Abuse, Fraud, and Exploitation Deterrence Program (GAFEDP) was implemented by the Office of Court Administration on September 1, 2019, in response to SB 31 & HB 1286 (Zaffirini/Smithee). The program aims to provide resources for monitoring and compliance of guardianship matters. Auditors review guardianship cases to identify reporting deficiencies by guardians, audit annual accountings, and report any concerns of potential abuse, fraud, or financial exploitation to the courts. The GAFEDP mission is to assist the courts in protecting our most vulnerable citizens and their assets.

### **FY 24 Program Highlights**

- The Program has completed **247** *Initial Baseline Audits* out of 254 counties throughout Texas.
- Using the *Initial Baseline Audit* data we have identified the most at risk counties to start our follow-up reviews. We have started **3** *follow-up* counties and have scheduled an additional **24** counties for audit.
- The Program has also initiated *County Financial Audits* of annual accountings in Hays County and is in the process of scheduling more counties.
- Shifting from internal online guardianship reporting system to a vendor-based system- created project charter, statement of work, and requirements. In progress.
- We continue to hire additional team members to complete the Program mission- 3 new auditors have completed training and have been assigned counties to begin their reviews.
- We also have begun using Tableau and anticipate having more detailed demographic and program information soon.

### **GAFEDP Overall Numbers from Jan 30, 2019 to August 31, 2024**

- Initial Compliance Reviews Conducted in **319** Courts and **247** Counties
- **54,731**: Total Number of Guardianship Cases Reviewed
- **21,626**: Total Number of Cases Recommended for Closure
- **33,105**: Total Number of Active Guardianships Identified
  - **21%** Percentage of Cases Missing Annual Reports
  - **41%** Percentage of Cases Missing Annual Accountings
  - **39%** Percentage of Cases Missing Inventories
  - **28%** Percentage of Cases Out of Compliance
  - **11%** Waived Bonds

- o **4,639**: Total Number of Deceased Wards Identified

### ***GAFEDP FY 24 Totals***

- Initial Compliance Reviews Conducted in **13** Courts and **7** Counties
- **6,800**: Total Number of Guardianship Cases Reviewed
- **1,970**: Total Number of Cases Recommended for Closure
- **4,830**: Total Number of Active Guardianships Identified
  - o **7%** Percentage of Cases Missing Annual Reports
  - o **12%** Percentage of Cases Missing Annual Accountings
  - o **11%** Percentage of Cases Missing Inventories
  - o **16%** Percentage of Cases Out of Compliance
  - o **2%** Waived
  - o **245** Total Number of Deceased Wards Identified

### ***FY 24 for County Courts and County Courts at Law Compliance Review***

- **5** Total Counties Completed
- **10** Total Courts Completed
  - o **19%** Cases Missing Annual Reports
  - o **36%** Cases Missing Annual Accounts
  - o **42%** Cases Missing Inventories
  - o **28%** Cases Out of Compliance
  - o **15%** Cases with Waived Bonds

### ***FY 24 for Statutory Probate Courts Compliance Review***

- **2** Total Counties Completed
- **3** Total Courts Completed
  - o **8%** Cases Missing Annual Reports
  - o **13%** Cases Missing Annual Accounts
  - o **6%** Cases Missing Inventories
  - o **9%** Cases Out of Compliance
  - o **1%** Cases with Waived Bonds

\* Statutory Probate Courts reflect higher cases in compliance due to additional court staff.

## **ENTERPRISE PLANNING OFFICE (EPO)**

The Enterprise Planning Office (EPO) within OCA manages agency projects and aims to plan, execute, and deliver projects statewide. Our team collaborates with subject matter experts and project team members to develop requirements and implement projects. Additionally, the EPO manages the agency contract management process and is currently working on the OCA projects below.

- **Case Level Data Project**
  - Finalizing contract negotiations
- **Court Notification Project**
  - Kick off held on August 26, 2024
  - Adding counties to the project
- **Uniform Case Management Project**
  - Implementing the four remaining counties
- **New 15<sup>th</sup> Court of Appeal Creation and Implementation**
  - Construction build-out office space completion on September 1, 2024
- **Assisting with the New Statewide Business Courts Implementation**
  - Initiation on September 1, 2024
- **New 7<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room**
  - Construction start scheduled for September 6, 2024
- **Guardian Online Reporting System Development and Implementation**
  - Finalized project charter, statement of work and requirements
- **Continued Enhancement to the Public Safety Report System (PSRS)**
  - On-going system enhancements
- **New Forensic Science Commission Portal**
  - Adding FSC to the Alis licensing system
- **Moving the JBCC Alis Licensing System to the Cloud Environment**
  - In progress





The licensing team attends a docket call in Bexar County Statutory Probate Court II (pictured at top), and conducts training on how to administer the licensed court Interpreter oral exams.



### ***Commission Duties***

- Fund public defense in Texas's 254 counties
- Oversee public defense through data collection and monitoring
- Set policies and standards
- Help improve public defense through planning, publications, training, and mentoring
- Beginning in FY 24, the Legislature has directed TIDC to add family protection representation (court-ordered representation in the parent-child relationship) to its duties.



# TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

The mission of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) is to protect the right to counsel and improve public defense. TIDC provides financial and technical support to counties to develop and maintain quality, cost-effective public defense systems that meet the needs of local communities and the requirements of the Constitution and state law. Public defense includes appointed counsel for persons who cannot afford it in criminal, juvenile, and family representation matters. At the end of FY 24, **19** TIDC staff operated under the direction and supervision of a governing board.

## COMMISSION MEMBERS (AS OF SEPT. 9, 2024)

**Hon. Missy Medary**, Chair, Presiding Judge, 5th Administrative Judicial Region of Texas, Corpus Christi

**James “Jim” Bethke**, Executive Director, Bexar County MAC, San Antonio

**Alex Bunin**, Chief Public Defender, Harris County Public Defender Office, Houston

**Jay Cohen**, Attorney, Blass Law PLLC, Houston

**Hon. Valerie Covey**, Williamson County Commissioner Precinct 3, Georgetown

**Hon. Brandon Creighton**, State Senator, Conroe

**Hon. Richard Evans**, Bandera County Judge, Bandera

**Hon. Bill Gravell Jr.**, Williamson County Judge, Georgetown

**Hon. Nathan Hecht**, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin

**Hon. Sharon Keller**, Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

**Hon. Emily Miskel**, Justice, Fifth Court of Appeals, McKinney

**Hon. Joe Moody**, State Representative, El Paso

**Hon. Reggie Smith**, State Representative, Sherman

**Hon. James “J.R.” Woolley, Jr.**, Justice of the Peace, Waller

## FY 24 SNAPSHOT

TIDC works to fund, oversee, and improve public defense in all 254 Texas counties. In FY 23, it also collected and reported data on expenditures related to court-ordered representation in suits affecting the parent-child relationship.

In FY 24, TIDC:

- Awarded **\$46 million** in grants for TIDC’s core program, including **\$28.4 million** in programmatic grants to sustain and improve local public defense systems and **\$17.5 million** in formula grants to assist counties in meeting indigent defense requirements.
- Awarded **\$44.1 million** to support indigent defense in Operation Lone Star (OLS) cases during the FY 24/25 biennium.
- Conducted reviews in **37** counties to monitor and improve public defense processes and payments.
- Trained over **2,700** judges, auditors, county officials, and attorneys in **64** presentations.
- Prepared eight planning studies for new public defender or managed assigned counsel offices in **11** counties.

## 89th LEGISLATIVE SESSION

For FY 26-27, TIDC requests four exceptional items in its Legislative Appropriations Request:

- (1) **\$12 million** in general revenue (GR) to address the revenue shortfall in the Fair Defense Account
- (2) **\$8,941,793** in GR to reduce attorney shortages through a “pipeline program” consisting of internships, fellowships and loan repayment or scholarships for attorneys working in high need areas, which includes 1 FTE to implement and operate the program
- (3) **\$47,548,803** in GR to operate TIDC’s Family Protection Representation program, which includes funds for grants to counties and 5 FTEs to implement and operate the program
- (4) **\$35 million** in GR to increase TIDC’s capacity to fund new and expanded public defense offices

TIDC’s Board also approved **12** legislative proposals for improving indigent defense. These include clarifying magistrates’ duties under Article 15.17; allowing for limited-scope appointments for 15.17 hearings; and expanding the scope of MAC duties and allowing MACs to access DPS’ criminal history information. TIDC also recommends creating and funding a student loan repayment program, as well as internships and fellowships, for law students and attorneys working in appointed criminal, juvenile delinquency, and family protection cases in underserved areas of the state.



The TIDC Full Board met in Austin in August for legislative recommendations from the Policies and Standards (P&S) Committee and to decide on pending Improvement Grant applications.



# FY 24 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## FY 23 Texas Public Defender and Managed Assigned Counsel Offices



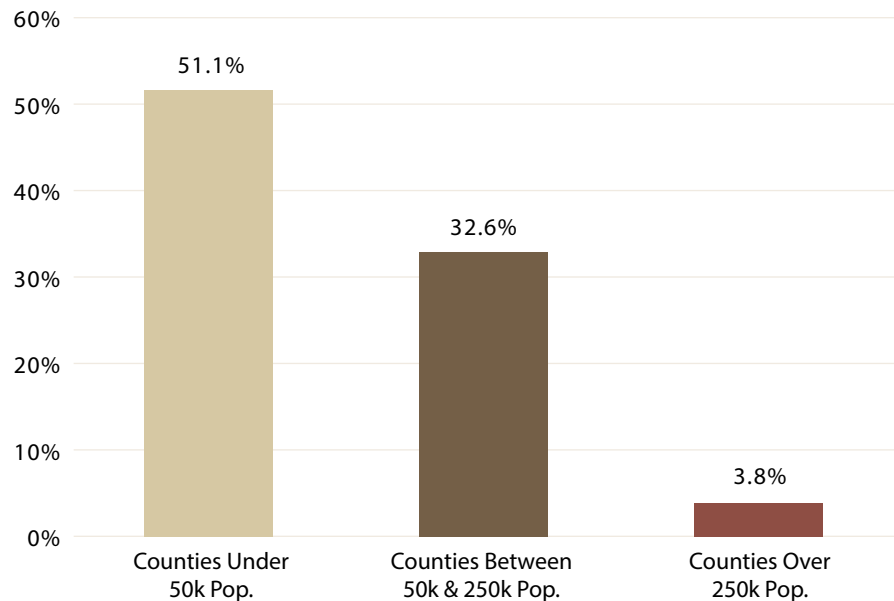
*Note: Each color represents a single-county public defender office and/or managed assigned counsel office, or a regional public defender office.*

## Funding

TIDC reimburses a portion of counties' public defense costs and awards competitive grants to improve public defense systems. In FY 23<sup>1</sup>, overall statewide public defense spending was about **\$414.9 million** (not including TIDC's OLS program that fully funds eligible indigent defense representation). In FY 24, TIDC awarded **\$46 million** in grants, or about **11%** of the most recently reported annual reported statewide expenditure. In FY 24, TIDC awarded **\$17.5 million** in Formula Grants to **248** counties and **\$28.5 million** in **46** separate Improvement Grants.

## Oversight

**Estimates Of Uncounseled Misdemeanor Defendants by County Type (FY 23)**



TIDC collects indigent defense plans and expenditure reports from every Texas county. It conducts desk reviews for all counties and site visits for select counties to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Fair Defense Laws. For FY 24, TIDC conducted policy monitoring reviews in **24** counties and issued **10** reports.

TIDC also collects indigent defense expenditure data annually from each county and conducts desk reviews of those reports. Selected counties have fiscal monitoring reviews that include site visits and detailed document review to determine that reported expenditures are eligible indigent defense expenses that meet grant requirements. During FY 24, TIDC conducted fiscal monitoring in **13** counties and issued **9** fiscal monitoring reports.

## Improvement

TIDC provides analysis, training, and technical assistance to improve indigent defense systems. In FY 23, TIDC helped counties plan major projects for FY 24, including seven planning studies resulting in two new public defender offices, two public defender office expansions, and one new managed assigned counsel office, serving a total of **30** counties. Recognizing the attorney recruiting challenges faced by public defender offices, managed assigned counsel programs, and local officials, TIDC works intensively with Texas law schools to highlight public defense career opportunities. In addition, TIDC works closely with Texas' public defense offices to bring their attorneys to law school campuses to

<sup>1</sup> FY23 is the most recent year for which expenditure data is available.

share the challenges and rewards of their work. TIDC continued its work with the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association to bring the Gault Center’s best-in-the-nation juvenile defense practices to Texas through the Juvenile Training Immersion Program (JTIP) with a program on adolescent brain development.

The Future Indigent Defense Leaders (FIDL) Program is a partnership between the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, the Harris County Public Defender’s Office, and TIDC to train the next generation of Texan defenders utilizing the nationally recognized Gideon’s Promise curriculum. During FY 24, the third class of FIDL attorneys graduated from the program and the fourth class received an additional 20 hours of intensive training in October of 2023 and April of 2024.

In FY 24, TIDC worked with the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL) to develop a training for attorneys and investigators to improve investigator usage by court-appointed counsel. With funding provided by the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, speakers from Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Texas came together for a training at Texas Tech School of Law on March 28-29, 2024. The training was a result of research conducted by NACDL and RTI International, [Evaluating Investigator Use by Defense Counsel in Texas](#), which found that both investigators and attorneys thought more training on the use of investigators was needed.

## **OPERATION LONE STAR**

In March 2021, Governor Abbott declared a disaster in response to the rise in illegal immigration and launched Operation Lone Star (OLS). The Supreme Court of Texas issued an order authorizing TIDC to create a plan to effectuate the constitutionally guaranteed right to counsel of indigent OLS defendants in August 2021 and continued to renew that order throughout FY 24. As of October 1, 2023, the Operation Lone Star defense division of the Lubbock Private Defender’s Office (LPDO), previously designated as the OLS indigent defense hub, became an independent nonprofit organization named Lone Star Defenders Office (LSDO). TIDC designated the Lone Star Defenders Office as its indigent defense hub, responsible for appointing counsel to indigent OLS defendants, and granted funding for the program. To meet capacity demands and fulfill its duty to appoint counsel, LSDO contracted with private attorneys as well as two public defender organizations: Neighborhood Defender Service of Texas (NDS) and Texas Rio Grande Public Defender. The 88th Texas Legislature allocated **\$41,057,688** in General Revenue for OLS indigent defense. TIDC will continue to work with LSDO to ensure high quality, cost-effective representation is provided in OLS cases and monitor the OLS appointment system for compliance with Fair Defense Laws.

## **FAMILY PROTECTION REPRESENTATION (CPS)**

### ***Data Collection***

Family protection representation is the court-appointed legal representation of children and indigent parents in cases brought by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. The passage of SB 2120 (88th Legislature) continued family protection representation data reporting requirements for counties, with the change that TIDC be statutorily responsible for the collection of the data. Prior to the passage of this legislation, TIDC collected data on behalf of the Texas Judicial Council. TIDC collected both expenditure data and family protection representation plans from counties. For the first time, pursuant to SB 2120, TIDC also collected reports from attorneys on the percentage of their practice time spent on family protection representation court-appointments.

Total reported county spending on family protection representation for October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023 was **\$62,780,536**. Nearly all Texas counties submitted a family protection representation plan, with 247 counties completing a submission. TIDC received attorney practice time reports from **1,088** attorneys who reported spending a percentage of their legal practice time on court-appointed family protection representation. In August 2024,

TIDC completed its report on 2023 data collected, which can be read here: [https://www.tidc.texas.gov/media/bjbnvy4r/2023-fpr-data-report\\_final.pdf](https://www.tidc.texas.gov/media/bjbnvy4r/2023-fpr-data-report_final.pdf).

### ***New Legislation***

Following the 88th legislative session, FY 24 is the first year that TIDC had full duties and responsibilities to improve the family protection representation system pursuant to SB 2120. Although TIDC did not receive any new funding to fully implement SB 2120, staff completed and began multiple projects to support TIDC's new responsibilities.

TIDC completed a collaborative video series with the Children's Commission of the Supreme Court of Texas, highlighting judges and attorneys who work in child protection law to increase awareness among law students and attorneys about working in this field. The full series can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvYvTTBsI5At5fYLqw5e9JSpLqB5b-FBy>. TIDC worked with the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section and the Children's Commission of the Supreme Court of Texas to host panels of judges and attorneys who work in child protection law at Texas Tech University School of Law and Baylor University School of Law to raise awareness among law students about representing families in child protection cases. TIDC also created a statewide mentorship program for attorneys that accept court-appointments in child protection cases. Applications for mentors and mentees were sought in the summer of 2024 and the mentorship program officially began in FY 25.

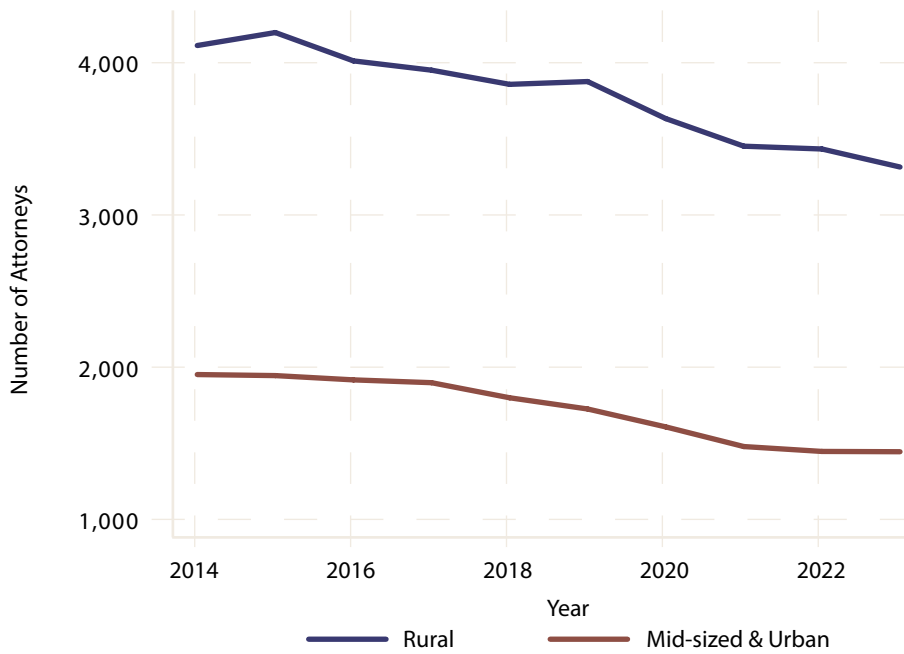
For the first time, TIDC hosted legislative workgroups focused on family protection representation and invited various stakeholders to discuss possible legislation to improve court-appointed legal representation for families involved in child protection cases. TIDC included a request of **\$47.5 million** for the biennium in its Legislative Appropriations Request to support family protection representation work.

### **TRENDS**

The 88<sup>th</sup> Legislature directed TIDC to conduct an assessment of public defense needs in rural Texas. TIDC contracted with the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M to conduct that assessment in FY 24. The report, [Justice Beyond the Cities: The State of Rural Public Defense in Texas](#), found that the number of attorneys taking indigent criminal defense cases has dropped significantly in Texas, particularly in rural Texas. Attorneys' average number of years in practice in rural counties has risen from **19** in 2014 to **21.5** in 2022, meaning that indigent defense providers are increasingly older and getting closer to retirement. Rural survey respondents overwhelmingly (**71.3%**) said that availability of attorneys is a significant concern.

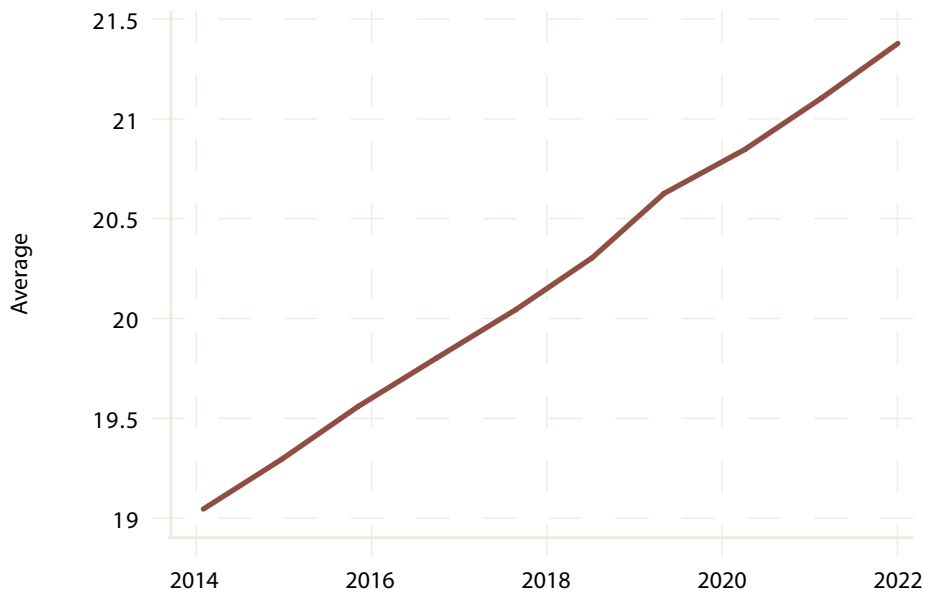


### Attorneys Taking Indigent Criminal Defense Cases in Texas

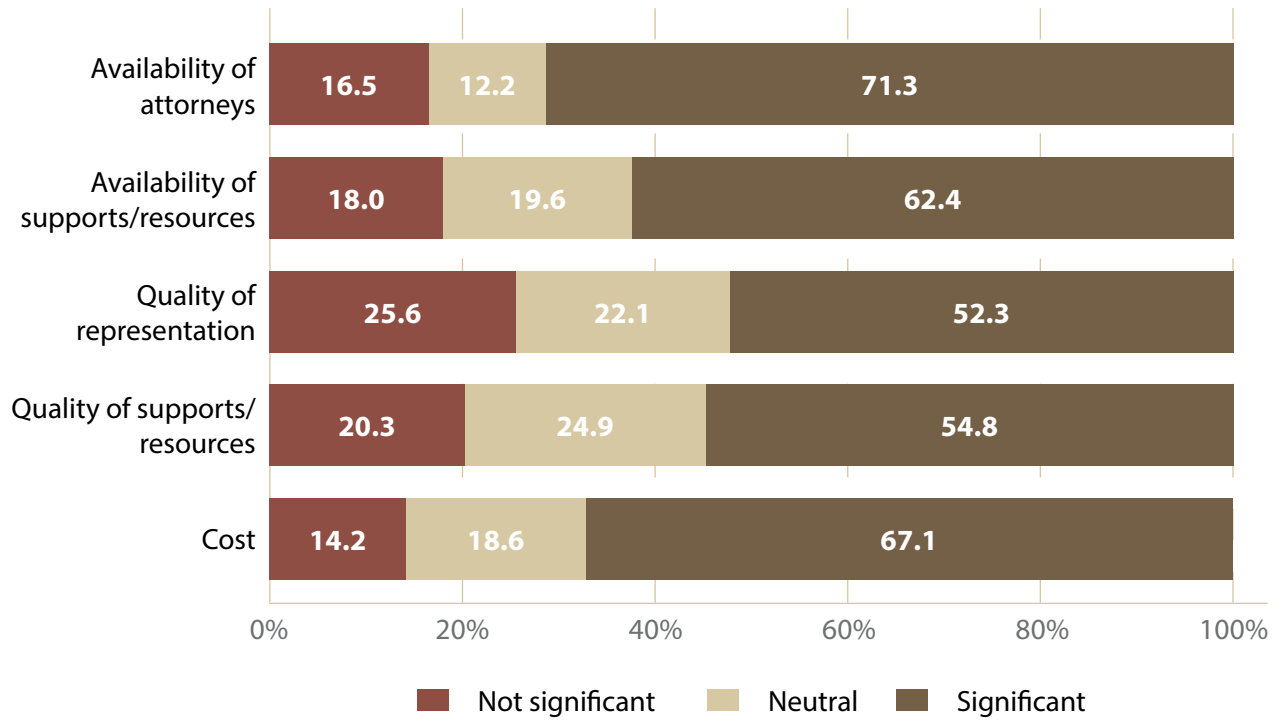


The number of attorneys paid for at least one indigent defense case continued to decrease in both rural and urban Texas counties.

### Attorneys' Average Number of Years Since Receiving Law License in Rural Counties



**Survey Respondents Perception of Issues Related to Indigent Defense in their Jurisdiction**









### ***Commission Duties***

- Investigate allegations of negligence and/or misconduct
- Administer the State Crime Laboratory Accreditation Program
- Administer the Forensic Analyst Licensing Program
- Maintain a code of professional responsibility
- Provide education and guidance to stakeholders regarding forensic issues



# TEXAS FORENSIC SCIENCE COMMISSION

The Texas Legislature created the Texas Forensic Science Commission (“Commission”) during the 79th Legislative Session by amending the Code of Criminal Procedure to add Article 38.01, which describes the composition and authority of the Commission. The Commission is required to investigate allegations of professional negligence or professional misconduct that would substantially affect the integrity of the results of a forensic analysis conducted by a crime laboratory. The Commission is also charged with developing and implementing a reporting system through which accredited laboratories report professional negligence or misconduct. During subsequent legislative sessions, the Texas Legislature further amended the Code of Criminal Procedure, clarifying and expanding the Commission’s jurisdiction to include oversight of the State’s crime laboratory accreditation and forensic analyst licensing programs. The 87th Texas Legislature tasked the Commission with establishing a code of professional responsibility to regulate the conduct of persons, laboratories, facilities, and other entities subject to the Commission’s jurisdiction. The Commission is also actively engaged in various forensic development initiatives and works collaboratively with stakeholders on the local and national level in the criminal justice system to improve education and training in forensic science and the law, including the Court of Criminal Appeals training initiatives led by Judge Barbara Hervey.

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Commission has nine members appointed by the Governor of Texas. Seven of the nine commissioners are scientists and two are attorneys (one prosecutor nominated by the Texas District and County Attorneys Association and one criminal defense attorney nominated by the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association).

Presiding Officer: **Jeffrey Barnard**, MD, Chief Medical Examiner, Dallas County and Director of the Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences; Professor of Pathology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

**Patrick Buzzini**, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Forensic Science, Sam Houston State University

**Michael Coble**, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Executive Director of the Center for Human Identification, University of North Texas Health Science Center

**Mark Daniel**, Esq., Criminal Defense Attorney, Daniel, Moore, Evans, Biggs, Decker & Smid

**Nancy Downing**, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Texas A&M University Department of Forensic Nursing and Forensic Nurse at Baylor, Scott & White Hospital

**Jasmine Drake**, Ph.D., Acting Chair, Assistant Professor and Graduate Program Director of the Forensic Science Learning Laboratory at the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs, Texas Southern University.

**Sarah Kerrigan**, Ph.D., Professor, Forensic Science Department, Sam Houston State University

**Hon. Jarvis Parsons**, Elected District Attorney, Brazos County

**Erika Ziemak**, M.S., Director of Special Projects at the Center for Human Identification, University of North Texas Health Science Center

## *Licensing Advisory Board*

**Megan Rommel**, DNA Technical Leader and Section Supervisor, Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Laboratory System - Austin

**Kelly Wouters**, Laboratory Director, Armstrong Forensic Laboratory, Inc.

**Deion Christophe**, Firearms Examiner, Plano Police Department Crime Laboratory

**Michelle Paulson**, Forensic Services Division Manager, Plano Police Department Crime Laboratory

**Andrew Greenwood**, Forensic Toxicologist, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

**Carina Haynes**, Crime Scene Unit Director, Houston Forensic Science Center

**Jessica Frazier**, Chief Civil Prosecutor, Comal County District Attorney's Office

**Angelica Cogliano**, Defense Attorney, The Law Office of E.G. Morris

**Katherine Sanchez**, Quality Assurance Program Manager, City of Austin Forensic Science Department

## FY 24 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The Texas Forensic Science Commission staff worked on numerous projects with the goal of improving the integrity and reliability of forensic science in Texas criminal cases. Below are some of the highlighted accomplishments in FY 24.

- The Commission received and reviewed **9** complaints and **82** self-disclosures and issued reports in **3** investigative cases this fiscal year. Copies of all investigative reports can be found on the Commission's website at <http://www.txcourts.gov/fsc/publications-reports/investigative-reports/>.
- The Commission accredits **61** forensic laboratories.
- The Commission has licensed over **1,500** forensic analysts.
- The Commission's Licensing Advisory Committee established voluntary licensing programs for forensic anthropologists, forensic document examiners, latent print processors, latent print analysts, digital/multimedia analysts, crime scene processing technicians, crime scene investigation analysts, and crime scene reconstruction analysts in Texas over the past fiscal year.
- Staff presented at various conferences and trainings, virtually and in-person, throughout the United States highlighting current forensic issues, and its crime laboratory accreditation and forensic analyst licensing programs.
- November 2-3, 2023, the Commission, in collaboration with the Court of Criminal Appeals, the Texas District Attorneys Association, and the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, hosted a DNA training for over **300** lawyers and judges.
- In November 2023, the Commission concluded a month-long statewide training for Texas laboratory managers by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Director's Leadership Academy.
- On November 16-17, 2023, the Commission hosted the inaugural meeting of the nation's first Association of State Forensic Boards.
- On August 26, 2024, the Commission hosted a virtual training for Forensic Biology/DNA technical leaders across the State to address complicated DNA mixture interpretation issues.

In September 2024, staff finalized the development of a statewide public database of information concerning crime laboratories, complaints, laboratory self-disclosures, forensic standards, and forensic analysts, and quality incident reports. The database can be accessed at <https://www.fsc.texas.gov>.

The Commission continues to work with representation from the Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (OSAC) and Texas crime laboratories on implementation of consensus standards in various forensic science disciplines and publishes OSAC Registry standard compliance by laboratories in its online database. <https://fsc.txcourts.gov/StandardPublic>

The agendas and meeting recordings for all Forensic Science Commission meetings can be found at <http://www.txcourts.gov/fsc/meetings/>.

*The main goal of the Forensic Science Commission is to Improve the integrity and reliability of forensic science in Texas courts.*



### ***Organization***

- 12 FTEs
- Administered by the State Law Library Board
- Board members designated by:
  - Supreme Court
  - Court of Criminal Appeals
  - Office of the Attorney General



# THE STATE LAW LIBRARY

The State Law Library was initially created as the law library for the Supreme Court in 1854. It was established as its own state agency in 1971. The State Law Library's mission is to provide legal information and research materials to state agencies and the residents of Texas. The Library prioritizes assistance to the Supreme Court, Court of Criminal Appeals, and the Office of the Attorney General.

Since 2014, the Library has focused on improving statewide access to justice and legal information by making legal resources available to Texans throughout the state via its website.

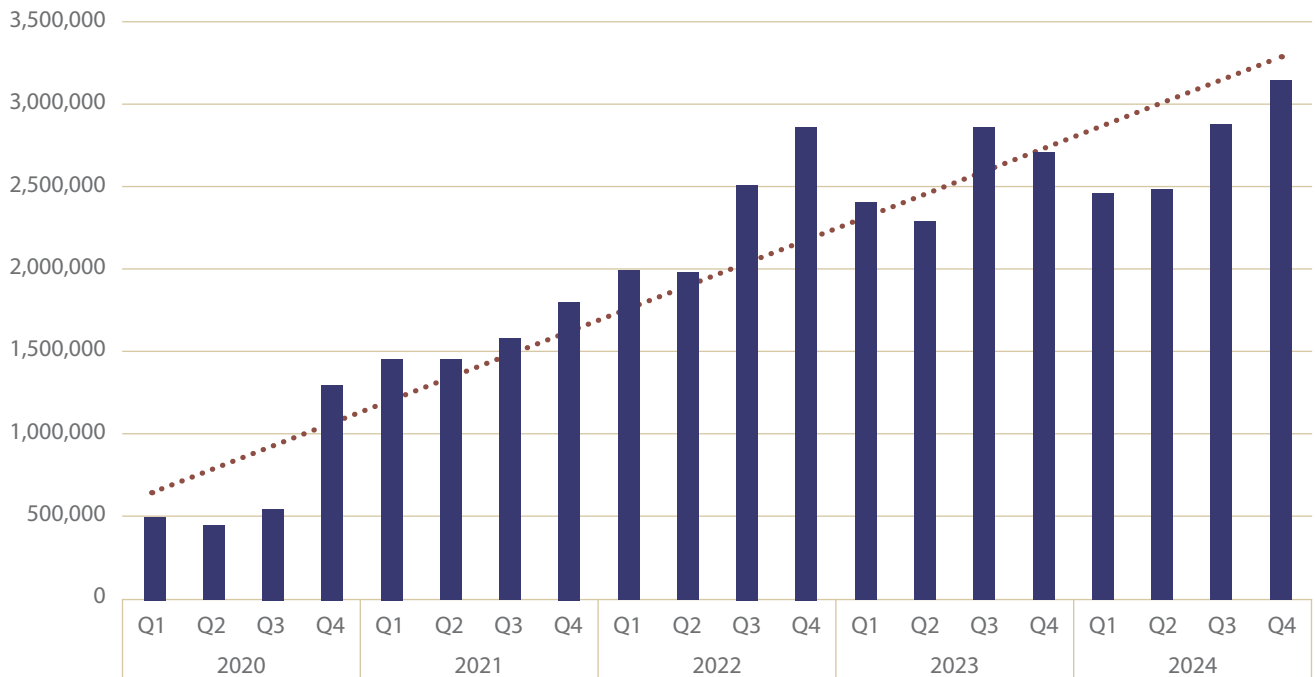
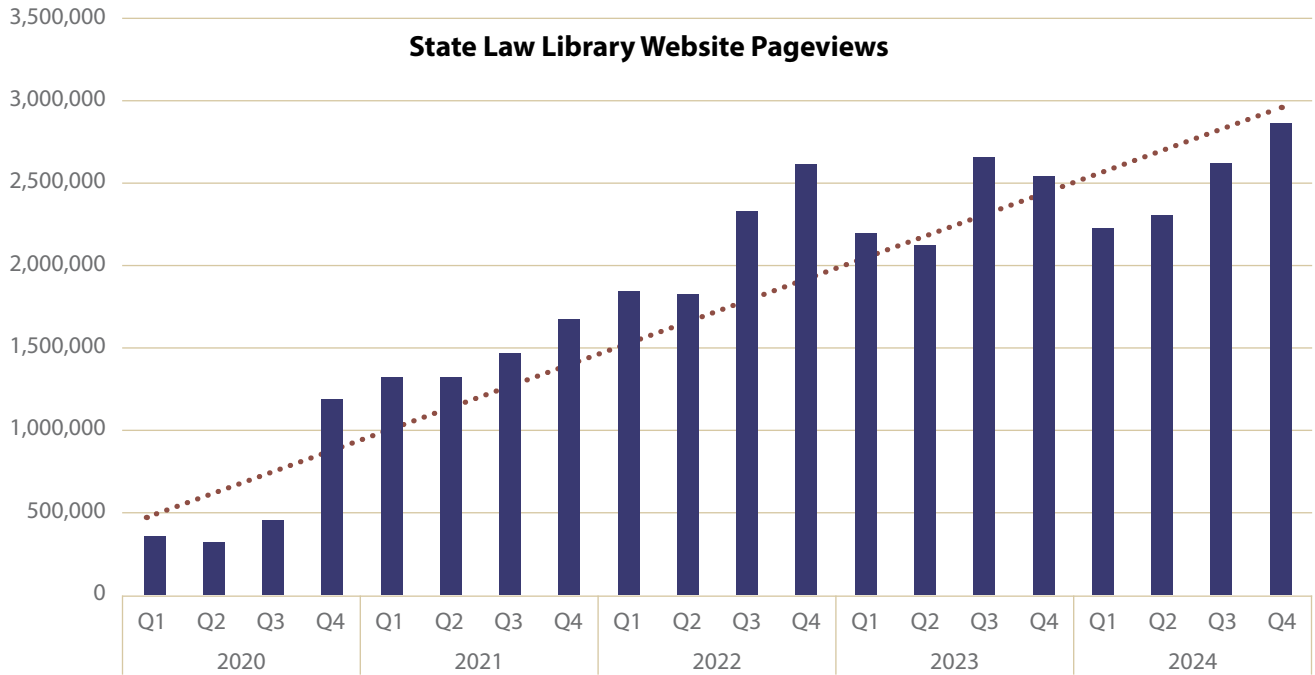
One of the most popular services on the Library's website is a growing collection of subject-specific research guides called LibGuides. These guides help patrons easily locate online resources on a specific topic. As of October 2024, librarians have created **64** custom LibGuides that compile information on commonly asked-about subjects such as landlord/tenant law, homeowners' associations, family law issues, debt collection, and more. These guides provide direct links to digital resources and e-books on the selected topics, saving researchers time and frustration.

Because many patrons are looking for basic information but don't know how to get started, the LibGuides feature has proven to be wildly successful due to the simplicity with which they present relevant, current, and helpful information. State Law Library librarians have also developed a collection of Legal Frequently Asked Questions that provide answers to straightforward and common questions about the law. Links to these LibGuides and FAQs frequently show up in Google searches, making them a handy gateway to authoritative information for the general public.

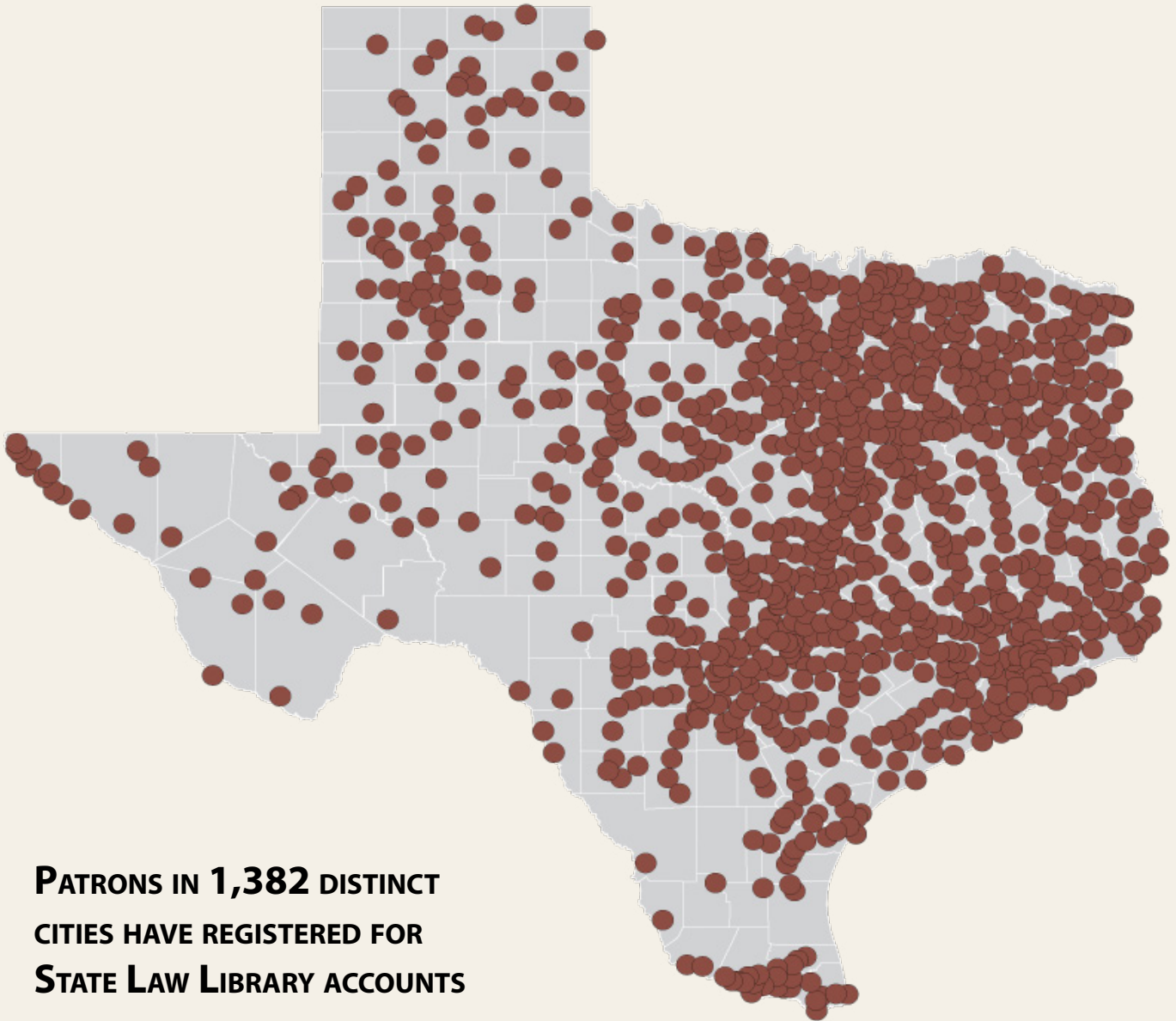
For more in-depth research, our website offers thousands of e-books and databases ranging from self-help information to detailed practice information for professionals. Public response to the Library's digital offerings has been enthusiastic and widespread. Since the program's inception, over 54,000 patrons have registered to use the service, representing **over 1,300** cities and **245** out of 254 counties across Texas.



### LibGuide Views

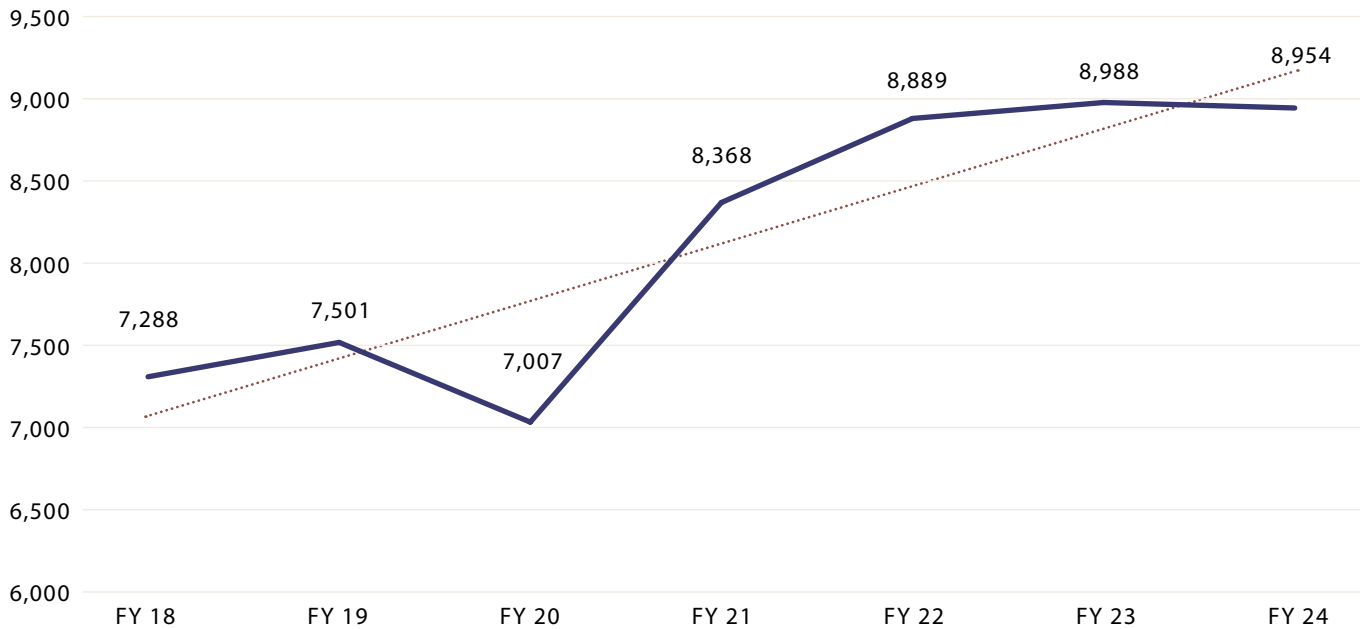


**State Law Library Map of Account Holders by City**



**PATRONS IN 1,382 DISTINCT  
CITIES HAVE REGISTERED FOR  
STATE LAW LIBRARY ACCOUNTS**

### Questions Answered Per Fiscal Year



A crucial component to patrons' success at using these databases is the assistance of librarian staff. Professional librarians are available to help patrons navigate online resources as well as print books. They provide expertly researched responses to patrons' questions about the law in person or via phone, email, or mail. In addition, Library staff have made several presentations about legal research and the Library's remote services to legal groups, court staff, and public librarians throughout the state.

To browse the Library's Digital Collection, visit:

<https://www.sll.texas.gov/library-resources/collections/digital-collection/>

To register for a library account to access these digital resources from home, visit the Get a Library Account page:

<http://www.sll.texas.gov/about-us/get-a-library-account/>

### FY24 HIGHLIGHTS

- 11,321 new patrons registered in FY24, up 28% from FY23
- 8,954 questions answered by reference staff
- In July, the Library discontinued charging circulation fees for the general public. Our hope is that this will reduce financial barriers to accessing legal information.

#### Resources available for researchers

Historical materials:

- Texas statutes, 1879 – present
- Texas court rules, 1894 – present



- Texas Administrative Code, 1978 – present
- *South Western Reports/Texas Cases*, 1889 - present
- *Black's Law Dictionary*, 1891 – present

Treatises, practice guides, and more:

- Dorsaneo's *Texas Litigation Guide*
- *Texas Practice Guide*
- *Texas Jurisprudence*
- *Restatements of the Law*
- State Bar of Texas *Pattern Jury Charges*
- State Bar of Texas Continuing Legal Education Courses
- Law reviews, law journals, and bar journals

*The primary responsibility of the  
State Law Library is to make  
legal information accessible to all  
researchers.*



### ***State Prosecuting Attorney Duties***

With exclusive jurisdiction before the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the State Prosecuting Attorney scrutinizes all decisions adverse to the State issued by Texas' fourteen courts of appeals to ensure their faithful adherence to the law and to identify significant issues requiring resolution by the Court of Criminal Appeals.

# OFFICE OF THE STATE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

The Office of the State Prosecuting Attorney represents the State of Texas in criminal proceedings before the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, either independently or in partnership with locally elected prosecutors. It also steps in to handle cases in the fourteen courts of appeals when it's in the best interest of the State.

State Prosecuting Attorney Stacey M. Soule heads this vital office, supported by two Assistant State Prosecuting Attorneys, John R. Messinger and Emily Johnson-Liu. Together, they oversee the Office's crucial role in shaping Texas' criminal justice system.

One of the Office's key responsibilities is thoroughly reviewing court opinions from all fourteen courts of appeals, particularly those that rule against the State. The team then identifies critical legal issues and brings them before the Court of Criminal Appeals by filing petitions for discretionary review (PDR). Once a PDR is granted, the Office works diligently to prepare and file briefs, sometimes presenting oral arguments in especially significant cases. This collaborative effort extends to working closely with local prosecutors and special prosecutors across Texas to identify emerging legal challenges and craft strategies that ensure a fair and efficient justice system.

The Office is committed to keeping the public and practitioners informed by providing summaries of PDR issues granted by the Court of Criminal Appeals on its website ([www.spa.texas.gov](http://www.spa.texas.gov)) and its X (formerly Twitter) feed (@[OSPATX](https://twitter.com/OSPATX)). The website also offers a wealth of resources, including publications and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) materials produced by the Office.

## FY 24 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Submitting PDRs and amicus briefs on a variety of key cases.
- Conducting in-depth reviews of hundreds of opinions from the U.S. Supreme Court, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, and Texas' Courts of Appeals.
- Providing guidance and advice to prosecutors and defense attorneys.
- Assisting in the drafting and editing of petitions and briefs.
- Authored papers and presented at numerous continuing legal education conferences.
- Participating in several committees focused on addressing diverse criminal law issues.

These efforts highlight the Office's dedication to ensuring justice is served and that Texas' legal system continues to evolve and improve.

*The Office of the State Prosecuting Attorney is the voice of the people of Texas before the Court of Criminal Appeals.*





### ***Commission Duties***

- Issues discipline and orders of additional education when necessary
- Can petition the Texas Supreme Court for the removal of a judge
- Dismisses cases when appropriate
- Provides informal ethics advice to judges, court clerks, staff attorneys, interns and others at judicial training programs across the State of Texas



# STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

The State Commission on Judicial Conduct reviews and decides every allegation of judicial misconduct received against a Texas judge.

## ORGANIZATION

The State Commission on Judicial Conduct was created in 1965 by an amendment to Article V of the Texas Constitution. The Commission is the independent judicial branch agency responsible for investigating allegations of judicial misconduct or permanent disability, and for disciplining judges. The Commission has fourteen authorized staff positions consisting of: the Executive Director, General Counsel, the Chief Investigator, four staff attorneys, four investigators, a staff services officer, and two administrative assistants.

The Commission's jurisdiction includes all sitting Texas judges, including municipal judges, justices of the peace, criminal magistrates, county judges, county courts-at-law judges, statutory probate judges, district judges, appellate justices, masters, associate judges, referees, retired and former judges who consent to sit by assignment, and judges pro tempore. The Commission has no jurisdiction over federal judges and magistrates, administrative hearing officers for state agencies or the State Office of Administrative Hearings, or private mediators or arbitrators. Effective September 1, 2023, the Commission's authority was expanded to investigate a select type of allegations raised against judicial candidates (who are not currently sitting judges).

## DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

In FY 24, according to OCA records, **3,936** judges were under the jurisdiction of the Commission.

During FY 24, the SCJC:

- Received **1,134** cases and disposed of **1,215** cases.
- Resolved **43** cases through public sanction, private sanction, orders of additional education, a combination of a sanction with an order of additional education, special court of review order, or resignation in lieu of discipline agreement.
- Dismissed **1,180** cases as follows: **727** were determined to not contain any allegations which, if true, would violate the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct. **453** cases were dismissed after investigation which included **25** cases that were dismissed with letters of caution, and **7** cases that were dismissed as moot.
- Resolved **350** cases after a preliminary investigation and **138** cases after a full investigation (requiring a response from the judge).

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

The State Commission on Judicial Conduct is a 13-member body. Its members, who receive no pay for their service, serve staggered six-year terms. The members of the Commission include:

- Six judges appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas, one from each of the following court levels: appellate, district, county court at law, constitutional county, justice of the peace, and municipal;
- Two attorneys appointed by the State Bar of Texas, who are not judges; and
- Five citizen members appointed by the Governor, who are neither attorneys nor judges.

**Officers:**

Chair: **Gary L. Steel**, Judge, 274th District Court, Comal, Guadalupe, and Hays County

Vice-Chair: **Ken Wise**, Justice, 14th Court of Appeals, Place 7, Houston, Harris County

Secretary: **Carey F. Walker**, Judge, County Criminal Court 2, Fort Worth, Tarrant County

**Members:**

**Janis Holt**, Public Member, Silsbee, Hardin County

**Clifton Roberson**, Attorney Member, Tyler, Smith County

**Kathy P. Ward**, Public Member, Plano, Collin County

**Wayne Money**, Justice of the Peace, Pct. 1, Greenville, Hunt County

**Andrew M. "Andy" Kahan**, Public Member, Houston, Harris County

**Chace A. Craig**, Judge, Municipal Court, Abilene, Taylor County

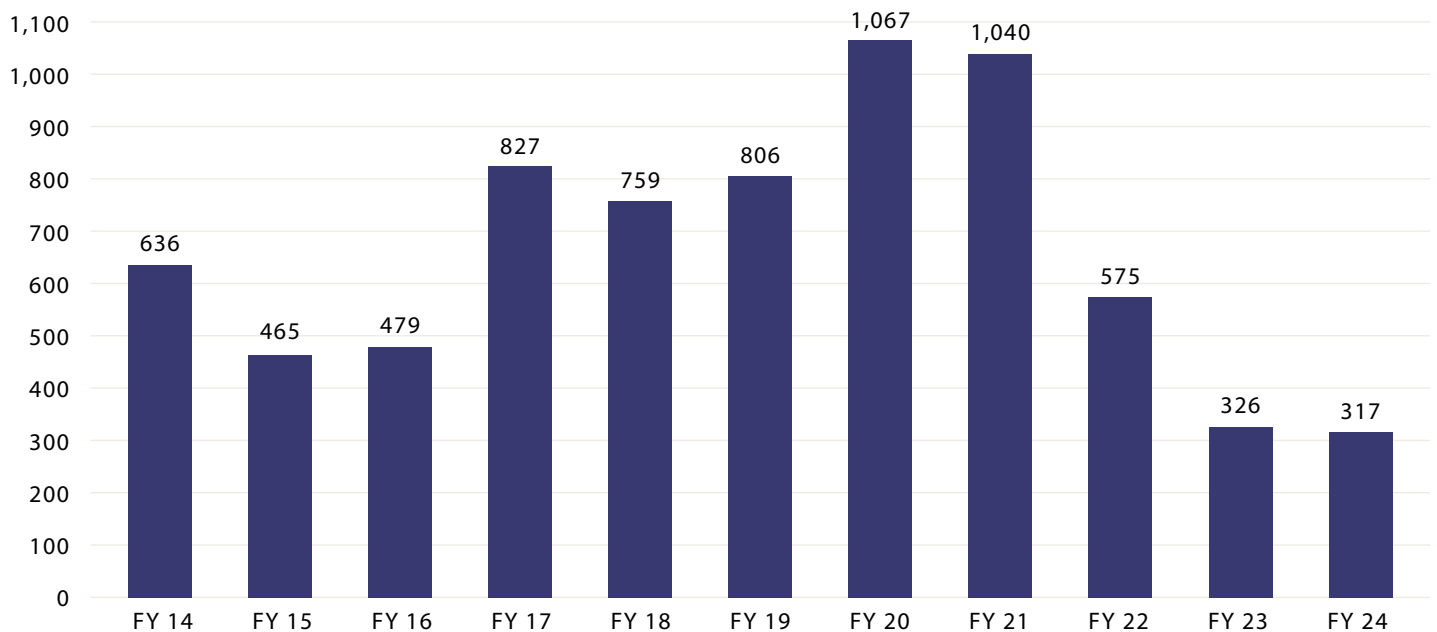
**Tano E. Tijerina**, Constitutional County Judge, Laredo, Webb County

**Clifford T. Harbin**, Public Member, Montgomery, Montgomery County

**Sylvia Borunda Firth**, Attorney Member, El Paso, El Paso County

**Derek M. Cohen**, Ph.D., Public Member, Austin, Travis County

**SCJC Number of Pending Cases FY 14 – FY 24**



*The mission of the State  
Commission on Judicial Conduct  
is to protect the public, promote public  
confidence in the integrity, independence,  
competence, and impartiality of the  
judiciary, and encourage judges to  
maintain high standards of conduct both  
on and off the bench.*



### ***Essential Duties***

- Investigate and identify all facts necessary to present and litigate potential claims of constitutional error.
- Gather, review, and digest all available materials from the client's capital trial, including from the trial defense team, the state, and the official court records.
- Conduct independent investigation of all facts and circumstances relating to a client's conviction and sentence, including mitigating evidence from a client's life history and examining all forensic evidence.
- File motions, briefing, and applications for writs of habeas corpus and litigate the constitutionality of a client's conviction and sentence in Texas state habeas proceedings.



# OFFICE OF CAPITAL & FORENSIC WRITS

Since 2010, the Office of Capital and Forensic Writs (OCFW) has proudly served as the office of conviction integrity for the State of Texas, ensuring that capital and non-capital convictions are constitutional, reliable, and untainted by questionable forensic science.

OCFW does this through two programs:

- Capital Post-conviction representation.
  - OCFW represents death-sentenced Texans in mandated proceedings that determine the constitutionality of convictions and death sentences.
- Forensic Science post-conviction representation.
  - OCFW represents incarcerated Texans in cases where questionable forensic science contributed to their conviction.
  - The Texas Forensic Science Commission refers OCFW these cases following an investigation into professional negligence or misconduct of forensic analysts or unsupported forensic scientific analysis or testimony.

## OCFW GOVERNANCE

The Court of Criminal Appeals appoints the Executive Director of OCFW. OCFW is also supported by an oversight board, which helps ensure continued institutional success, independence, and good governance in alignment with Texas and national public defender governance standards. The oversight board provides strategic guidance in matters of policy and budget with members appointed by the Executive Director of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission and the State Bar of Texas.

## OCFW OVERSIGHT BOARD MEMBERS:

**Geoff Burkhardt**, Esq., County Executive for Community Legal Services, Travis County. Austin, TX.

**Marcy Greer**, Esq., Managing Partner, Alexander Dubose & Jefferson. Austin, TX.

**Alma Lagarda**, Esq., Capital Defense Attorney. El Paso, TX.

**Hon. Terry Shamsie**, Esq., Criminal Defense Attorney. Corpus Christi, TX.

**Phillip Yates**, Esq., Attorney at Law. Houston, TX.

## SMALL JUDICIAL AGENCY, BIG FOOTPRINT

- OCFW staff includes 12 attorneys, seven mitigation specialists, three paralegals, and two accountants.
- OCFW represents **70%** of death sentenced persons pending in initial Article 11.071 proceedings.
- Since 2020, the Forensic Science Commission has referred **over 70** cases to OCFW for review and possible representation. OCFW currently represents eight persons pursuant to this forensic writ mandate.
- OCFW has represented clients from **over 30** counties from across Texas.

## ESSENTIAL AND ECONOMICAL SERVICES

- OCFW safeguards the constitutionality of death penalty convictions and sentences, and the Texas criminal justice

system, by investigating and litigating all possible constitutional claims in post-conviction litigation in Texas courts, ensuring that these fundamental claims are fully aired, and Texas courts can consider them efficiently and fairly.

- As a public defender, OCFW provides the State great benefits, including economies of scale, skilled and specialized experience, and supervised, high-quality work.
- The Code of Criminal Procedure requires that OCFW be appointed to represent death-sentenced persons in post-conviction proceedings, if the Office can assume representation and has sufficient resources to provide professional representation.
- OCFW salaried staff are funded by the Texas Legislature; when OCFW is unable to provide representation, trial courts must appoint private counsel, who are paid hourly by the county of conviction.

## **RECENT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

- OCFW practices statewide, focusing narrowly on constitutional issues, forensic science, and wrongful convictions.
- OCFW has presented evidence in support of post-conviction applications in hearings before numerous trial courts and litigated constitutional issues before the Court of Criminal Appeals and United States Supreme Court.
- The Court of Criminal Appeals overturned the death sentences of two separate clients based on constitutional violations, one after **37** years, the other after **16** years.
- OCFW's work resulted in a unanimous, favorable decision by the United States Supreme Court.
- Over the last two years, Texas courts have found constitutional violations and recommend new trials or sentencings in four separate OCFW capital cases.
- OCFW's work exposed significant flaws in the work of a forensic analyst, prompting not only the Court of Criminal Appeals to grant a new trial to the OCFW client in 2022, but the 88<sup>th</sup> Legislature to create a statewide crime lab disclosure portal, which will facilitate the disclosure of relevant evidence simultaneously to the defense and the prosecution. The portal is expected to go live during FY 24.



OCFW Group Photo - October 2023

*The Office of Capital and Forensic Writs provides zealous, principled post-conviction representation to indigent persons in Texas on claims relating to the constitutionality of convictions and sentences.*

**Annual Report of Judicial Support Agencies Board and Commissions**

P.O. Box 12066  
Austin, TX 78711-2066

512.463.1625 Phone  
512.463.1648 Fax

[www.txcourts.gov](http://www.txcourts.gov)