ANNUAL REPORT of **JUDICIAL SUPPORT** AGENCIES, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Fiscal Year 2025







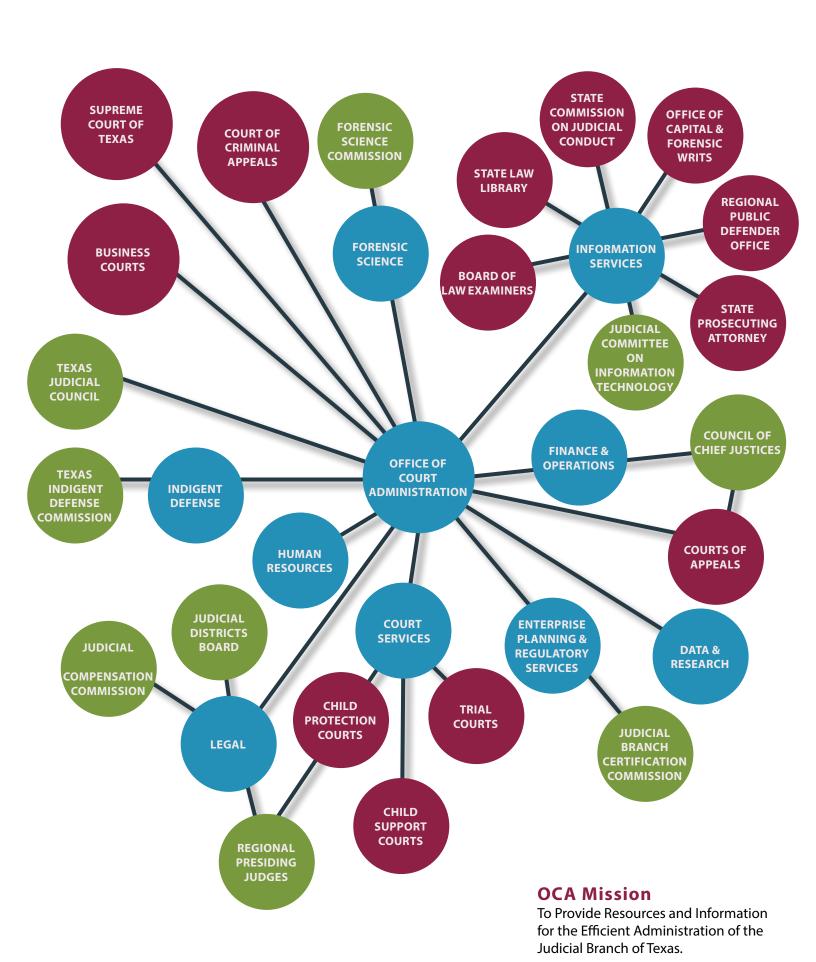












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Texas Judicial Council

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."



Jimmy Blacklock, Chairman Texas Judicial Council



David J. Schenck, Vice-Chair Texas Judicial Council

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Vacant, County Judge

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Mr. David Dunmoyer, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Pflugerville

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



Megan LaVoie, Administrative Director, Office of Court Administration

Committees

The Texas Judicial Council (TJC) has four committees, Civil Justice, Criminal Justice, Data, and Public Trust and Confidence. The Committees 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/.

The TJC has issued 19 Resolutions for the 89th Legislative Session in September 2024.

- Access to Courts
- Centers of Excellence
- Children's Commission
- Civics Education
- Civil Jurisdiction
- Civil Legal Aid
- Court Funding
- Court Personnel
- Court Security
- Emergency Management Readiness

- Enhancing Bail
- Indigent Defense
- Judicial Commission on Mental Health
- Judicial Compensation Commission
- Judicial Officers
- Judicial Profession Shortages
- Local Administrative Judge
- Regional Data Coordinators
- State Commission on Judicial Conduct

Executive Operations

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

Megan LaVoie has served as the Administrative Director of OCA and the Executive Director of the TJC since December 2021. The Administrative Director is supported by a Communications Manager/Executive Assistant, a Director of Government Relations, a Business Court Project Manager and a team of Division Directors.

Ms. LaVoie and executive staff present at Board, Commission, and Council meetings. In addition, executive staff prepare and present testimony to numerous legislative committees.

The Executive Division also serves as staff to the <u>Texas Judicial Compensation Commission</u>. 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.



Pictured left to right: Michael Smith, Management Analyst; Jeffrey Tsunekawa, Court Services Director; Louis Tomasetti, Director of Government Relations; Casey Kennedy, Information Services Director; Megan LaVoie, Administrative Director; Jennifer Henry, Chief Financial Officer; Angela Garcia, Chief Data Officer; Alejandra Peña, Data & Research Director; Mena Ramón, General Counsel, Legal Division Director.

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

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Texas Court Reminder Program

The Texas Court Reminder Program was authorized by <u>HB 4293</u> of the 87th Legislative Session. The Office of Court Administration contracted with eCourtDate to provide a statewide court text and email reminder system available at no cost to the courts or counties who elect to use it.

The system is designed with the ability to integrate with case management systems across the state, providing customization for reminders to defendants and participants of court hearings. At the end of FY2025 over **3.5 million** text messages and almost **400,000** emails were sent to litigants.

Operation Lone Star

In July 2021, OCA began supporting local court systems impacted by Operation Lone Star (OLS). This support included facilitation of central magistration at two processing facilities in Val Verde and Jim Hogg Counties. Sixteen visiting judges appointed by the Supreme Court conducted magistrations at the temporary processing facilities. The Judges conducted **17,259** magistrations with OCA providing administrative support for the proceedings, including court interpretation services. During 2025, the number of arrests by law enforcement dramatically decreased which resulted in both facilities closing. A dedicated OCA employee continues to provide courts technical assistance including case flow management and liaising with other criminal justice agencies.

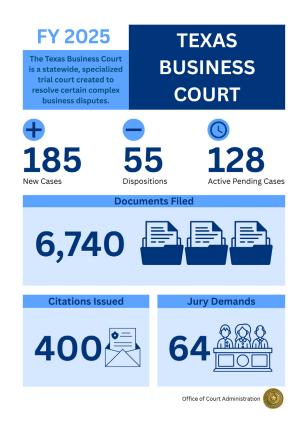
Texas Business Court and Fifteenth Court of Appeals

The Texas Business Court and the 15th Court of Appeals began accepting cases on September 1, 2024. OCA Executive Staff and various divisions including Human Resources, Information Technology and Finance assisted with the implementation

The Business Court is a statewide, specialized trial court created to resolve certain complex business disputes. The Court is composed of eleven geographical divisions. Five of those divisions are 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.

In FY 2025, the Texas Business Court saw **185** new cases, disposed of **55** cases, issued **400** citations, and had **6,740** documents filed.

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 Courts, involving cases dealing with business disputes valued at more than \$10 million.

The Fifteenth Court of Appeals saw 262 cases in FY 2025. This includes 135 new case filings, 142 cases transferred in and 23 cases transferred out. At the end of FY 2025, there were 122 pending cases.

Court Services

Language Access Program

Texas courts continue to face a critical shortage of qualified court interpreters, creating significant barriers to justice for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Judges, court coordinators, and administrators across the state consistently report challenges in securing contract interpreters, particularly for last-minute hearings or when scheduled interpreters cancel unexpectedly at the county level.

The Office of Court Administration's (OCA) Language Access Program provides statewide support to courts in communicating with defendants and parties with LEP, ensuring meaningful access to legal proceedings using existing court audio and video technology. Remote interpreting services are provided by the Texas Court Remote Interpreter Service (TCRIS) staff for uncontested matters lasting 30 minutes or less. All OCA remote interpreters hold master licenses and are qualified to interpret in any court in Texas. They are available for same-day, on-demand requests, a vital solution for local courts facing urgent interpreter needs, or by advanced scheduling.

Since FY 2021, the department has experienced a surge in requests for OCA interpreter services, with demand continuing to grow steadily. Even with the temporary expansion of staff funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in FY 2023, allowing for two temporary full-time employee (FTE) positions to assist with court case backlogs, demand for remote interpreting services has outpaced capacity. This trend highlights the ongoing need for more qualified court interpreters within the Texas Judiciary.

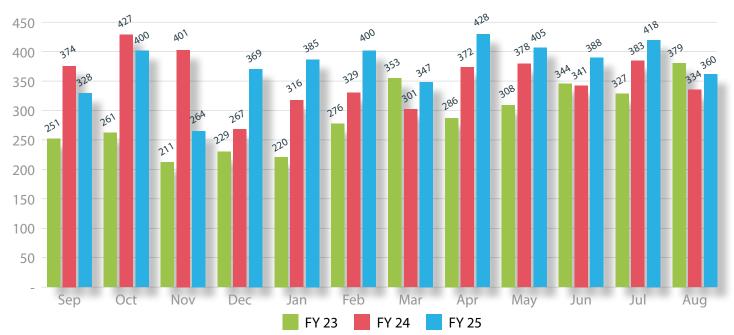
In response, during the 89th Regular Legislative Session, OCA

Court Services Duties and Responsibilities

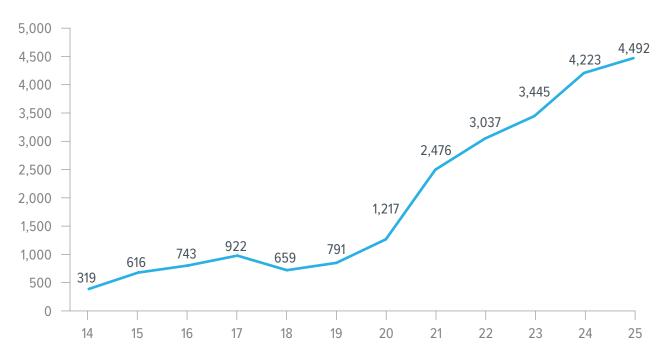
- Provide resources, services and guidance for the efficient operation of the Texas judiciary.
- Provide remote language interpretation, document translation and court reporter services.
- Assist courts with security and emergency preparedness programs and procedures, and supports the implementation of privacy protections for judicial officers.
- Support work in the area of bail and the public safety report system.
- Provide assistance to the Courts relating to the compliance in laws regarding guardianship matters.
- Support judges and staff in the child protection and child support courts.
- Ensure adherence to best practice standards and offer support and technical assistance to all specialty court programs.

sought and received approval from the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) for additional funding to convert the two temporary interpreter positions to permanent full-time roles and to add one new full-time interpreter (FTE) to further support court operations. In FY 2025, OCA remote interpreters provided free interpretation services in Spanish, French, Portuguese, and German for **4,492** hearings, serving 121 counties across Texas.

Number of Interpreted Sessions by Month



OCA Remote Interpreter Service Interpreted Sessions by Fiscal Year



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 2025, the Court Security Division's efforts to assess court facilities and provide court security training increased as courts largely resumed operations. The Division's four full-time court security personnel have been able to meet the needs of the judiciary by addressing the courthouse assessment backlog created by the pandemic and welcoming the increase in additional court assessment and training requests. The Division completed **86** courthouse security assessments in FY 2025, created template guides to assist court systems in developing emergency preparedness planning, and suggested court security policies and procedures. There was a marked increase in judicial threats and reported courthouse related incidents this fiscal year.



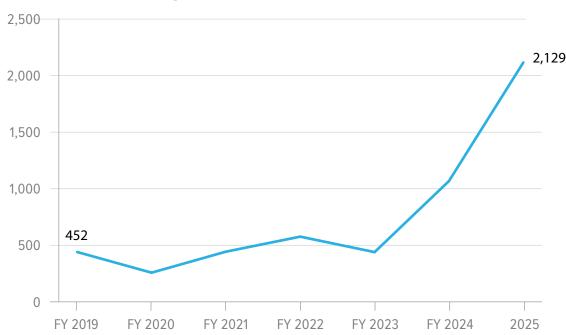
Court Security Specialist Nick Barsetti confirming presence of ballistic properties behind the judicial bench of a Galveston County District Courtroom.

To maximize OCA's outreach promoting awareness of the privacy protections afforded pursuant to SB 42 (85th-R), 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, de-escalation tactics, suspicious mail/package handling guidance, along with strategies to interact with potential bomb threateners and unruly members of the public. Judges were provided personal security tactics for their family and home, in addition to personal security strategies to minimize their digital footprint. OCA's <u>Personal Security Guide</u> was updated to provide judges and courthouse staff with additional areas of concern to address personal, family and residential safety. Efforts continued to inform judges of their option to exercise their privacy questionnaire and address court security related concerns or questions with staff.

Incident reporting into OCA reflected a total of **2,129** incident reports submitted in FY 2025, a 97% increase over FY 2024. To date, **1,716** judicial officers have taken advantage of having their personal and residential information suppressed from public view from the Texas Ethics Commission, County Appraisal Districts and County Registrars.

Total Reported Incidents Year Over Year



Courthouse vulnerability assessments remain a core component of the Court Security Division's workload. In addition, judicial home assessments continue to play an important role in addressing the evolving judicial threat environment. Many courthouses continue to express the need for evaluation, consultation, training, and alternative local funding sources to mitigate security deficiencies, particularly in counties facing the unique challenges associated with historic courthouse facilities. The Division has engaged in robust court safety training throughout the state providing tailored judicial and court staff training focused on violence mitigation strategies, workplace violence, de-escalation tactics, active shooter, shelter in place, suspicious mail, and bomb threat mitigation and identification. Focused training was provided to multiple municipal, county, and state appellate courts in FY 2025. Training will remain a core mission of the Division as requests continue to increase and court staff continue to benefit in an area that has a significant void throughout Texas courthouses.

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 to four specialists capable of



Court Security Director Hector Gomez addresses legislative updates and potential future legislation that could impact courthouse security at the annual Sheriff's Association of Texas conference in Ft. Worth.



Court Security Specialist Keith Conley and Lampasas County Sheriff David Parker discuss challenges of addressing physical security enhancements at the Lampasas County Courthouse.

leveraging their depth of knowledge, experience, and law enforcement partnerships to effectively address emerging threats, court safety training, assessment requests, and institution of recommended best practices in judicial and court security throughout the state. The Division has experienced continued improvement in incident reporting since FY 2024 principally due to an enhanced reporting platform, expanded messaging to court security stakeholders, and local investment in security screening equipment (x-ray machines, magnetometers, and law enforcement).

The 89th Legislature passed HB 5081 amending the Government Code, enacting comprehensive protection of *Personal Identifiable Information* [PII] of At-Risk Individuals. Directing data-brokers and those engaged in the business of collecting and selling PII, to prohibit the display of PII with a duty to remove pursuant to written request. Potential exposure to criminal liability or civil remedies strengthen the bill to ensure further efforts aid in enhancing judicial and court security.

HB 16 will expand and impose requirements upon court security committees ensuring a broad spectrum of courthouse stakeholders are represented with clear direction to prioritize security deficiencies and develop local emergency planning.

U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) re-introduced SB 2379, Countering Threats, and Attacks on Our Judges Act. The Act passed the Senate in the previous congressional session. In July of 2025, Congressman Michael McCaul (R-TX) introduced companion legislation HR 4602 aimed at establishing a State Judicial Threat Intelligence & Resource Center, to provide technical assistance, training, and monitoring of threats for state and local judges, and court personnel.

Bill proposals include:

- Amending the State Justice Institute Act of 1984 authorizing awards to establish State Judicial Threat Intelligence and Resource Centers.
- 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 three new associate judges to replace two judges who were elected to district benches and one who retired. One other CSC Judge retired on August 31, 2025, and a replacement took office October 1, 2025. There were four new court coordinators hired for the CSC program to replace two coordinators who retired and another two who left to continue serving the judges elected to the district benches. In the CPC program, there was one new associate judge hired to replace a judge who retired.

This fiscal year featured significant operational milestones. The Child Protection Court Convening, held virtually on July 18, 2025, brought together judges and coordinators for a full day of learning and collaboration. Sessions included legislative updates, data and reporting practices, courtroom management strategies, and rural jurisdiction challenges. Breakout discussions allowed participants to explore role-specific topics such as record retention rules and future expectations for CPCs.

The 89th Legislature appropriated funding to OCA to develop a case management system for statutorily defined specialty courts. After careful consideration, this opportunity will also be used to modernize and upgrade both the CPCMS and CSCMS systems that are utilized by the Children's Courts. This initiative will ensure continued support for child protection courts while aligning with broader efforts to enhance case management capabilities across the judiciary.

The Early Intervention Court Liaison (EICL) Project concluded on August 31, 2025. Beginning in 2021, liaisons in Bell, Galveston, and Lubbock counties identified and engaged community organizations, facilitated access to community-based services, organized brown bag events, and attended court hearings to help families at risk or already involved with DFPS. Their efforts improved access to housing, employment, parenting support, and behavioral and mental health resources for families. Highlights include Bell County's targeted resource guides and weekly communications, Galveston's large-scale Resource Fair with over **60** vendors and twice-weekly resource blasts to more than **200** partners, and Lubbock's leadership in Child Abuse Prevention Month activities. Lessons learned from this initiative will inform future court–community collaborations.

Looking ahead, the program will continue to prioritize training, technology, and operational coordination, with an emphasis on data-informed practices and strategies.

Hearings for Child Protection Courts FY 2025 (Sept 2024 - Aug 2025)

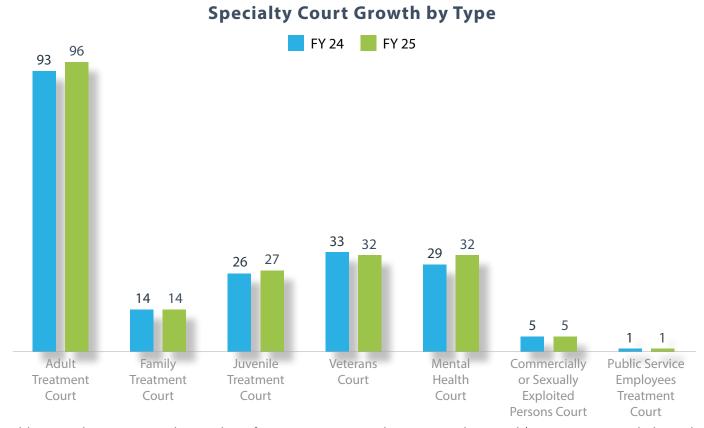


Final Orders Rendered for Child Protection Courts FY 2025 (Sept 2024 - Aug 2025)



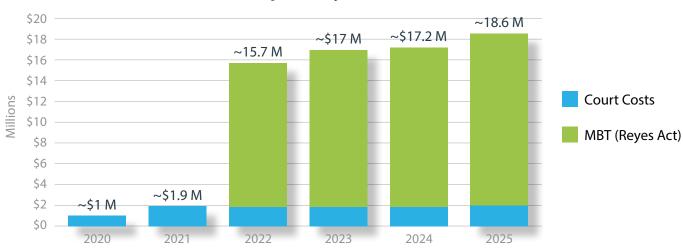
Specialty Courts

The total number of registered Specialty Courts in Texas rose from 201 to 207 in FY 2025, as illustrated by the following chart.



In addition to the increase in the number of programs, FY 2025 also generated a record \$18,588,681.92 in dedicated specialty court funding through court cost collections and the Mixed Beverage Tax (also known as the Ruben Reyes Act) that was enacted in the 87th Legislative Session.





With increased funding available, the Governor's Office has expanded its grant program from supporting 75 programs in 2024 to **80** programs in 2025. Most recently, notices were issued to **85** specialty courts awarding approximately **\$15** million for FY 2026. While this reflects steady growth in the number of funded programs, it still represents only **40** percent of registered specialty courts. The remaining 60 percent rely on local county or CSCD funds, non-profit grants, other state agency grants such as the Fund for Veterans Assistance, or federal funding.

This continued growth, combined with the fragmented nature of funding and staffing across specialty courts, has created an increased demand for training and technical assistance, as well as the need for greater standardization and more structured oversight. To address this demand, the program manager drafted Texas-specific Standards for Best Practices and Data Collection ("the Standards"). The Standards were reviewed and revised by two different workgroups representing all mandatory roles and court types and were subsequently peer reviewed by other state treatment court coordinators and national



Erin Morgan joined Judge Forrest Beadle and his Denton County Veterans Treatment Court team to complete a peer review of the Dallas County Veterans Treatment Court, led by Judge Dominique Collins.

experts. The document was presented to the Specialty Courts Advisory Council (SCAC) in June 2025, who voted unanimously to recommend adoption to the Texas Judicial Council (TJC). Until it is officially adopted by TJC, the Standards are being used as a framework for developing foundational training curriculum. Efforts to monitor fidelity to the treatment court model were strengthened by the 89th Legislature's approval of funding for a statewide case management system. This system will allow for consistent data collection, streamline reporting requirements, and provide greater transparency across programs. By creating a centralized platform, stakeholders can more effectively track participant progress, measure outcomes, and ensure that courts are adhering to best practices outlined in the model. Ultimately, this investment supports accountability and enhances the ability of treatment courts statewide to deliver meaningful, evidence-based interventions. The data collection standards that were developed are being used to draft requirements for the case management system Request for Offer (RFO).

The program manager is collaborating with the Specialty Courts Resource Center (SCRC) and the Governor's Criminal Justice Division (CJD) to establish a statewide system of program review that ensures all registered specialty courts operate in accordance with best practice standards. Originally implemented as a peer review process for CJD-funded courts, with technical assistance provided by NPC Research, the initiative's primary objective was to provide the Specialty Courts Advisory Council (SCAC) with evidence that these programs represent a sound and justified use of public funds. During FY 2025, fifteen peer reviews were completed across the state for CJD-funded programs referred by the SCAC. Referrals were generally prompted by questions regarding program operations, concerns about outcomes, or inconsistencies in reporting or narratives. The program manager attended several of these reviews to observe the process developed by NPC Research and assess how it might be adapted and tailored to meet Texas's specific needs. Once fully implemented, this review process is expected to inform the future development of a statewide certification program for specialty courts.

Guardianship Abuse, Fraud Exploitation Deterrence Program

The Guardianship Abuse, Fraud, and Exploitation Deterrence Program (GAFEDP) was established by the Office of Court Administration on September 1, 2019, in response to Senate Bill 31 and House Bill 1286 (Zaffirini/Smithee). The program provides critical support for the monitoring and compliance of guardianship cases across Texas. GAFEDP auditors review guardianship files to identify reporting deficiencies, audit annual accountings, and report any concerns related to potential abuse, fraud, or financial exploitation to the courts. The program's mission is to assist courts in protecting our most vulnerable citizens and safeguarding their assets.

FY 2025 Program Highlights of FY 2025

- Completed 249 Initial Baseline Audits across the state's 254 counties, identifying compliance trends and systemic
 gaps.
- Conducted 22 follow-up reviews in high-risk counties identified through baseline audit data.
- OCA continued the transition from an internal online guardianship reporting system to a vendor-based platform by developing the project charter, statement of work, and system requirements, with the goal of issuing a Request for Offers in the next fiscal year.
- Achieved full staffing for the program with 21 FTEs, enabling expanded audit coverage and operational capacity.
- GAFEDP launched a new performance metric by implementing a 180-day self-reporting process, through which courts and clerks report on corrective actions taken in response to their initial file reviews.
- Follow-up audits in high-risk counties observed an average 11% increase in compliance scores, demonstrating statistically and operationally significant improvements in guardianship case monitoring and administration.

GAFEDP Initial Compliance Review Overall Numbers from January 30, 2019, to August 31, 2025

- Initial Compliance Reviews Conducted in 321 Courts and 249 Counties
- 55,644 Guardianship Cases Reviewed
- 21,831 Cases Recommended for Closure
- 33,813 Active Guardianships Identified
 - 21% Cases Missing Annual Reports
 - 41% Cases Missing Annual Accountings
 - 39% Cases Missing Inventories
 - o 28% Cases Out of Compliance
 - 11% Cases with Waived Bonds
- 4,667 Deceased Wards Identified

GAFEDP FY 2025 Initial and Follow-up Compliance Review Totals

- Initial and Follow-up Compliance Reviews Conducted in 39 Courts and 24 Counties
- · 7,590 Guardianship Cases Reviewed
- 2,921 Cases Recommended for Closure
- 4,669 Active Guardianships Identified
 - 23% Cases Missing Annual Reports
 - 40% Cases Missing Annual Accountings
 - 41% Cases Missing Inventories
 - o 34% Cases Out of Compliance
 - 10% Cases with Waived Bonds
- 474 Deceased Wards Identified

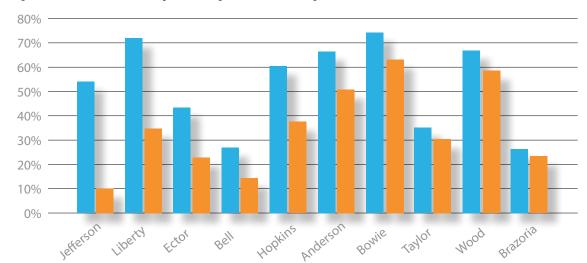
Follow-up audits in high-risk counties showed an average 11% improvement in compliance scores, signaling statistically and operationally significant progress in monitoring and administering guardianship cases.

GAFEDP Follow-up Compliance Review Overall Numbers from August 19, 2024 to August 31, 2025

- Follow-up Compliance Reviews Conducted in 37 Courts and 22 Counties
- 6,677 Guardianship Cases Reviewed
- 2,716 Cases Recommended for Closure
- 3,961 Active Guardianships Identified
 - o 24% Cases Missing Annual Reports
 - 40% Cases Missing Annual Accountings
 - 41% Cases Missing Inventories
 - 35% Cases Out of Compliance
 - 11% Cases with Waived Bonds
- 446 Deceased Wards Identified



The GAFEDP team consists of (from left to right): Ashley Bell, Christina Ford, Dona Simmons, La-Nett Belasco, Tisha Cantu, Linda Foster, Marquiata Carrier, Tamera Barrera, Meredith Foster, Rebecca Doolittle, David Hernandez, Loreba Stoddard, Brittany Gardner, Sara Hudson, and Cathy Horvath.



Top 10 Counties by Compliance Improvement Since Initial Review

Court Personnel Workload Study

In December 2024, the Office of Court Administration, along with the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M released: The Hidden Backbone of Justice: Insights into Staffing Levels and Salaries of Court Personnel, a report on staffing levels in the court and clerk systems across Texas. The study analyzed staffing data, salary, and workload in the district, statutory county, and statutory probate courts in the state, and included the same level of analysis for the district, county, and combination clerks that support those courts.

According to the analysis, a majority of both court and clerk staff, approximately 72%, feel that their workload is heavy, but that they were mostly adequately staffed with 57% of court staff and 54% of clerk staff reporting that current staffing levels were sufficient to carry out workloads. However, there is a significant disparity between rural and urban counties in this regard. Approximately 55% of urban court staff and 60% of urban clerk staff report that they did not have sufficient staff, compared with just 29% of rural courts and 43% of rural clerks.

Other key findings relate to the challenges of hiring and retaining qualified employees. The hiring difficulties were more pronounced in clerks' offices with 54% of clerks reporting that it is somewhat or extremely difficult to hire and retain employees. According to surveyed clerks, one of their biggest challenges is pay and retention. Clerks report that most of their current staff have been employed for less than five years and are constantly under threat of shedding staff to other county agencies who can promise higher salaries or advancement tracks.

Finally, a key finding from the study finds profound variation in and range in compensation from clerk to court staff, with some clerks reporting an annual salary of \$16,523 (\$7.94 an hour) per annum in rural areas, and minimum salary of \$21,907.62 (\$10.53 an hour) for entry level court coordinator staff in those same areas.

As part of their study, PPRI provided a list of recommendations around the study:

- Increase minimum salaries to the Federal Living Wage Standards at the county level and conduct further research to set a Suggested Pay Scale Statewide.
 - Nearly half of all staff live below the local living wage standard for their respective county.

- Conduct further research into the area and field a time study of clerk and court staff similar to the weighted caseload analysis.
 - Seventy counties did not respond to Freedom of Information Requests from PPRI, and much of that data is imprecise. Further, the actual day to day work of a court coordinator or clerk is estimated for the purposes of this study.
- Provide additional resources directly to courts and clerks across the state relating to training and technology modernization.
 - The federated nature of the court system in Texas necessitates a decentralized training structure, additional resources around training and modernization to the courts and clerks would support continued professional development and improve work outcomes.
- Develop and Provide Specialized Technical Support
 - The increase in reporting requirements, the ongoing improvement to court reporting, and the advent of Artificial Intelligence represent significant changes to the court and staff dynamic. Providing technical assistance to clerks and courts around these issues can ease the challenges at the county level and provide necessary resources to adapt to change.

As part of the study, PPRI leveraged the collected data from courts and clerks around the state to design and field a court and clerk personnel formula to support courts and clerk staff in identifying staffing needs. Over the course of 2025, PPRI convened several working groups of elected clerks, judges, and court staff to further refine the tool, and adapt it to an online platform. With the help of our dedicated local stakeholders, the PPRI team is in the final stages of refining and fielding an online tool, to be hosted by OCA, and leveraged by courts and clerks around the state to identify staffing gaps and provide additional resources to our courts in ongoing staffing and administrative decision making.

NCHIP Grant

In FY 2023, the Office of Court Administration received a grant from the Department of Justice's National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP) centered around improving National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) reporting from district and county clerks' offices across Texas. The OCA Program, supported by the Court Services Division, takes a two-pronged approach to supporting the NCHIP Program Goals:

- (1) Providing direct technical assistance and casefile review to district and county clerks across Texas.
- (2) Providing ongoing training and support with criminal justice partners at regional clerk's conference around NICS reporting.

In the first instance, OCA has already conducted a casefile review and onsite with the Tom Green District and County Clerk's Offices. The program team, supported by Sheri Woodfin and Michael Smith, reviewed over **500** cases from both offices for NICS reportable incidents including findings of incompetence in felony criminal cases and adult quardianship cases.

In June 2025, the program received a grant extension from the Bureau of Justice Services to continue spending unspent grant funds and continue the program. In July, Clarissa Webster and Jeffrey Tsunekawa began work with the Hidalgo County District Clerk to conduct a full file and process review on NICS reporting.

For fiscal year 2026, Clarissa Webster and Michael Smith are working with the Department of Public Safety and other criminal justice partners to organize ongoing training for clerks across the state in winter and spring of 2026, while bringing on Fannin, Anderson, and Wood counties for a file review in the next fiscal year. As part of this work, and the grant program, the team will seek to bring on two temporary staff to support the efforts and funded out of grant monies.

Centers of Excellence

In 2025, the Centers of Excellence successfully brought six new courts into the program—three district courts, one county court at law, one justice of the peace, and one municipal court:

FY 2025 Centers of Excellence Courts

| Judge | Court | Court Level | County |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Judge Shequitta Kelly | Dallas County Criminal Court No. 11 | Statutory County Court | Dallas |
| Judge Titiana Frausto | 181st District Court | District Court | Potter and Randall |
| Judge Jennifer Dillingham | 81st District Court | District Court | Atascosa et al |
| Judge Angela Williams | Justice of the Peace 2 | Justice of the Peace | Williamson |
| Judge Brian Holman | Lewisville Municipal Court | Municipal Court | Denton |
| Judge Ryan Luna | 414th District Court | District Court | McLennan |

At the close of Fiscal Year 2025, four courts have completed the program steps and are set for recognition. In April, Michael Smith travelled to Atascosa County to conduct an onsite of the 81st District Court, presided over by Judge Jennifer Dillingham. Elected in 2022, Judge Dillingham presides over five counties, Atascosa, Frio, Karnes, LaSalle, and Wilson. In that role, she travels a weekly circuit, shares staff with the 218th District Cout and presides over a joint civil and criminal docket. She excels in judicial administration, taking over as the local administrative judge in 2024, and launching a district wide effort to improve and streamline court proceedings. As part of the program, Judge Dillingham began an in-depth review of court reporting, working with all five district clerks to audit court reporting procedures, and closing gaps in reporting identified by the Court Services Division. On April 11th, 2025, Judge Dillingham registered the 81st Judicial District Mental Health Court, the first specialty court established in this region of South Texas, aiming to provide services and support adults facing non-felony violent charges who struggle with mental health and co-occurring disorders. She is currently acting as a county judge by assignment in Frio County, on top of her statutory duties as the 81st District Court Judge.

That same month, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Tsunekawa traveled to Potter and Randall counties to conduct an onsite of the 181st District Court, presided over by Judge Titiana D. Frausto. Appointed by Governor Abbott to the bench in September of 2020, Judge Frausto navigates a complex civil and criminal docket split between Randall and Potter Counties. As the local administrative judge, Judge Frausto coordinates and supports the administration of justice across two counties which include four other district courts and two county courts at law in Potter. Judge Frausto maintains a robust and efficient docket while managing a challenging pro-se caseload. Both Potter and Randall counties lack a deep and accessible defense bar, with many local attorneys going into civil practices. Finding competent public defenders is further hindered by a managed assigned counsel office that has seen high turnover since the pandemic. To manage these challenges, Judge Frausto ensures that court administration practices, caseflow management, and court procedures are clear and up to date. Prior to participating in the program, Judge Frausto began the unenviable task of updating and modernizing local administrative rules that were last updated in 1967.

In August 2025, Jeffrey Tsunekawa and Michael Smith conducted the first ever dual onsite in the Centers of Excellence Program visiting Lewisville Municipal Court and Dallas County Criminal Court at Law 11 in the same week. Lewisville Municipal Court is the first municipal court to successfully complete the Centers of Excellence program. Judge Holman was appointed to the role in 1998 and has held the post ever since. Judge Holman excels in local administration and commitment to fair and impartial justice at the ground level. Fluent in Spanish, he conducts magistration every morning and every evening at the attached municipal jail facility, ensuring that detainees rights are upheld, and that they are heard before a magistrate in a timely fashion. As the presiding judge of the municipal court, he manages other associate judges to manage the magistrate duties, and coordinates with court staff to effectively manage a high caseload. He presides over regular bond hearings, manages pro-se litigants, and exudes a calm, firm, compassionate, and juridical disposition with all the court users and litigants before him.

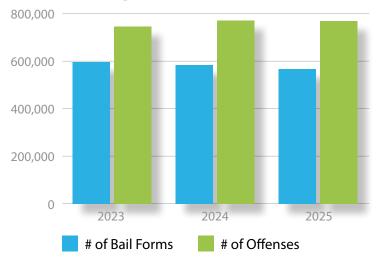
In that same week, the Centers of Excellence team visited Dallas County Court at Law 11 presided over by Judge Shequitta Kelly. Judge Kelly's docket is a first in the program, dedicated solely to criminal misdemeanor cases related to family violence. Elected in 2015, Judge Kelly has made significant changes to the day-to-day operations of the court and regular caseflow management. Implementing "a two-reset rule", Judge Kelly ensures that both prosecutors and defense are moving cases in a timely fashion. Moreover, Judge Kelly has placed her docket on an expedited timeline with the expectation for all parties involved that a misdemeanor case in her court will be set for trial, dismissal, or plea within six months from the initial filing; ensuring that cases are resolved in a timely fashion, without significant delay. Furthermore, Judge Kelly operates several community programs, including a Domestic Violence Diversion Court which identifies offenders for diversion opportunities and seeks to end the cycle of family violence early. By working with mental healthcare providers, and leveraging probation and the district attorney's office, Judge Kelly ensures that litigants in her court are set up for success outside of her courtroom and are fully rehabilitated and functioning members of their community.

Two more courts will make it through the program in the last quarter of 2025, the 414th District Court in McLennan County and Justice of the Peace Precinct Two in Williamson. These courts will round out the 2025 class. In 2026, the program will bring on new courts after undergoing an end of year review of the program to include lessons learned, make program adjustments, and include any new required statutory changes to the program out of the 89th Legislative Session.

Pretrial and Bail

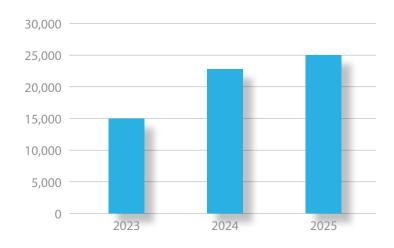
The Public Safety Report System (PSRS) has operated since April 1, 2022, pursuant to the requirements set forth in Senate Bill 6, the Damon Allen Act. This legislation was passed by the 87th Legislature during its Second Called Session in September 2021. The Office of Court Administration (OCA), the PSRS vendor, Catalis, and statewide users have successfully transitioned from initial implementation and adaptation to sustained improvement through targeted enhancements, jurisdiction-specific guidance and improved growing user proficiency. Since its launch, Catalis reports more than **1.7 million** bail forms into the PSRS, supporting judicial bail decisions for over **2.2 million** criminal offenses statewide. An average of **44,000** bail forms were submitted monthly during this fiscal year. Because a single bail form can encompass multiple new arrests for the same individual, bail form counts appropriately trail offense counts.

Bail Forms Completed vs. Number of Offenses



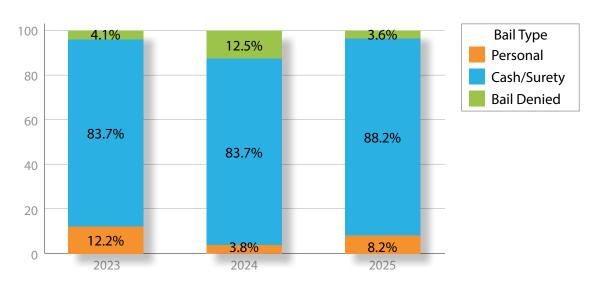
The PSRS supports the full lifecycle of an individual's case. When a defendant fails to comply with bond conditions or is arrested for new offenses, the judiciary can modify the form to adjust conditions or bail amounts. The number of modifications increased steadily as use has expanded from magistration to trial courts during the case lifecycle.

Bail Form Modicfications



After review of the PSR, a judge can deny bail, order a cash/surety bond or allow for a personal bond. Over the last three years, cash/surety remains consistent making up 84-88% of bail decisions. The fluctuation in personal bonds and denied bonds is seemingly indicative of judges leveraging richer PSR content that allows a holistic view in measuring public safety with individual rights.

Bail Decisions by Year



Together, OCA and Catalis have launched eight enhancements that were released to improve system functionality and make data entry and reporting more efficient for users, stakeholders, and the public. To ensure transparency and usability, Catalis issues release notes for all updates which generally include a recorded demonstration or screen shots to guide users. Release notes and other PSRS resources are available within their online document repository (PSRS Help Center). The OCA further supports knowledge sharing with monthly webinars that highlight any new or upcoming enhancements and provide a forum for training and discussion.

| System Enhancements FY 2024 | Month/Year |
|--|------------|
| Query Builder for Data Reporting | Dec-24 |
| Query Role Permissions | Dec-24 |
| New PSR PDF Summary Text | Feb-25 |
| Offense Count no longer Required | Feb-25 |
| New Criminal History Search Status | Feb-25 |
| Mandatory Release under 17.151 Check box | Feb-25 |
| Edit Cause/Case Numbers | Feb-25 |
| New Column showing Bail Form Modified | Feb-25 |

The OCA continues to advance its mission of supporting the efficient administration of the Texas Judicial Branch by offering multiple platforms for information sharing, professional development, and data resources that strengthen the statewide knowledge base. To reinforce user proficiency, OCA hosted 12 monthly webinars open to all PSRS users, providing training and addressing identified knowledge gaps. Recordings of these sessions are available online for later review or reference and to support jurisdictions in onboarding new staff. Webinar schedules and topic lists remain easily accessible at txcourts.gov/bail.

In preparation for the September 2025 effective date of Senate Bill 9, OCA issued a comprehensive guidance document, <u>Senate Bill 9 Guidance</u>, developed and updated an ongoing <u>Frequently Asked Questions</u> document resource, and delivered numerous presentations at conferences and stakeholder meetings. Presentations are made available online or sent directly to stakeholders by request. These efforts, combined with frequent webinars and direct support, ensured that judges, court staff, and system users across the state were informed and could start preparing their jurisdiction for implementation.

Beyond training and outreach, OCA has provided direct assistance through its dedicated Bail@txcourts.gov mailbox. In FY 2025, the bail team responded to more than **1,300** inquiries that were sent to this inbox. This was in addition to email support requests that are sent directly to an OCA staff member. While many of these requests involved system related issues such as user permissions, jurisdictional specific support and functionality concerns; each inquiry was answered or triaged to the appropriate staff or system vendor to ensure timely resolution and minimize disruptions for users statewide.

Over the past year, OCA received multiple jurisdictional requests for onsite support. In response, staff conducted visits to Hidalgo, Fort Bend, and Dallas counties during the last quarter of the fiscal year. In addition to in-person engagements, OCA offered jurisdictions the opportunity to schedule dedicated sessions via Teams or Zoom, connecting local stakeholders with subject-matter experts to address specific needs and strengthen collaboration. These direct interactions not only fostered stronger working relationships but also provided valuable insight into any local jurisdictional issues, allowing OCA to deliver targeted support and help partners prepare for future legislative updates.

Looking ahead, OCA's priorities in the upcoming fiscal year will center on supporting the statewide implementation of Senate Bill 9, enacted by the Regular Session of the 89th Legislative Session. OCA will provide stakeholders with the support, guidance and training necessary to ensure successful adoption of the new requirements. In partnership with Catalis, OCA will also ensure the system is prepared to capture and report required data as for the staggered effective dates written into the bill.

PSRS Specific Updates Outlined in SB 9

September 2025

- Bail form certification must be completed in 48 hours;
- Within 24 hours of a 'No Probable Cause' finding, a judge must document the finding and support of that finding;
- Certain offenses are restricted from personal bond;
- The criminal history within the PSRS system must remain for 30 days to allow modification or to foster the appeal process;
- Prosecutors may appeal a bail decision;
- Defines decision abilities for judges (specifically for 54 and 54A judges).

January 2026

- Participation and progress in a Pretrial Intervention program will be data field in the PSRS;
- Prosecutors have access to completed Bail Forms;
- · Cross-county notifications when a new felony is alleged to have been committed;
- Notification of new arrest to District Attorney if the defendant is on bail for an offense involving violence.

April 2026

- The PSR is required to show applicable outstanding warrants, protective orders, if the defendant is currently on community supervision, parole or mandatory supervision;
- Any willful failure to appear dates, status or community supervision or if currently on parole.

The vendor contract with Catalis expires at the end of fiscal year 2026. OCA is currently in the midst of the procurement process to critically evaluate and make recommendations for the future of the statewide PSRS.

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, as well as training via presentations at statewide education conferences for court coordinators and administrators, county and district clerks, justices of the peace, and county judges and commissioners.

- Assisting county and district clerks with their mandated integration configurations and testing for publishing statewide court records on re:SearchTX, attending multiple virtual meetings and traveling to clerk offices, as needed.
- Participating in and assisting with webinar presentations and education conference sessions to inform and train judges, court staff, and clerks on the benefits and usages of re:SearchTX, and how the public will access and view the court records in the platform.
- Providing docket management and case workflow training to Justices of the Peace, Court Coordinators, and Court Administrators at regional and statewide education meetings and conferences.
- Providing training on jury practices and procedures to district clerks at regional education conferences.
- Providing training on criminal court costs to district and county clerks at regional education conferences.
- Responding to telephone and email inquiries from courts and clerks' offices to provide practical assistance
 and support in real-time as questions arise regarding case workflow management, court and clerk procedures,
 financials, legislative updates, available forms and resources, best recommended practices, jury processes, docket
 management, and various time deadlines.
- Providing collaborative information, working with the OCA Legal Department to update the County Clerk Manual and District Clerk Manual.
- Assisting and advising as courts and clerks transition into paperless procedures, digital record keeping practices, and digital-only courtroom proceedings (Midland, Lubbock, and Hidalgo Counties).
- Attendance at the Winter and Summer County and District Clerks' Association of Texas (CDCAT) conferences to assist county and district clerks and answer their in-person questions.
- Providing practical feedback on the Texas Court Reminders project and providing presentations promoting the product to courts and clerks at regional and statewide meetings.

- Attendance at the 2025 National Association of Court Managers (NACM) Annual Conference in Omaha, Nebraska.
- Providing assistance on the NICS grant project for no-consequence audits including assisting team with:
 - Conducting an audit of local court case files and comparing data found to available historical reported incidents;
 - Working with counties and OCA I.T. to establish direct virtual access to digital records in the local CMS for more efficient and cost effective NICS case file audits;
 - Developing job description for hiring temporary assistance to complete additional audits;
 - Working with Department of Public Safety (DPS) to develop collaborative NICS training for Regional/Area clerks' meetings and conferences, including review of their training materials to confirm accuracy of content.
 - o Answering mental health related-questions and update NICS reporting manual when needed.

On-going project – Operational and Management Review Project for the Hidalgo County District Clerk. This project has a four-fold vision:

- (1) Voluntary participation by the Hidalgo District Clerk in a transparent, comprehensive review by the Office of Court Administration of local office operational and management practices, including organization and performance of statutory and mandated office requirements.
- (2) Collaboration with the Office of Court Administration in the extensive review and verification of compliance with applicable Federal and State Constitutions, Statutes, Rules, and mandates that govern the practices of District Clerks in Texas.
- (3) Identification of practical areas for contemporary use of available technology to modernize the District Clerk's workflow practices and interactions with the courts, attorneys, law enforcement, and public, formulating general and sizeable model instructions.
- (4) Utilize the information and forms verified and developed through this review to produce and provide resources and training for new and transitioning clerks in Texas.

Data & Research

The Office of Court Administration's Data and Research Division was created on 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.

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.

Court Analytics TX (Case-Level Data Project)

In June 2017, the Data Committee of the Texas Judicial Council was charged with guiding the revisions of the court activity reporting database to collect case-level statistical data. In 2022, the Committee recommended that the Legislature fund the necessary tools for the Texas Judiciary to collect case-level data. During the 88th Legislative Session, funds were appropriated for this project. OCA signed a contract with Tyler Technologies in September 2024 to build a system capable of capturing case-level data. This multi-year project is off to a strong start and is moving along quickly.

Over the last few years there has been a noticeable interest for more detailed data. The demand has been driven by the need for a more comprehensive insight into court cases and outcomes. This project will collect multiple data points for one case rather than the general filing and disposition information that is currently being collected.

OCA's goal for this system is to eventually eliminate manual reporting for counties by integrating with local case management systems. Currently Tyler Uniform Case Management System (UCMS) Customers are being integrated first. We are starting with Criminal data then moving on to Civil and Family. After the Tyler UCMS, we will proceed with the largest counties. This is expected to happen in the Spring or Summer of 2026.

Report Production and Updates

In FY 2025 program staff were involved in the following activities:

- Collection and publication of <u>Reports for Counties with a Population Over 1 Million</u>: Monthly collection, validation, and publication of district and county court-level reports and <u>dashboard for counties</u> with a population over one million.
- Collection and publication of <u>Annual Performance Measures Reports</u>: Collection of annual statewide district
 and county court-level reports that capture the courts' clearance rates, age of active pending cases, and age of
 cases disposed. Data for FY 2024 is currently published in a <u>set of dashboards</u>. The FY 2025 data will be published
 December 1, 2025.
- Collection and publication of <u>Court Interpretation Services Expenditures</u>: Collection of annual reports on courtordered interpretation services.
- <u>2024 Annual Statistical Report</u> 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
- <u>2024 Annual Report</u> on Disposition of Judicial Bypass Cases by Trial Courts.
- 2024 Presiding Judges Annual Report
- 2024 Writs of Attachment Annual Report
- Profile of Judges Report as of September 1, 2025
- 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, maps, and judicial system overview documents due to legislative changes and creation of new courts.
- Compilation of Texas' calendar year 2024 statistics for the National Center for State Court's Court Statistics Project.
- Judicial turnover surveys for judges leaving in FY 2025.
- Maintenance of <u>bail data dashboards</u> from the Public Safety Report System and from Judicial Council Court Activity Reports.
- Quarterly and monthly data posted to the Department of Information Resources' Open Database Portal.
- Quarterly Performance Measures Reports on reports processed from all court levels.
- Updates to reporting instructions and other resources due to legislative changes.

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

The Data and Research Division continued research on business court practices across the country.

- Court Analytics Texas: Ongoing work for the development of a statewide data warehouse that will capture case-level data. Multi-year project that will also serve as a business intelligence system to display court case level data for all court levels across the state. The project began in September 2024.
- Statewide Trends Dashboards: Development of dashboards displaying statewide trends at each trial court level by case type.
- Regional Data Coordinators: Initiation of reporting compliance program dedication to assisting clerks and courts
 with reporting issues, reporting inquiries, data clean-up, data mapping, data validation, and OCA Reporting
 training.

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
- Regional Judicial Conferences and presentations on current reporting and upcoming reporting requirements
- · Annual Judicial Conference and presentation on current reporting and upcoming 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

Information

Services

The Information Services Division works to foster technological innovation with its Judicial branch partners in a secure environment. The division provides direct support for internet services, networks, cloud services, servers, workstations, and mobile devices for approximately 1200 users across the State of Texas.

The division also 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), the court reminder program, 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 assists other divisions and judicial branch agencies on procurements of cloudbased systems and services.

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 Director Casey Kennedy (far right) presented on Cybersecurity during the Fireside Chat at the 2025 National Association for Court Management (NACM) Annual Conference in Omaha, Nebraska this past July.

Users directly supported by **OCA IT** approximately 1,200 eFile Users 1,052,000 (a 22.33% increase from last FY) eFile envelopes per day (avg) 52,000 (a 10.64% increase from last FY) JP Courts on eFile **248** across 57 counties reSearchTX Users 129,219 Documents available via re:SearchTX 169,337,032 **Collected for counties in** re:searchTX in FY 25 \$414,397.90 **Documents sold through** re:searchTX in FY 25 254,806



eFile

Tyler Technologies operates and maintains the statewide electronic filing system. OCA works closely with Tyler to ensure operational issues are kept to a minimum. In FY 2025, eFiling continued to expand with the new state (EFSP) and the planned depreciation of the old state EFSP. Throughout the year, additional justice courts implemented eFiling. The system also deployed a new process for proposed orders, replacing the cumbersome existing process, ensuring all parties are notified electronically when a proposed order becomes a granted order.

re:SearchTX™

Re:SearchTX

Re:SearchTX aims to provide a single statewide view of electronic court documents. The system currently includes more than 169 million documents filed in civil cases across the state. Any of the more than 129,000 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 \$400,000 was collected and distributed to the counites.

OCA and JCIT, working with county case management system vendors monitored and integrated more than 80% of the 443 clerk offices with re:SearchTX in FY 2025. Integration allows re:SearchTX to have a near real-time view of case data and documents, including upcoming hearings and all docketed events in a case, regardless of if the document was eFiled or tendered on paper.

Continuing Efficiencies Through Technology

In addition to continuing existing statewide technology initiatives, OCA launched the Texas Court Reminder Program into production in FY 2025. This program allows counties to integrate with a statewide system to provide emails and text reminders to litigants about upcoming hearings and court events.

Self-Help

The statewide self-help tool (available at https://selfhelp.efiletexas.gov) allows self-represented litigants to complete 46 different interviews resulting in forms that can be filed with the court. These forms were promulgated by the Supreme Court and by Texas Legal Services Corporation. Eight of the interviews, once completed, allow litigants to pay the necessary court fees, and file the resulting forms electronically.

In FY 2025, the self-help tool averaged between **7,000** and **7,500** uses each month, with more than half of the uses resulting in electronically filed cases by self-represented litigants.



Judicial Committee on Information Technology

Mission

The mission of the Judicial Committee on Information Technology (JCIT) is to promulgate standards and guidelines for statewide technology systems in the Texas Judiciary. In FY 2025, JCIT met four times and discussed a variety of topics including:

- Monitored the implementation of the ordered re:SearchTX integration mandate.
- Adopted Standards that expand re:SearchTX to be able to include criminal case documents, clarified the
 definitions and permissions for roles implemented for role-based access, and expanded standard civil case types
 to all statewide systems.
- Began the process to implement Case Notices in re:SearchTX to notify active attorneys of activities on their cases including upcoming hearings and orders issued.
- Started discussions on improving the self-help tools, expanding mandatory eFiling to JP courts, and bulk data.

Committee Members

Justice **Rebecca Simmons** serves as Chair and Mr. **Bob 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, serve as the Courts' liaisons.

Voting Members

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

Bob Wessels, Former Criminal Courts Administrator, Harris County

Honorable **Lawrence Doss**, Justice, Seventh Court of Appeals, Amarillo

Honorable **David Escamilla**, County Attorney, Travis County

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

Honorable **Dan Hinde**, Dan Hinde PLLC, Houston

Honorable **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

Honorable John Warren, County Clerk, Dallas County

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

Non-Voting Members

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

Honorable **Kevin Yeary**, Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

Michael Cruz, Deputy Clerk, 15th Court of Appeals, Austin

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

Doug Gowin, Operations Manager, Tarrant County

Jessica Griffith, JP Functional Analyst, Collin County

Honorable **Blake Hawthorne**, Clerk, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin

Honorable **Patty Henry**, District Clerk, Chambers County

Roland Johnson, Attorney, Fort Worth

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

Bart Lesniewicz, Chief Deputy County Clerk, Tarrant County

Cynthia Orr, Attorney, San Antonio

Honorable **Velva Price**, District Clerk, Travis County

Honorable **Russ Ridgway**, Former JP, Harris County

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

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

Honorable **David Stith**, Judge, 319th District Court, Nueces County

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

Honorable **Beverly McGrew-Walker**, District Clerk, Fort Bend County

Jennifer Williams, Vinson and Elkins, Austin

Honorable **Deana Williamson**, Clerk, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

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

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 2025, the Division processed **27** appeals, **16** of which resulted in the issuance of a formal published decision.

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



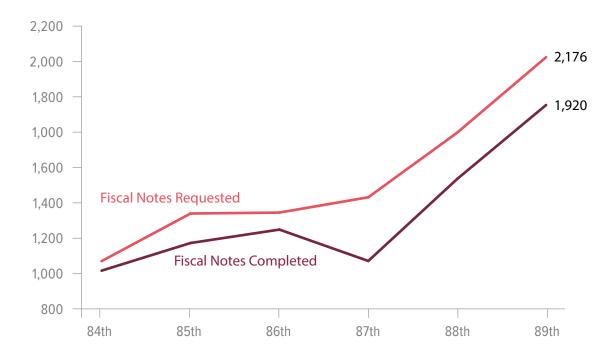
The Legal team, from left: Veena Mohan; Kim Piechowiak; Margie Johnson; Mena Ramón; Shelly Ortiz; Marcus Kellis; Marilyn Galloway-Martin; Scott Gibson; and Brandon Bellows.

Fiscal Notes

During the 89th Legislative Session, OCA completed more Fiscal Notes and Bill Analysis than any other agency in the state except for the Comptroller of Public Accounts. Most Fiscal Notes are completed by the Legal Division who is supported by in-house subject matter experts. This session, OCA was assigned **2,176** fiscal notes, a 23% increase over last session. Of those, **1,920** were completed. The remaining were not completed because fiscal analysis was unnecessary when the bill was declared procedurally dead based on legislative deadlines. Over **180** bills were signed into law that had a direct nexus to the judiciary, which are summarized in the <u>Texas Judiciary Legislative Update</u>.

| Chamber | 86th Legislative Session | 87th Legislative Session | 88th Legislative Session | 89th Legislative Session |
|---------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| House | 4,765 | 4,671 | 5,413 | 5,644 |
| Senate | 2,559 | 2,259 | 2,633 | 3,075 |
| Total | 7,324 | 6,930 | 8,046 | 8,719 |

OCA Fiscal Notes Processed - 89th Legislative Session



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, procurement, travel, operations, and payroll related issues. Division staff 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 prepares the agency's legislative appropriations request, operating budget, quarterly performance measures, and annual financial report.

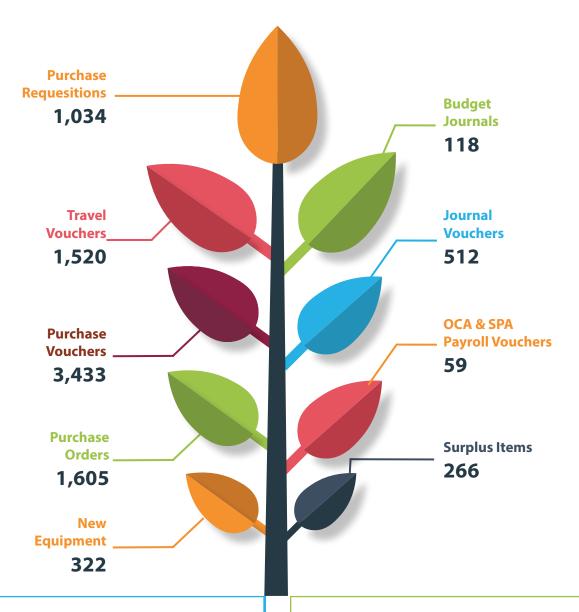
Finance and Operations staff work with the clerks of the appellate courts on issues related to accounting, budgeting, purchasing, and financial reporting. The division also provides support to the chief justices of the appellate courts and the presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions regarding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

During FY 2025, Finance & Operations processed **8,281** documents while Property and Operations processed **588** items. By the numbers, this breaks down as follows:

Finance & Operations Support Responsibilities

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



90

Reimbursement Requests for grants and contracts, totaling \$6,349,037

332

Electronic Filing Fee Refunds to County Clerks, totaling **\$29,748**

4,791

Fees Deposited or Reconciled fees from licensees, totaling **\$1,038,368**

\$8,013,327
Reimbursements received from the Office of

Reimbursements received from the Office of Attorney General for the IV-D Program

89th Legislative Session Appropriations for 2026-2027

The Legislative Appropriations Request for the 2026-2027 biennium was submitted to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) and Governor's Office (OOG) on August 3, 2024. The total baseline budget request for 2026-2027 totaled \$294.5 million. Exceptional Item requests totaled \$137.9 million; \$34.4 million for OCA and \$103.5 million for TIDC. OCA had a very successful legislative session, with several exceptional items included in the LBB recommended introduced versions of both the Senate and House.

EXCEPTIONAL ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE SENATE AND HOUSE INTRODUCED BILLS (Excluding TIDC)

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

OCA requested the addition of eleven FTEs, Regional Data Coordinators (RDCs), to ensure the accuracy and reliability of judicial data reported by trial courts. The eleven FTEs will coincide with the eleven Administrative Judicial Regions. The demand for more detailed data has significantly increased, driven by a growing number of data requests and the need for precise information to inform policy decisions and recommendations. As we continue to expand the level of detailed data collection, 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 - \$3,309,080.

During the implementation of the Business Court in FY 2024, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) identified several critical needs that were not accounted for in the Fiscal Note for HB 19. These included court reporters, law clerks, video conferencing equipment, and security measures. To address these gaps, OCA submitted an exceptional item request that also included funding for six additional judges, their support staff, lease expenses, and other operational costs—contingent on legislative approval for the addition of six new business court judges. However, the LBB removed funding for the proposed new judges, leaving their establishment to legislative discretion and reducing the total funding from \$10,734,838 to \$3,309,080 to support the existing courts.

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

Senate Bill 30 authorized a salary increase in July 2023, followed by a 5% increase provided by House Bill 1 in FY 2024 for state agency employees. At the time of submitting its Legislative Appropriations Request, the OCA had 40 vacant positions, many tied to the newly established Business Court. Because the agency was unable to access funds from the Comptroller of Public Accounts (CPA) in time to include them in the General Revenue limit calculation, OCA sought and successfully secured a 10% salary increase for these vacant positions to ensure parity with comparable 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 requested and received 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 also requested and received \$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

OCA employed two court interpreters through temporary funding provided by the American Rescue Plan Act. This funding was projected to expire by the end of FY 2025. To ensure continuity of essential interpreter services and reduce reliance on higher-cost contract interpreters, OCA sought and secured funding to retain these two positions as full-time employees beginning in FY 2026.

Additionally, OCA requested and received funding for a third FTE to fill the vacancy created when one interpreter position was reclassified as a manager. This new managerial role was established to oversee the Court Reporter program for the Business Courts. Due to the scope and responsibilities of this position, the manager is no longer able to serve as a court interpreter. Retaining these skilled professionals was a critical priority, especially as the Texas Judiciary continues to face a statewide shortage of qualified court interpreters.

EXCEPTIONAL ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE BILL (Excluding TIDC)

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

The Article IV Courts and agencies remained 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 requested and received 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, requested 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. The legislature recognized the importance of bringing the children's court coordinators closer to an equitable level of the county court coordinators and provided OCA funding to do so.

EXCEPTIONAL ITEMS INCLUDED IN HB 500, THE SUPPLEMENTAL BILL (Excluding TIDC)

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. The legislature approved funding for 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 requested and received 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 who want to review case documents at the appellate courts. The legislature recognized the importance of updating this legacy system and provided funding in the supplemental bill. House Bill 500 also provided the Business Court with unexpended balances from the 2024-2025 biennium to support the activities of the court.

For the 2026–2027 biennium, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) submitted a total budget request of \$294,538,358 in baseline funding and \$137,956,129 in exceptional items. Of this amount, \$145,119,496 in baseline and \$103,861,514 in exceptional items are attributable to the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) and will be detailed in TIDC's separate report. The Senate Bill 1 Conference Committee report of the 89th Regular Session issued in May 2025 appropriated \$372,267,267 total for the agency.

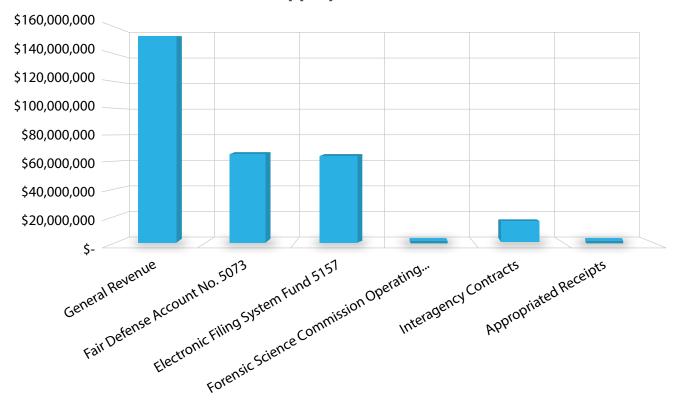
Contingency riders associated with legislation enacted after the release of the conference report resulted in an additional \$10,352,958 in appropriations. This adjustment brings the Office of Court Administration's total appropriations for the 2026–2027 biennium to \$382,620,225—representing a 29% increase over the 2024–2025 funding levels. The updated figures will be reflected in the Fiscal Size-Up version of the bill, anticipated for release in late Fall 2025.

• SB 293 provided a judicial pay increase, changing the minimum annual salary of a district judge to \$175,000. OCA received a total of \$5,520,812 to fund the salary increases for the Children's Courts Associate Judges and provided funding for development of a system to collect judicial transparency information.

• SB 1620 established a Texas forensic analyst apprenticeship pilot program to increase the forensic science workforce capacity in the state. The commission will partner with academic teaching institutions, set requirements for eligibility and work with accredited crime laboratories to sponsor an apprenticeship under the pilot program.

| Method of Finance | 2024-2025 | 2026-2027 | Increase/(Decrease) |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| General Revenue | \$155,261,055 | \$195,930,130 | \$40,669,075 |
| Electronic Filing System Fund | \$52,542,505 | \$103,808,503 | \$51,265,998 |
| Forensic Science Commission Operating Acct | \$661,001 | \$328,000 | (\$333,001) |
| 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 | \$17,247,928 | \$4,117,654 |
| Federal Funds/OOG Grant | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| TOTAL | \$296,928,007 | \$382,620,225 | \$85,692,218 |

Office of Court Administration 2026-2027 Appropriations



The 89th Legislative Appropriations Conference Committee report can be found here: Conference Committee Report 3rd 89th

Enterprise Planning & Regulatory Services

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

Regulatory Services – Judicial Branch Certification Commission

The Texas Legislature established the nine-member Judicial Branch Certification Commission (JBCC) during the 83rd Regular Session. The Hon. Sid Harle serves as the Chair of the commission, which is appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas and is responsible for regulating various court professions. Over **7,600** court reporters and court reporting firms, quardians, quardianship programs, quardianship registrations, process servers, as well as licensed court interpreters fall under the regulatory oversight of the JBCC. The Commission is staffed by the Enterprise Planning and Regulatory Services Division of OCA, and the Division Director serves as Director of the JBCC. JBCC staff include the Licensing Team, which manages the testing and licensing process, and the Compliance Team, which processes and investigates complaints.



EPRS Director **Ron Morgan** testifies at the Senate Committee on Juriprudence, May 2025.

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. David Jahn, Judge, Denton County Statutory Probate Court No. 1, Denton

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

Certification, Registrations, Licenses and Examinations

As of the conclusion of FY 2025, **7,622** certificate holders, registrants, and licensees are regulated by the Judicial Branch Certification Commission. By profession, this breaks down to:

| CERTIFICATIONS, REGISTRATIONS AND LICENSES | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------|--|--|
| Profession | Туре | Number | | |
| Court Reporters | Certification | 2,366 | | |
| Court Reporting Firms | Registration | 243 | | |
| Process Servers | Certification | 4,027 | | |
| Guardians | Certification | 457 | | |
| Guardianship Programs | Registration | 34 | | |
| Court Interpreters | License | 495 | | |

FY 2025, the licensing team processed 1,450 new certifications, licenses, and registrations, and 2,294 renewals.

Examinations

The JBCC Licensing Team administers examinations for Certified Guardians and Licensed Court Interpreters. A vendor administers the written and skills examination for the Court Reporters Certification on the Commission's behalf. In Fiscal Year 2025, over **1,000** exams were administered, broken down as follows:

- 341 licensed court interpreter exams administered-216 written and 125 oral exams.
- 87 certified guardian examinations administered.
- 605 court reporter examinations were administered by vendor-299 oral exams, and 306 written exams.

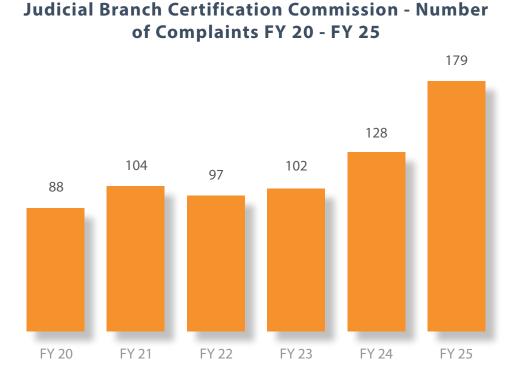
Continuing Education

Court professionals are required to complete JBCC-approved continuing education in order to renew their respective certifications. In FY 2025, the JBCC reviewed and approved **125** CE courses offered to licensees and certificate holders.

Complaints and Disciplinary Actions

The Compliance Team is responsible for investigating complaints against regulated persons and entities. With the assistance of an Assistant General Counsel from OCA, who serves as the JBCC's Prosecutor, they work to dispose of those complaints.

• In FY 2025, the Compliance Team received **179** complaints, reflecting a nearly 40% increase compared to FY 2024. **144** complaints were resolved during FY 2025.



Guardianship Registration

In addition to regulating the professions who serve the Judiciary, the JBCC has been charged with implementing the provisions of SB 1096 (Zaffirini/Smithee), passed during the 85th Texas Legislature. This bill created a safety net to ensure guardianships are registered, guardians are properly trained, courts receive a criminal history background check on proposed guardians, 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.

In FY 2025, the Guardianship Registration team processed **3,844** registrations and provided **6,062** guardianship trainings.

Enterprise Planning Office

Projects

The Enterprise Planning Office (EPO) within OCA is responsible for planning, executing, and delivering projects that impact OCA and the courts statewide. We collaborate with subject matter experts and project team members to develop requirements and implement projects.

Below is a summary of the projects that were managed by EPO in FY 2025.

EPRS Duties and Responsibilities

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

FY 2025 PROJECTS MANAGED BY EPO

Public Safety Reporting System

Supported troubleshooting and resolution of issues from prior deployments and began work on updates to PSRS resulting from legislation passed in the most recent legislative session. Additionally supported development of requirements and procurement for the 'next generation' PSRS.

Guardianship Audit Case Management System

Supported development of requirements for a new case management system and began the RFP process in FY 2025.

Court Analytics Texas

Continued work on system development and preparing a launch schedule. Development, testing and deployment are expected in FY 2026.

Judicial Directory

Developed system layout and incorporated into Court Analytics project. Continued development as well as testing and deployment are expected in FY 2026.

Texas Court Reminder Program

Continued support of TCRP roll-out to entities interested in this system. As of the end of FY 2025, offices in 11 different jurisdictions were onboard and using the system.

Uniform Case Management System Phase 3

Managed continued deployment of UCMS to jurisdictions. At the end of FY 2025, there were **65** Clerks' Offices live on the UCMS, **six** in process of joining the UCMS and **19** on the wait list.

FY 2025 PROJECTS MANAGED BY EPO Cont'd

eFileTexas Phase 4

Tested bulk filing and focused on making this available for entities interested in this.

New Forensic Science Commission Portal

Supported development and testing of a new licensing portal for FSC. Deployment is projected for FY 2026.

Forensic Science Commission and JBCC Credit Card Payment System Migration

Supported testing and migration for JBCC Credit Card Payment System and testing for Forensic Science Commission. Deployment is projected for FY 2026 after completion of the FSC Licensing Portal.

Upgrades to JBCC Licensing Management System

Developed requirements for licensing system upgrades needed to enhance efficiency for the Judicial Branch Certification Commission.

Statewide Business Courts Implementation

Managed design and construction projects for the Business Court Divisions in Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, and McKinney.

Forensic Science Commission Office Construction

Completed design and planning completed for construction for FSC's new office space, which will begin in FY 2026.

15th Court of Appeals Construction

Completed Chambers construction and furniture move-in. Project is being closed-out.

OCA 7th Floor Conference Room

Construction completed and project closed out In FY 2025.

OCA Networking Refresh

Completed Access Point heat maps of all the OCA facilities and supported agencies to provide more efficient WIFI for use usage. New network connections were established in San Antonio and McKinney for use by the Business Courts.

Texas Indigent Defense

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 (courtordered representation in the parent-child relationship) to its duties.

Commission



On May 6, TIDC Director Scott Ehlers testified on SB 1848 at the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice hearing.

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 2024, 19 TIDC staff operated under the direction and supervision of a governing board.

COMMISSION MEMBERS (as of August 31, 2025)

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

James "Jim" Bethke, Vice Chair, Executive Director, Bexar County Managed Assigned Counsel Office, San Antonio

Hon. Jimmy Blacklock, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austiin

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

Hon. Joe Moody, State Representative, El Paso

Hon. David Schenck, Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, Austin

Hon. John Smithee, State Representative, Amarillo

Hon. James "J.R." Woolley, Jr., Justice of the Peace, Waller

FY 202025 Snapshot

TIDC works to fund, oversee, and improve public defense in all 254 Texas counties.

In FY 2025, TIDC:

- Awarded \$49.3 million in grants for TIDC's core program, including \$28.8 million in programmatic grants
 to sustain and improve local public defense systems and \$20.5 million in formula grants to assist counties in
 meeting indigent defense requirements.
- Continued to administer a **\$44.1 million** grant issued in FY 2024 to support indigent defense in Operation Lone Star (OLS) cases during the FY 2024/25 biennium.
- TIDC conducted policy monitoring reviews in 30 counties to ensure proper appointment procedures were in place and fiscal monitoring reviews for **20** counties to ensure proper payment procedures and accurate data reporting.
- Trained over 2,800 judges, auditors, county officials, and attorneys in 74 presentations.
- Prepared two planning studies for new public defender or managed assigned counsel offices in three counties.

89th Legislative Session

For FY 2026-2027, TIDC received an additional **\$10 million** in general revenue (GR) to address the revenue shortfall in the Fair Defense Account; **\$8.7 million** in GR for new and expanded public defense offices; authorization to spend **\$10 million** in unspent Operation Lone Star funds on one-time or temporary expenditures for indigent defense in rural counties; and **\$5.1 million** in supplemental appropriations to address its FY 2025 Fair Defense Account shortfall. The Legislature also directed TIDC through two budget riders to establish a regional public defender office for Wharton and Matagorda Counties, and Val Verde and Terrell Counties.

The following tables summarize TIDC's exceptional item requests compared to appropriations, and TIDC's overall appropriation.

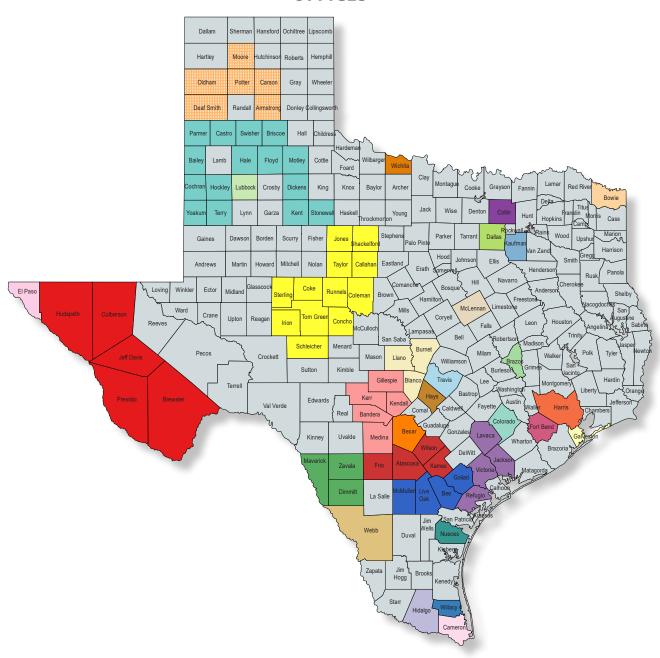
| Exceptional Item Requests | Total Request | FY 26/27 Appropriation |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|
| #1: Fair Defense Account Shortfall | \$19.7M | \$10M GR |
| #2: Pipeline Program to Address Attorney Shortages | \$8.9M +1 FTEs | \$0 |
| #3: Family Protection Representation | \$47.5M +5 FTEs | \$0 |
| #4: New & Expanded Public Defense Offices | \$35M | \$8.7M GR |
| Total Additional Funds Requested vs. Approved | \$111.19M 0 FTEs | \$18.7M GR |

| | FY 24/25 | FYY 26/27 | Difference |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| SB 1 / Regular (non-OLS) Budget | \$113,964,080 | \$124,240,414 | +\$10,276,334 |
| SB 1 / OLS Budget | \$41,000,000 | \$41,000,000 | |
| SB 1 Rider - Unspent OLS Funds | | \$10,000,000 | +\$10,000,000 |
| HB 500 / Supp. Approps. | | \$5,100,000 | \$5,100,000 |
| Total Approriation | \$154,964,080 | \$180,340,414 | +\$25,376,334 |

Thirteen of 17 legislative proposals TIDC's Board approved for improving indigent defense passed the legislature, however the Governor vetoed the three bills that included those proposals (SB 2111, SB 1838, and HB 4885). An additional bill, HB 1445, containing a portion of one TIDC proposal, passed and was signed by the Governor. That bill allows a director of a managed assigned counsel program to designate another person to approve vouchers for payment. The final proposal to expand the pool of attorneys qualified to represent indigent defendants in death penalty cases did not pass.

FY 2025 Program Highlights

FY 2025 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.

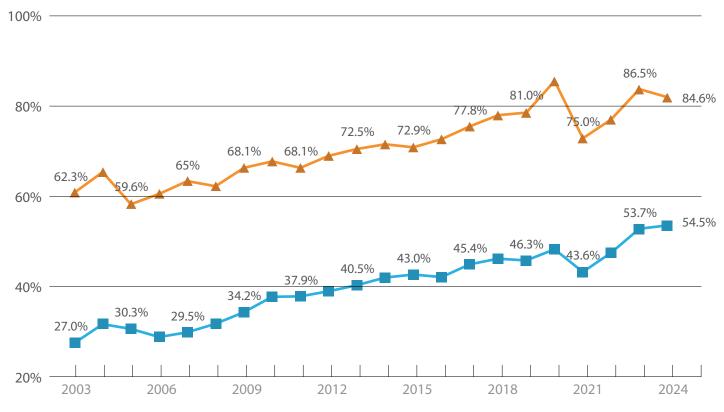
Funding

TIDC reimburses a portion of counties' public defense costs and awards competitive grants to improve public defense systems. In FY 2024¹, Texas counties reported **\$467 million** in total public defense spending (not including TIDC's OLS program that fully funds eligible indigent defense representation). In FY 2025, TIDC awarded **\$49.3 million** in grants, or about 10.5% of the most recently reported annual statewide expenditure. In FY 2025, TIDC awarded **\$20.5 million** in Formula Grants to **250** counties and **\$28.8 million** in **43** separate Improvement Grants.

Oversight

Historical Felony and Misdemeanor Appointment Rates (excluding Dallas County in FY 24)

Appointment Rates calculated by # Appointed Cases Paid / # Cases Disposed



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 2025, TIDC conducted policy monitoring reviews in **30** counties and issued eleven 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

¹ FY24 is the most recent year for which expenditure data is available.

determine that reported expenditures are eligible indigent defense expenses that meet grant requirements. During FY 2025, TIDC conducted fiscal monitoring in ten counties and issued reports on three other counties. Also, in FY 2025, seven fiscal reviews were conducted on Improvement grants.

Improvement

TIDC provides analysis, training, and technical assistance to improve indigent defense systems. In FY 2025, TIDC helped counties plan major projects for FY 2025 and FY 2026, including two planning studies resulting in one new public defender office, and technical assistance for another county resulting in another new public defender office. As a result, three counties which did not have institutional public defense programs are launching public defender offices.

Recognizing the attorney recruiting challenges faced by public defender offices, managed assigned counsel programs, and local officials, TIDC works intensively with Texas law schools, law student organizations, and the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association highlighting public defense career opportunities and bringing Texas' public defense attorneys to law school campuses to share the challenges and rewards of their work. With the insufficient numbers of Texas law graduates entering public service, TIDC is also broadening its public defense recruitment work to law schools and legal organizations outside the state.

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 2025, the fourth class of FIDL attorneys graduated from the program, and the fifth class of FIDL attorneys was selected and received two weeks of intensive training. The fourth class received an additional 20 hours of intensive training in October 2024 and April 2025, while the fifth class received an additional ten hours of intensive training in April of 2025. In addition, many of Texas' FIDL graduates attended an April Alumni program, receiving eight hours of training.

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. The order was renewed multiple times, ultimately expiring on May 31, 2025.

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 the OLS indigent defense hub and granted funding for the program, making it responsible for appointing counsel to indigent OLS defendants. 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.

With the expiration of the Supreme Court's Emergency Order in May 2025, OLS counties were provided a choice between continuing to use LSDO or transitioning to local appointment of counsel in OLS cases. Most counties in which LSDO had previously provided OLS representation chose LSDO to continue providing representation.

The 89th Texas Legislature allocated \$41,057,688 in General Revenue for OLS indigent defense. TIDC will continue to

work with counties and LSDO to ensure high quality, cost-effective representation provided in OLS cases and monitor the OLS appointment system for compliance with Fair Defense Laws.

Family Protection Representation

Data Collection

Family protection representation (FPR) is the court-appointed legal representation of children and indigent parents in cases brought by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. This year, TIDC continued the collection of FPR data pursuant to Texas Government Code § 79.0365 and Texas Family Code § 107.0042. Between September 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025, TIDC provided trainings and technical support for the FPR Indigent Defense Expenditure Report and the Attorney Practice Time Report. These reports were collected in October and November of 2024.

Total reported county spending on family protection representation for October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024 (FY24) was **\$62,138,146** (latest available data). This number reflects information from 244 counties whose reports were accepted. An additional nine counties submitted a report that was not accepted due to possible data inaccuracies. Only one county did not submit a report at all.

TIDC received attorney practice time reports from **1,124** attorneys who reported spending a percentage of their legal practice time on court-appointed family protection representation.

New Legislation

Building on TIDC's new legislative mandate in Family Protection Representation, staff have launched and completed several projects to further develop this area of work.

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 St. Mary's School of Law to raise awareness among law students about representing families in child protection cases. TIDC also launched a statewide mentorship program for attorneys that accept court-appointments in child protection cases. Trainings and group virtual convenings were offered to mentorship program participants through the Fall of 2024 and Spring of 2025.

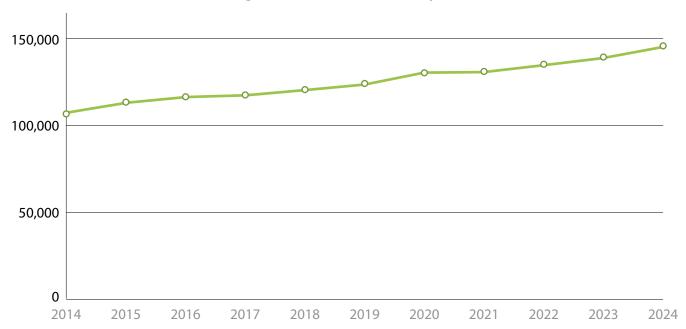
TIDC's expanded role in Family Protection Representation allowed for a unique opportunity to partner with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to enhance the drawdown of Federal Title IV-E funds. These funds are available to provide partial reimbursement for expenses made to provide legal representation in child protection cases. The reimbursed funds can be used to improve Family Protection Representation but have historically been under-claimed in Texas. In January of 2025, TIDC agreed to an MOU with DFPS to provide support and assistance in the improvement of the Title IV-E claiming process. In September of 2025, the Children's Commission of the Supreme Court of Texas awarded TIDC a grant to hire a dedicated Title IV-E staff member and implement a full project.

Trends

The 88th 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 2024. The report, <u>Justice Beyond the Cities: The State of Rural Public Defense in Texas</u>, found that the number of attorneys taking indigent criminal defense cases has dropped significantly in Texas, particularly in rural Texas. In 2024, while the number of attorneys in Texas continues to grow, the number of attorneys taking indigent defense cases continues to shrink.

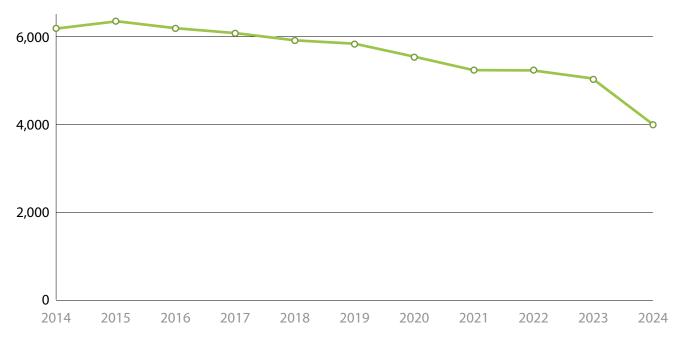
The number of attorneys paid for at least one indigent defense case continued to decrease in both rural and urban Texas counties.

Growing number of attorneys in Texas



The number of attorneys in the state of Texas NOT taking indigent defense cases/appointments continues to increase. In 2024, almost **150,000** attorneys were licensed to practice in Texas, with **2,858** new attorneys added in 2024.

Declining number of attorneys taking indigent defense cases/appointments



The number of attorneys taking indigent defense cases/appointments continues to decrease. In 2024, **4,004** attorneys accepted adult criminal, juvenile delinquency and family protection representation cases/appointments. That is a 34% decrease since 2014.

2024 Indigent Defense Attorneys by License Year



Texas Forensic Science Commission

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

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. During the 89th Session, the Legislature tasked the Commission with developing a pilot forensic science apprenticeship program. The Commission is also actively engaged in various forensic development initiatives and works collaboratively with stakeholders on the local and national level to improve education and training in forensic science.

Mission

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

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

Stacey Mitchell, Ph.D., Clinical Professor and Director, Texas A&M University's Center of Excellence in Forensic Nursing

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

Honorable 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 2025 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 2025.

- The Commission received and reviewed **18** complaints and **58** self-disclosures and issued reports in four investigative cases this fiscal year. The Commission also reviewed **71** non-consensus proficiency testing results and **43** accreditation assessment activities. Copies of all investigative reports can be found on the Commission's website at https://www.fsc.texas.gov.
- The Commission currently accredits 62 forensic laboratories.
- The Commission has licensed over **1500** forensic analysts.
- The Commission's Licensing Advisory Committee established voluntary licensing programs for latent print processing technicians, 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.
- 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.
- In January 2025, the Commission established a Statewide Task Force on Rapid DNA to address the State's
 approach to expanded use of Rapid DNA Technology for Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) search of crime
 scene samples following the Federal Bureau of Investigation's July 1, 2025, rule change permitting crime scene
 samples to be run through Rapid DNA instruments and uploaded and searchable in CODIS. The group met on
 April 17, 2025, and June 27, 2025, in Austin.
- The Commission hosted a series of statewide meetings for DNA technical leaders, throughout the state and virtually, in FY 2025 related to DNA evaluations given activity level propositions.
- The Commission formed a statewide firearms working group working with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) on implementing a statewide validation assessment tool (VAST) for the firearms sections of forensic laboratories.

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 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 State Law Library

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

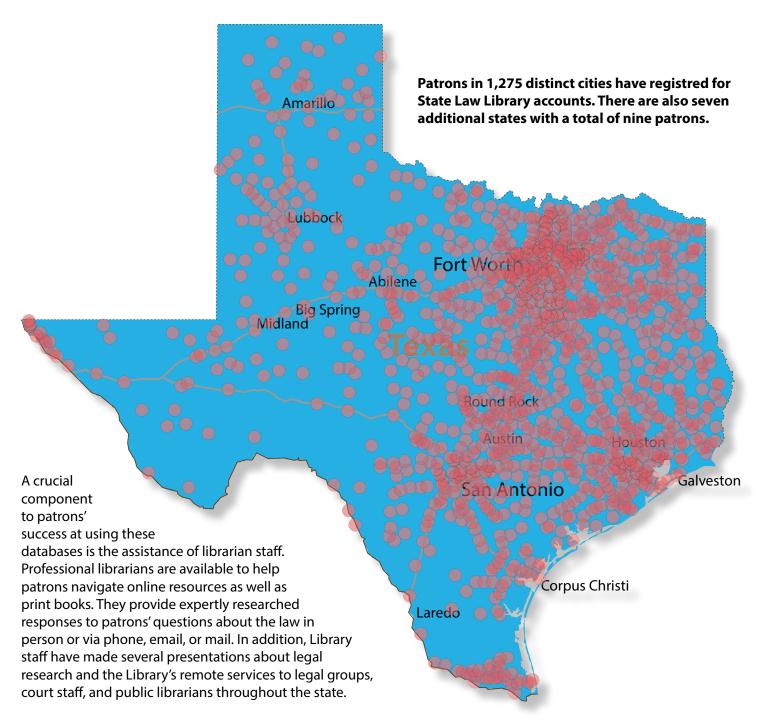
The State Law Library was initially created as the law library for the Supreme Court in 1854. It was established as its own state agency in 1971. The State Law Library's mission is to provide legal information and research materials to state agencies and the residents of Texas. The Library prioritizes 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 2025, librarians have created **76** 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 **63,000** patrons have registered to use the service, representing over **1,200** cities and **249** out of **254** counties across Texas.



The 89th Legislature granted two additional librarian positions to ensure that patrons receive timely and accurate assistance. One new librarian position will be dedicated to supporting Spanish-speaking Texans. According to 2020 Census data, 10.7% of the Texas population five years and older speaks Spanish at home and speaks English less than "very well." To ensure that we are truly serving all Texans with our information needs, this librarian will be assisting patrons directly as well as conducting outreach to Spanish-speaking community organizations to promote our services.

An evaluation of the almost **7,000** questions the Library received in FY 2025 is indicative of the wide variety of patrons served. Representative of our traditional role in legal research, librarians assisted **1,300** patrons with research tasks such as recommending resources, finding citations, and locating historical versions of rules and statutes, and answered another **1,149** questions related to civil procedure. Our support for the public who are researching their own legal rights is indicated by **1,183** questions related to family law, **361** landlord/tenant questions, **317** questions about estate planning, wills, and probate, and **240** questions about consumer issues and debt.

To browse highlights from the Library's print and digital collection, visit: https://guides.sll.texas.gov/recommended-titles

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/

FY 2025 Program Highlights

- 9,633 new patrons registered in FY 2025
- 6,922 questions answered by reference staff
- A reorganization of the Library's historical statute material now allows greater public access to Vernon's Annotated Texas Statutes base volumes back to the 1920s and corresponding pocket parts starting in 1981.

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

MISSION

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

Office of the State Prosecuting

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.

Attorney

Legislative Mandate

The Office of 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.

MISSION

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

Prosecutors

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.

Operations

The Office's central mission is to ensure consistency and integrity in Texas criminal law through appellate review and statewide collaboration. OSPA attorneys meticulously examine opinions from all fourteen courts of appeals—particularly those adverse to the State—to identify significant legal questions warranting further review. When appropriate, the Office seeks clarification from the Court of Criminal Appeals by filing petitions for discretionary review (PDRs) and presenting well-reasoned arguments in both briefs and oral arguments. The Office also works closely with local and special prosecutors to address emerging legal challenges and promote a fair and efficient justice system.

Key responsibilities and activities include:

- Preparing and submitting PDRs and amicus briefs in cases of statewide importance.
- Conducting in-depth analysis of opinions from the U.S. Supreme Court, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, and the courts of appeals.
- Advising and supporting prosecutors and defense attorneys on complex appellate issues.
- Collaborating in the drafting and refinement of petitions and briefs to ensure clarity and accuracy.

Leadership in Criminal Justice Education and Practice

The Office of continues to demonstrate statewide leadership through education, collaboration, and the advancement of criminal-law practice.

Education and Training

The Office is committed to strengthening the administration of justice by providing education and training to judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and law enforcement officers. **The SPA** presents on discovery obligations under *Brady v. Maryland* and the Michael Morton Act, promoting transparency and consistency in criminal proceedings across the state.

Professional Leadership

Assistant State Prosecuting Attorney **John R. Messinger** provides statewide leadership as a member of the **Texas Criminal Pattern Jury Charge Committee (Criminal)**, helping shape accurate and comprehensible jury instructions used throughout Texas courts. Assistant State Prosecuting Attorney **Emily Johnson-Liu** served as Co-Course Director for the **Advanced Writing and Appellate Advocacy Course** for the Texas District and County Attorneys Association, ensuring high-quality continuing education for appellate practitioners.

Public Outreach and Transparency

The Office is also committed to keeping both the public and practitioners informed. It provides summaries of Petitions for Discretionary Review (PDRs) granted by the Court of Criminal Appeals through its website (www.spa.texas.gov) and its X feed @OSPATX. The website also offers a wealth of resources, including publications and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) materials produced by the Office.

State Commission

On Judicial Conduct

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

The SCJC 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 judges).

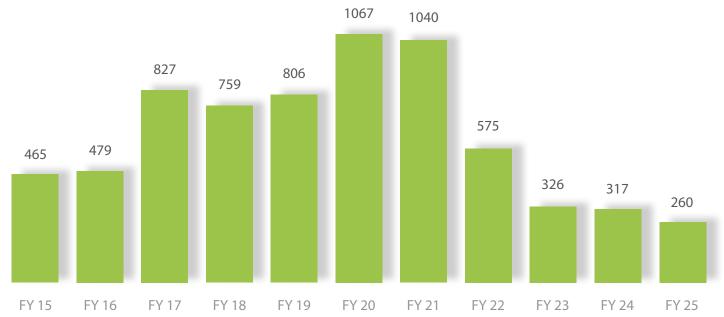
Disciplinary Actions

In FY 2025, according to OCA records, **3,798** judges were under the jurisdiction of the Commission.

During FY 2025, the SCJC:

- Received 1,281 cases and disposed of 1,286 cases.
- Resolved 74 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 **1,232** cases as follows: **635** were determined to not contain any allegations which, if true, would violate the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct. **597** cases were dismissed after investigation which included **26** cases that were dismissed with letters of caution, three cases because the judge took corrective action, and four cases that were dismissed as moot.
- Resolved **497** cases after a preliminary investigation and **157** 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:

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

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

Vacant, Judge, Municipal Court

MISSION

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.

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.

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.

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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.

Oversight Board Members

The members of the OCFW Oversight Board are:

Alma Lagarda, Esq., Capital Defense Attorney. El Paso, TX. (Chair)

Geoff Burkhart, Esq., County Executive for Community Legal Services, Travis County. Austin, TX. (Vice-Chair)

Phillip Yates, Esq., Attorney at Law. Houston, TX. (Secretary)

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

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

Small Judicial Agency, Big Footprint

- OCFW staff includes 14 attorneys, ten mitigation specialists, six paralegals, and two accountants.
- OCFW represents over **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 dozens of counties 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. Texas trial courts have recommended new trials in three
 other cases currently pending before the Court of Criminal Appeals. OCFW's work in another case resulted in
 unanimous, favorable decision by the United States Supreme Court.
- OCFW's work in non-capital cases involving flawed forensic science has resulted in one client's conviction being
 overturned on an innocence claim, a still-pending recommendation of a new trial in another case, and ongoing
 litigation and investigation in other matters.
- 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 88th Legislature to create a statewide crime lab
 disclosure portal managed by the Department of Public Safety, which will facilitate the disclosure of relevant
 evidence simultaneously to the defense and the prosecution. The Texas Crime Lab Records (CLR) Connect portal
 is expected to go live during August 2026.
- The State Bar of Texas awarded OCFW the 2025 Warren Burnet Award at their annual meeting, in recognition of our "extraordinary contributions to the representation of indigent Texans."



OCFW Director Benjamin B. Wolff accepting the Warren Burger Award, accompanied by Geoff Burkhardt, OCFW Oversight Board Vice-Chair.

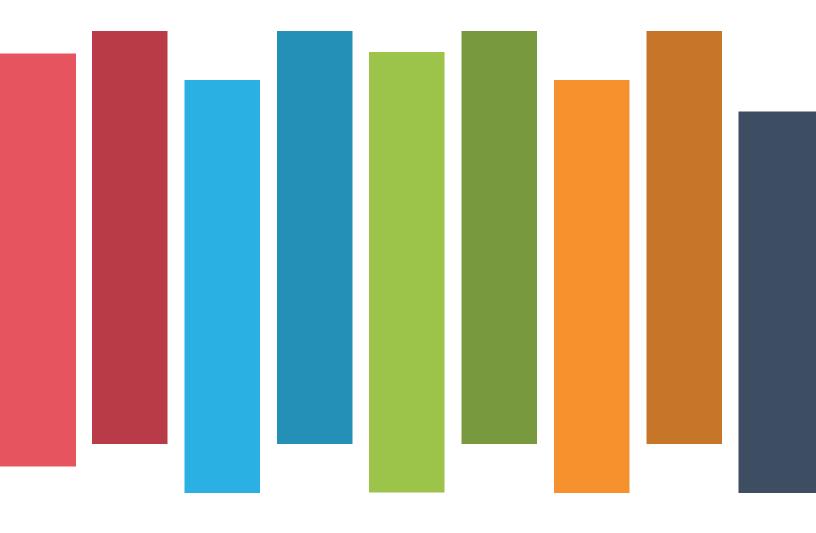
MISSION

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



OCFW Staff





Annual Report of Judicial Support Agencies Board and Commissions