



For Immediate Release

Harris County State District Courts Surpass Case Backlog Reduction Target

November 15, 2023 — In May of 2022, the Harris County State District Courts requested funds from the Texas Judiciary under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to aid in the reduction of the overwhelming case backlog across the Criminal, Civil, and Family Divisions, caused by the 2020 COVID-19 Global Pandemic. The request required the Courts to identify an attainable goal for change.

As of September 30, 2023, the Harris County State Criminal District Courts have surpassed their self-imposed 75 percent target by 10 percent, resulting in an 85 percent backlog reduction: a goal met prior to the addition of the three new District Courts 486, 487, and 488.

This achievement was no small task. Prior to receipt of the ARPA funding, the Criminal Division formally adopted a robust plan to reduce pending criminal cases, that included the following action items:

- Redirection of two Emergency Response Dockets (ERDs) to streamline pretrial hearings and dispositions.
- Redirection of two Emergency Trial Response Dockets (ETRDs) to conduct continual trials on a weekly basis.
- Addition of six Associate Judges to assist with pretrial matters, pleas, and jury selection.
- Addition of four new case management analysts to review the status of cases and identify manual and automated process improvements.

“To say we’ve worked hard is an understatement,” said Judge Te’iva Bell, Criminal Division Administrative Judge. “It’s taken a lot of strategic thinking and collaboration to get us here.”

While the Harris County State Criminal District Courts were the only division to receive ARPA funding, the other divisions continued to work hard on their backlogs. The Civil Division is on track to dispose of over 52,000 cases for 2023 while managing an estimated 15 percent increase in filings to date. Additionally, the Family Division has achieved consistent clearance rates above 100 percent from 2021 to date, reducing the caseload by 20 percent.

“These milestones speak to the grit, dedication, and resourcefulness of our courts,” said Judge Latosha Lewis Payne, Local Administrative Judge for the 64 Harris County State District Courts. “It’s incredibly eye-opening to realize the impact our Judiciary can make when we receive the necessary resources for success. I am proud of what we have accomplished this past year, both with and without additional resources.”

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