



Press Release

For Immediate Release

District Courts call for expansion to address population growth and resource disparity

February 3, 2025 — Harris County, home to over 4.8 million people as of 2023, has experienced unprecedented growth that has left its court system stretched thin. Despite being the largest county in Texas by population—and the third largest in the U.S.—Harris County has not added a new non-felony district court in a half century. This means that the district courts today are in a state of perpetual triage, a trend that is not sustainable long-term, and leading to substantial and unnecessary delays in case resolution. This cycle negatively impacts individuals, families, businesses, and the broader community by prolonged wait times, increased legal costs, and the general sensation of uncertainty for those seeking aid or relief.

To address delays and improve access to justice and resolution, the Harris County District Courts are advocating for the creation of seven new district courts: three civil courts, three family courts, and one juvenile court.

This is the first in a series of releases that will seek to examine Harris County's unique judicial tapestry and shine the light on the resources needed to better serve our community as a safe and world-class place to reside, create families, and do business.

Harris County's Population Boom:

Harris County saw its population boom by 16.4 percent between 2010 and 2022 according to [USA facts.org](https://www.usafacts.org), the direct result of the more than 25,000 corporate entities who relocated to Texas during that time due to various pro-business state incentive programs. But, while the population continued to grow, the resources available to the judicial system stagnated. A perfect example of this disparity in judicial resources can be seen when comparing Harris County case filings for 2023 to other major Texas counties.

NEW FILINGS FOR 2023

	Harris	Dallas	Tarrant	Bexar	Travis	Collin	Brazoria*
Criminal	38,290	11,370	17,713	11,831	7,422	7,736	2,637
Civil	67,252	24,481	17,104	16,429	10,398	7,630	2,630
Family	43,350	27,158	20,330	22,109	11,466	9,912	3,801
Juvenile	1,522	769	561	753	315	277	n/a
Total	150,414	63,778	55,708	51,122	29,601	25,555	9,068
Number of Courts	61	39	24	27	20	15	5
Average per Court	2,466	1,635	2,321	1,893	1,480	1,704	1,814

*does not report Juvenile data

Filing data generated from OCA: Jan. 2023-Dec. 2023

A 2023 study titled *Measuring Current Judicial Workload in Texas* by the [National Center for State Courts](https://www.nationalcenterforstatecourts.org), an organization that provides technical assistance, training, and technology to enhance justice systems and services, in collaboration with governments, civil society, and development partners (and well-regarded by both the State of Texas and Harris County Commissioners' Court as a reputable data source), revealed that Texas needs 75 additional judges statewide to meet its growing demands. *Of those, 42 are recommended for Harris County alone, emphasizing the county's critical need for more courts.*



District Courts of Harris County

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How This Discrepancy Affects Harris County:

The Harris County District Courts have seen an almost 10 percent increase in case filings compared to a decade ago, creating significant delays in justice and resolution for residents, families, and businesses. These delays negatively impact our community through:

- Longer wait times for court hearings and trials and case dispositions
- Inflated legal costs for individuals and businesses
- Extended uncertainty for those seeking resolution in juvenile, family, business, and civil matters

The Need for More Courts:

The need for 42 more district courts is clear. District Courts trying criminal cases were added in 2023. But to continue the process of addressing the population growth's impact on the Judiciary, the Administration for the Harris County District Courts respectfully requested the establishment of seven (7) additional courts in 2025. This expansion will:

1. **Adapt to Population Growth:** The proposed courts will align judicial capacity with the county's ongoing rapid population increase
2. **Enhance Judicial Efficiency:** Additional courts will enable a more equitable caseload distribution, reduce delays, and ensure case resolution in a more-timely manner
3. **Support Economic Growth:** By providing faster resolutions for business-related disputes, Harris County will reinforce its position as a favorable location for economic activity and investment
4. **Access to Justice:** Residents and families will experience shorter wait times for hearings, trials, and judgements, ultimately restoring trust in the legal system

The Texas Two-Step: How a Texas District Court is Created:

Creating a Texas district court is a two-step process comprising legislative action and, in large counties like Harris County, Commissioners' Court.

Step One: The Texas Constitution states that only the Texas Legislature can create a new district court. The jurisdiction must first demonstrate the justification of need; this is often based on criteria like population growth, caseload data, resource shortages, and recommendations from organizations like the Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). From there, a state legislator must introduce a bill to create a new court. The bill must successfully pass through both houses of the Texas Legislature and be signed into law by the governor.

Step Two: The county commissioners' court must show support for additional district courts, usually reflected by a written resolution, and once created by the legislature is statutorily required to fund the courts, providing necessary resources like courtrooms, equipment, staff, and office space.

By investing in this expansion, Harris County and the State of Texas will reaffirm its commitment to providing efficient, accessible, and fair judicial services for all residents, families, and businesses. We urge the Harris County community, Commissioners' Court, and the great State of Texas to prioritize this initiative.

Let's lead with Harris County.

Look for the next installment of this series, a focus on juvenile justice.

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