District Courts
of Harris County

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

Harris County District Courts highlight specialty courts during Mental Health Awareness Month
Part Two: The STAR Court – Success Through Addiction Recovery

Oct. 27, 2025 — As Mental Health Awareness Month continues, the Harris County District Courts are shining the spotlight on another life-changing program: the STAR Court (Success Through Addiction Recovery). This specialty court offers a path to long-term recovery for individuals whose struggles with substance abuse have led them into the criminal justice system.

A Problem-Solving Court for Addiction Recovery:

The STAR Court is built on a collaborative model that integrates judicial supervision, clinical treatment, and community support. Participants enter the program voluntarily and commit to intensive oversight that combines structure with encouragement. Through frequent court appearances, drug testing, counseling, and treatment, the STAR Court addresses the root causes of addiction.

Judge Josh Hill of the 232nd District Court, Judge Hazel Jones of the 174th District Court, Judge Hilary Unger of the 248th District Court, and Judge Danilo Lacayo of the 182nd District Court currently preside over the STAR Court dockets, bringing experience and compassion to their work. Each case is closely monitored, and participants receive incentives for progress and sanctions for setbacks, reinforcing responsibility while supporting change.

“The STAR Court is about more than sobriety; it’s about giving participants the tools to rebuild their lives,” said Judge Unger. “We want to see people succeed in recovery, reconnect with their families, and reenter their communities stronger than before.”

Impact and Outcomes:

The STAR Court is designed as an alternative to incarceration for eligible defendants whose criminal conduct is directly tied to substance use. Instead of serving lengthy sentences, participants who successfully complete the program may receive reduced penalties, probation, or dismissal of charges. The court emphasizes measurable goals: consistent sobriety, employment or education, and community reintegration. In Harris County, the STAR Court has become a vital resource in breaking the cycle of addiction and crime.

Visit www.justex.net for more information about these courts and dockets.

About the Harris County Criminal District Courts:

The 29 Harris County Criminal District Courts handle state jail felonies up to first degree felonies, including capital murder charges. State jail felonies include burglary of a building, habitual burglary of a motor vehicle offenders, and possession of controlled substances less than one gram. First degree felonies include murder, aggravated robbery, and aggravated sexual assault. Capital murder can include situations where an individual is sentenced to death or life in prison without the possibility of parole.

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