

# The DOCKET

Phil Sorrells - Tarrant County District Attorney

Winter 2025



# A Message from DA Phil Sorrells



There is nothing more heartbreaking than when love turns into violence.

This year, we prosecuted cases where people murdered, tortured, or sexually assaulted those they were supposed to love — their own family members or partners.

In each of these tragedies, the victims trusted the very people who harmed them.

Now, these offenders will spend the rest of their lives in prison.

Here are some of those cases.

- Shawn McFarlane, 42, spent hours beating a female family member — slamming her face into the floor, hitting her, and strangling her until she blacked out — after she wouldn't give him money.
- Jacoby Roberts, 25, shot and killed his cousin then stole his handgun and a bag of his cocaine.
- Albert Flores, 57, sexually assaulted a boy he was related to multiple times while he was on parole. Flores threatened to hit him with a belt if he didn't comply — and he threatened to kill the boy's family in front of him if he told anyone.
- Kaitlyn Bailey, 27, demanded money from her mother. When her mom refused, Bailey shot and killed her. Because Kaitlyn's grandmother was there, she shot and killed her too.
- Freddy Garcia, 57, was mad at a woman he was dating. He threatened to kill her and her family and then sexually assaulted her.
- Hung "Billy" Nguyen, 54, fatally stabbed his ex-girlfriend and then set her house, with her in it, on fire.
- Joe Tiner, 65, sexually assaulted a young girl he was related to many times when she was between the ages of four and 12.

These are just some of the tough cases we prosecuted this year.

Every day, my office and I work to seek justice and protect the people of Tarrant County.

It is an honor to serve this community, and I am filled with hope and gratitude as we look toward all that 2026 may bring.

Wishing you and your loved ones a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May the season bring peace and joy to us all.



# By the Numbers

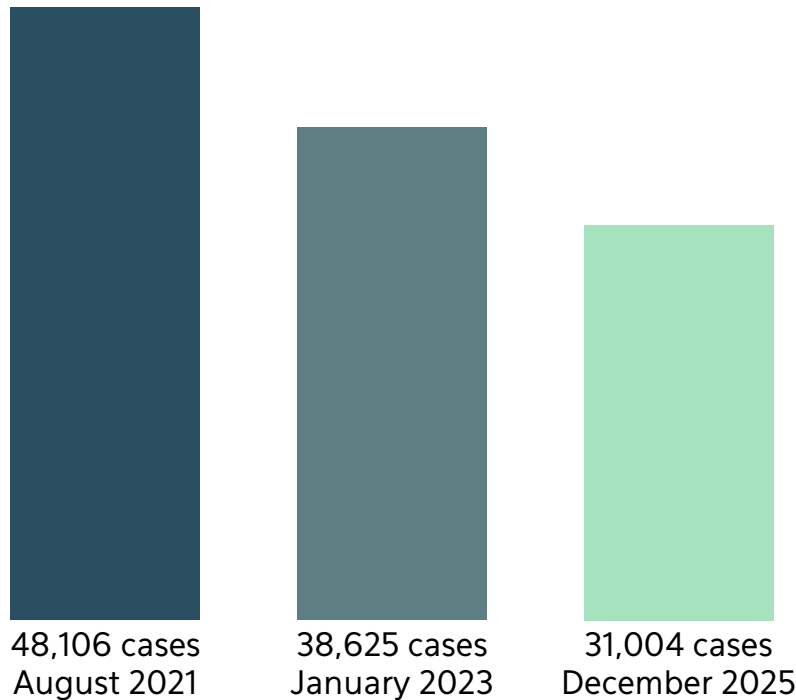
District Attorney Phil Sorrells continues working to reduce the caseload that grew in the criminal courts under Covid restrictions. Here's a look at the progress.

The backlog was at its peak in August 2021, with 48,106 cases.

In January 2023, 38,625 cases were pending in the Tarrant County criminal courts.

By December 1, 2025, that number was down to 31,004.

## Caseload Backlog



## Execution Date

An execution date has been set for Cedric Ricks, 39, who was sentenced to death by a Tarrant County jury in 2014 for stabbing to death his 30-year-old girlfriend, Roxann Sanchez, and her 8-year-old son, Anthony Figueroa.

371st District Judge Ryan Hill set March 11, 2026, as the execution date.

Hill's decision came in October, during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, which served as a stark reminder of why we continue to fight to end family violence.

On May 1, 2013, Ricks argued with Sanchez at her Bedford apartment. He grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed and killed her and her son. He also stabbed her 12-year-old son more than two dozen times, but he survived.



Cedric Ricks

# Emerging Financial Crimes

Financial crime is evolving — and so are we.

Our office hosted a North Texas Fraud Conference at the Hurst Convention Center, bringing together more than 130 investigators and prosecutors for two days of advanced training.

Topics ranged from white-collar crime and elder fraud to cryptocurrency scams and organized retail theft — all aimed at staying one step ahead of criminals who use new technology to commit old crimes.

“The North Texas Fraud Conference is intended to increase law enforcement’s understanding and ability to investigate and prosecute white collar crimes, elder exploitation, and criminal fraud organizations,” said Assistant District Attorney Lori Varnell, chief of the White Collar Crime and Public Integrity Units. “Our goal is to equip detectives and prosecutors with tools to streamline obtaining evidence and getting justice for victims of financial crimes.”



The conference featured leading experts in financial crime investigation, including professionals from the Colleyville Police Department, Texas Department of Public Safety, and the Texas Organized Retail Crime Association.

“Criminals continue to find new ways to steal from hardworking Texans,” District Attorney Phil Sorrells said. “We remain committed to protecting victims, pursuing justice, and keeping pace with innovation in the fight against financial crime.”

# Not On My Watch

It could be your friend, your daughter, your mother, or your neighbor.

Chances are high that you know someone who has been a victim of domestic violence — or you personally have been a victim. That is especially true in Tarrant County, where family violence was the second most commonly committed offense last year.

That must stop.

District Attorney Phil Sorrells and his team are committed to working with law enforcement and community partners to put an end to this violence.

“Domestic or family violence will not be tolerated here — not on my watch,” Sorrells said.

Each October, during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, our office launches a month-long Not On My Watch educational campaign to shine a light on how widespread this crime is.

We recognize that anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.

So, we show our solidarity on social media and in the community to amplify awareness and encourage community engagement.

“We seek justice for all victims in Tarrant County,” Sorrells said. “No one is alone in this fight.”

To report a suspected incident of Intimate Partner Violence, call your local police department. Contact The Archway’s 24-hour hotline at 1-877-701-7233 for help.



Purple Thursday 2025



District Clerk Tom Wilder  
Tax Assessor-Collector Rick Barnes



District Attorney Executive Team



County Clerk Mary Louise Nicholson



# Vatican Swiss Guards



Two members of the world's smallest army visited the DA's Office this year.

They are part of the Swiss Guards, 135 men who protect the Pope, his home, and the Vatican City.

Alain, 28, and Renato, 25, were in Fort Worth on vacation in August and they dropped in, at the request of First Assistant District Attorney Robb Catalano, to talk about their jobs and why they do what they do.

They each have spent about two years in the Swiss Guard.

It's not easy to become a Swiss Guard, which is similar to serving as a Secret Service agent.

Not only must they pass written and physical tests, but they also must meet certain qualifications. Among them: They must be men between the ages of 19 and 30, taller than 5 feet 8 inches, unmarried, and, of course, devoutly Catholic.

These men rigorously train in close combat, weapon handling, and personal security. They live in shared dorms and agree to serve the Pope for at least two years. They speak several languages, including German, English, French, and Italian. Their motto: "Fiercely and faithfully."

All the Guardsmen can roam through the Vatican City, even the serene gardens designed for the Pope's relaxation and meditation. And, if they marry, they may do so after five years in the Swiss Guard. When they sign a second five-year contract, they get an apartment to live in with their wife.

They wear red, yellow, and blue Renaissance-style uniforms with armor and halberds three days each year — Christmas, Easter, and May 6, the day of their annual swearing-in ceremony. They wear more modern uniforms and weapons the rest of the time.

"Our weapons are not always visible," Renato said. "That's the difference between Rome and Texas."

Once their tenure is up in the Swiss Guard, Alain and Renato have different plans.

For Alain, this service is a tradition. His family traces Guard service back to an ancestor in the 1700s, as well as to his father in the 1970s. Alain likely will extend his service. Prior to serving in the Guard, he worked in landscaping in Switzerland.

Renato plans to move to Fort Worth to work for the Diocese of Fort Worth.

The two visited California before they traveled to Fort Worth.

"Yes, I can tell you, Texas is better," Alain said with a grin.



# “She Was Beaten to Death”

Marissa Grimes, a 26-year-old mother of two, was on the verge of escaping.

In February 2022, she was moving to West Texas, away from Valerian “Will” O’Steen, 28, a man in Fort Worth with a history of domestic violence against her.

She stopped by his house one last time before leaving.

After that night, Grimes was never seen alive again.

More than a week later, her lifeless body was found in a shallow grave — covered by blankets, tarps, and dirt — in the crawl space under O’Steen’s house.

A Tarrant County jury in September found O’Steen guilty of capital murder.



Marissa Grimes

## Punishment

As Grimes’s family and friends waited to learn the punishment for O’Steen, who was a Russian orphan early in his life, several of them held hands and closed their eyes.

When it was announced that the jury sentenced O’Steen to death, several people in the courtroom — including a few jurors — wiped away tears.

Marissa’s dad, Daryl, told O’Steen that District Attorney Phil Sorrells reviewed this case before trial and “made the right decision, a hard decision” to seek the death penalty.

“We are all made in God’s image,” Daryl Grimes continued. “You had a horrible start to your life, but you had no right to murder Marissa Grimes.”

Tarrant County Assistant District Attorneys Allenna Bangs and Peter Gieseking prosecuted the case. DA Investigator Tim Pinckney and Victim Advocate Clara Salvatierra also worked on this case.



Valerian “Will” O’Steen

Continued on the next page...

## A Violent Relationship

In January 2022, O'Steen threatened to kill Marissa and refused to let her leave his house for days. She eventually was able to send a text message to her father, which led to police intervention.

O'Steen was arrested on domestic violence charges. As he bonded out of jail, the court ordered him to stay away from Marissa and wear a GPS ankle monitor.

He was mad, prosecutors told the jury. He wanted the charges dropped and the monitor removed from his body. And he told people that he was going to kill Marissa.

"He's a very dangerous person," Bangs said. "He's manipulative. ... Anyone who encountered Valerian O'Steen is a means to an end."

Marissa was scared and her family convinced her to move to West Texas. But, by February, she and O'Steen again were talking, texting, and seeing each other.

Driving a U-Haul packed for her move, she stopped by his home late on February 12, 2022, to say a quick goodbye. She didn't plan on staying long. But later that night, Marissa and O'Steen visited one of O'Steen's neighbors, who saw O'Steen threaten her with a gun.

She was not seen alive again.

## Reported Missing

Marissa's family soon reported her missing. Days later, her abandoned U-Haul was found about a mile from O'Steen's house.

Police executed a search warrant and found Marissa's decomposing body wrapped in blankets and a tarp in the crawl space under O'Steen's home.

"He dug her a shallow grave and lived above her for 10 days," Bangs said. "Yes, he is a future danger. He absolutely is."

Among her injuries: A broken arm, nose, and ribs. Two black eyes. Multiple lacerations to her head. Bruises on her arms, hands, and fingers. Her hair was chopped short in some areas.

The Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office ruled Marissa's death a homicide caused by blunt force trauma to the head.

"She was beaten to death," Giesecking told the jury. "She had been tortured."

Bangs called on the jury to do what was right.

"This is not a place for mercy," she said. "That is not what we dispense. In this courthouse, we administer justice."



ADA Allenna Bangs



# Getting Life

From September 1 to December 1, six people were sentenced to life in prison by Tarrant County juries or judges. Here's a look at their cases.

## Tranell Pleasant, 36



Pleasant was found guilty of murder. On February 8, 2021, during a verbal argument, Pleasant shot and killed his 42-year-old uncle, Shelton Harris. During the punishment phase, the jury learned Pleasant is a habitual offender who has been to prison multiple times for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and assault against family members.

Prosecutors: Madeline Jones, James Zaleta.

Investigator: Patrick Knotts.

Victim Coordinator: CeCe Jones.

September 11, 2025.

## Hung "Billy" Nguyen, 54



Nguyen pled guilty to murder. On March 9, 2018, Nguyen fatally stabbed his ex-girlfriend, 38-year-old Chi Pham, and then set her Grand Prairie home on fire. He left and drove to where he and Pham worked. There, he attacked former coworkers.

Prosecutors: Chase Payne, Allenna Bangs.

Investigator: Ben Lopez.

Victim Coordinator: Clara Salvatierra.

September 17, 2025.

## Johnny Edwards, 38



Edwards was found guilty of murder. Early Christmas morning in 2021, Edwards went to an apartment complex in west Fort Worth to visit Deshon Williams, 24. Once there, Edwards shot and killed Williams, who was sitting on the couch. Edwards went home, changed clothes, and returned to the apartment. He stole marijuana and a PS5 from Williams. Police arrived at the apartment later, around 10 a.m., in response to a shooting call. They found Williams dead on the couch. He had been shot seven times.

Prosecutors: Lisa Callaghan, Stephanie Simpson.

Investigator: Darran Gabbert.

Victim Coordinator: Elizabeth Garcia.

September 26, 2025.

# Getting Life

## Justin Shah, 37



Shah was found guilty of two counts of aggravated sexual assault. He was sentenced to two life sentences in prison. On April 10, 2022, Shah and friends were at a nightclub in the Stockyards. He met an 18-year-old high school student who worked there; they exchanged telephone numbers. In the middle of the night, Shah texted the student repeatedly, pressuring her to visit the Airbnb where he was staying. When she arrived, Shah and others sexually assaulted her. Judge Ryan Hill ordered these sentences to run consecutively to a life sentence Shah is already serving for a home invasion in McLennan County. Prosecutors: Melinda Hogan, Bill Vassar. Investigator: Tim Pinckney. Victim Coordinator: Laura Medina. October 6, 2025.

## Brien Jakubec, 40



Jakubec was found guilty of burglary of a habitation, aggravated sexual assault, aggravated kidnapping, and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. On February 25, 2024, Jakubec broke into a home carrying a weapon and tied up a young couple, demanding that they give him money, drugs, and other valuables. He sexually assaulted the woman. The male victim eventually escaped to get help. Jakubec also committed a carjacking in Dallas with another young female. Prosecutors: Libby Kinsey, David Elder. Investigator: Annabelle Amon. Victim Coordinator: Cristina Rangel. November 3, 2025.

## Moises De Paz Robles, 57



De Paz Robles was found guilty of the continuous sexual abuse of a child under the age of 14. In November 2024, a 12-year-old girl told her school counselor that De Paz Robles, a relative, had been sexually assaulting her for years. She said the abuse started when she was about 5 years old. Prosecutors: Katherine Messina, Victoria Lydahl. Investigator: Clint Leach. Victim Coordinator: Laura Medina. November 5, 2025.

# In Our Community

Our staff frequently meets with community groups in Tarrant County and across Texas. Here's some of the recent speaking events by DA staffers.



ADA Matt Rivers was included in "Bad Sports: When Fans Turn Violent," part of CNN's "The Whole Story with Anderson Cooper." He was on the show because he prosecuted a case where Marvin Rodriguez, a tailgater at a Dallas Cowboys home game in October 2015, shot and killed Richard Sells, a fellow tailgater, after the Cowboys lost to the New England Patriots.

ADA Sydney Brock was invited to speak to AP English classes at Paschal High School after a PHS teacher served on her jury panel in May. She explained the art of persuasion and how words matter during jury selection, highlighting our office's commitment to educating the community on the criminal justice system.

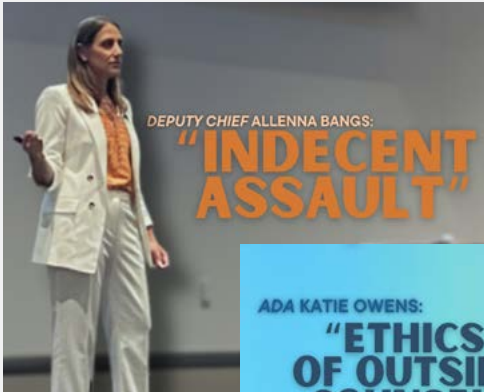


Our Elder Financial Fraud team members — Investigators Kyle Truly and Dara Couch and ADA Nathan Martin — work hard to let people know about scams that target their pocketbooks. They displayed their new signs at the Empowering Seniors Expo in October.



# In Our Community

Six of our prosecutors — Dale Smith, Tori Ford Oblon, Allenna Bangs, Katie Owens, Mark Kratovil, and Nathan Martin — spoke at the Texas District & County Attorneys Association Annual Criminal and Civil Law Conference, strengthening our commitment to justice.



DA Phil Sorrells spoke to graduates at the 2025 Fall Citizen Prosecutor Academy before handing out certificates showing that they completed the 11-week class.

# In Our Community



ADA Kim D'Avignon talked at the Monster Mash, highlighting the vital partnership between our office and The Women's Center in prosecuting sexually based offenses.

ADA Zach Ashford spoke with students at a University of Texas in Austin job fair about what it's like to fight for justice every day in the courtroom.



ADA Stuart Neal, who heads the Juvenile Unit, explained the differences between juvenile justice and the adult system to soon-to-be detectives at the Tarrant County College Law Enforcement Academy.

# In Our Community

ADA Chase Payne and Deputy Chief Allenna Bangs joined the celebration for SafeHaven of Tarrant County changing its name to The Archway. The organization, a key partner of ours, remains dedicated to helping those facing domestic violence. The name change represents a new chapter in their mission to help those in need. FWPD Victim Advocate Shelby Hopson, JPS RN Marianne Contreras, and The Archway CEO Kathryn Jacob joined in this photo.



## Recognition



Congratulations to DA Investigator Jose “Joe” Carrizal for being honored with the Homeland Security Investigations Task Force Officer of the Year.

Carrizal has been a key player in the investigation and apprehension of some of the most violent criminals in Tarrant County in recent years.

“Joe Carrizal embodies the highest standards of public service and partnership. His reliability and professionalism have made him an essential part of the HSI mission,” a Homeland Security Investigations press release announcing the award stated. “Though he never seeks the spotlight, his contributions have had a direct impact on public safety.”



# Citizen Prosecutor Academy

Congratulations to the most recent graduates of our Citizen Prosecutor Academy!

This group, the Fall 2025 Academy, spent the past three months learning about our criminal justice system in Tarrant County.

If you'd like to follow in their footsteps, our office's next Citizen Prosecutor Academy is in the Spring of 2026.

You will learn about every step of prosecution, and you'll get an insider's perspective on how the system works. Assistant District Attorneys and Investigators teach the classes. And you get to tour the Tarrant County Corrections Center.

Here's what some recent graduates said about the program:



*"I'm so glad I was part of the CPA! I feel like a more informed citizen now."*

*"I will definitely recommend to others. This helps us all."*

*"The jail is much cleaner than I expected."*

*"I wanted to learn a lot, and I did!"*

You can sign up for the Spring class that runs from March 5 to May 14 in 2026. Classes meet on Thursdays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and there's no cost. The deadline to apply is Friday, January 30, 2026.

For more information about the program, call 817-884-1400 or go online to [cda.tarrantcountytx.gov](https://cda.tarrantcountytx.gov) and click on the Community tab. You can apply online to participate.

[Online Application](#)



## Editorial

DA Communications Officer Anna Tinsley Williams wrote and compiled this newsletter.

Tarrant County Graphics Assistant Dakota Wyatt designed this newsletter.