

The DOCKET

Phil Sorrells - Tarrant County District Attorney

Summer 2026



A Message from DA Phil Sorrells



I came into this office with a clear mission: to seek justice in Tarrant County.

That purpose guides our work every day.

A core part of that mission is ensuring that every victim – and every defendant – receives justice in a timely manner.

My team and I have worked tirelessly to reduce the backlog of cases that has weighed heavily on both our court system and our jail population since COVID-19 forced the shutdown of courts in 2020.

Now, for the first time since the pandemic began, the number of pending cases has remained below 31,000 for several consecutive months – a significant milestone and a testament to the dedication of our prosecutors, investigators, and staff.

Before the pandemic, in February 2020, Tarrant County had 29,096 pending cases.

As the pandemic took hold, that number climbed steadily, ultimately peaking at 48,106 cases in August 2021.

When I took office in January 2023, the backlog stood at 38,626 cases.

We have steadily made progress in bringing that number down, even as new cases continue to be filed.

By February, the backlog stood at 30,900 pending cases. In March, it rose slightly to 30,921 but dropped again in April to 30,819. By May and June, the numbers fell further to 30,635 and then 30,403.

We keep taking cases to trial, working to reduce the backlog while ensuring each case receives the attention it deserves.

Every day, we fight for victims, for families, for public safety – and for justice.

Together, we are making a difference.

Don't Be the Next Victim

Be careful.

That's the warning District Attorney Phil Sorrells is giving to older adults.

A long-running international gold scam – a scheme designed to drain victims of their life savings and leave them with nothing – is targeting seniors.

"People have lost everything," Sorrells said. "Don't be the next victim."

Law enforcement seized more than \$130 million in gold tied to this criminal network. Around two dozen operatives have been indicted in Tarrant County for roles ranging from couriers who collect gold or cash from elderly victims to jewelry store owners who melt down stolen gold and convert it into bangles that are smuggled overseas.

The scheme typically begins in overseas call centers – primarily in India – where scammers contact older adults across Tarrant County and the United States. They falsely claim the victim's bank account, Social Security number, or personal information has been compromised.

Once the victim is frightened, scammers instruct them to withdraw most or all their money. They even coach victims on what to say to bank employees or family members to avoid raising suspicion.

Victims are then told to purchase gold bars, buy bitcoin, or simply withdraw most of their money.

Next, couriers posing as federal agents arrive in person to secure the gold, cryptocurrency, or cash, promising to keep it safe. Once the victim hands it over, the money is gone.

Some of the stolen gold is funneled to jewelry stores or refineries, melted down, and sold, or



converted into jewelry that is shipped overseas or sold for profit. One Texas victim lost \$2 million.

Sorrells warns everyone:

- Don't provide financial information over the phone.
- Law enforcement will never ask for gold, cash, or cryptocurrency.
- If you receive a suspicious call, hang up and contact your bank directly.

"This is a ruthless, organized criminal enterprise," Sorrells said. "If you receive a call claiming your accounts are compromised, it is a lie. Do not withdraw money. Do not hand anything over."

To help us maintain a complete list of complaints, we ask anyone who already has been a victim of this scheme to contact the Collin County Sheriff's Office Cyber Crimes Unit at CCSOScam@collincountytx.gov or call the non-emergency line at 972-547-5350 to file a report.

Justice For Noel



The search for 6-year-old Noel Rodriguez-Alvarez is finally over. In mid-May – more than 3 ½ years after he was last seen alive – investigators unearthed human remains at the boy’s former home in Everman, in a quiet neighborhood on the 3700 block of Wisteria Drive.

The Tarrant County Medical Examiner’s Office confirmed through dental records that the remains belonged to Noel, the child whose disappearance has haunted North Texans since 2023.

“This case has weighed heavily on our community from the beginning,” District Attorney Phil Sorrells said. “Noel was a child whose life mattered. He deserved protection, care, and love.”

“Instead, he became the victim of an unthinkable crime.”

A Missing Child

Noel, who was born with developmental and physical disabilities, was last seen in the fall of 2022.

Everman police say his mother, Cindy Rodriguez, was abusive and deprived Noel of food and water because she did not want to change his diapers. She called Noel evil and a demon.

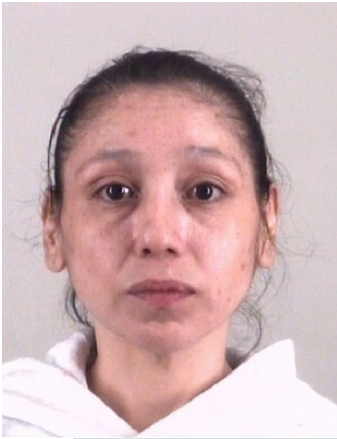
When Everman police conducted a welfare check in March 2023, they were told Noel was living with his biological father in Mexico. That wasn’t true.

Within days, Rodriguez and her husband, Arshdeep Singh, boarded a flight to India with six of her children.

Police have long said Noel, who was not on the flight to India with his family, was presumed dead.

Rodriguez, 41, was indicted on a charge of capital murder.

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An Evolving Case

In July 2025, FBI officials announced they added Rodriguez to their Ten Most Wanted List.

The next month, she was extradited from India and booked into the Tarrant County Jail.

By April 2026, Rodriguez was found incompetent to stand trial and an order was signed to send her to a state hospital for restoration.

Sorrells said he believes treatment will help Rodriguez regain competency.

"She will stand trial for this," he said.

The Discovery on Wisteria Drive

The discovery of Noel's body is the result of a coordinated effort between our office, the FBI, the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office, and the Everman Police Department.

Each agency played a vital role in bringing us to this moment.

Assistant District Attorneys Rose Anna Salinas and Ashlea Deener are prosecuting the case.

"Our focus is the successful prosecution of Cindy Rodriguez," Sorrells said. "We owe it to Noel and to our community to hold her accountable."

"We are seeking justice for Noel."



Empowering Survivors

Supporting crime victims isn't just part of our mission. It's at the heart of everything we do.

We understand how overwhelming it can be for victims to navigate the criminal justice system, and no one should ever have to face that process alone. That's why our Victim Assistance Coordinators (VACs) stand with them from the beginning of a case to the end, offering guidance, compassion, and unwavering support.

On April 14, Tarrant County Judge Tim O'Hare presented a proclamation recognizing National Crime Victims' Rights Week to District Attorney Phil Sorrells and our VACs.

"With the support of their communities and victim service providers, survivors are empowered to face their grief, loss, fear, and anger without judgment," the proclamation stated.

One week later, many in our office gathered at the Tarrant County College Trinity River Campus to honor crime victims and survivors and to raise awareness about victims' rights.

This event served to "reaffirm our shared commitment to justice, dignity, and support for those impacted by crime," First Assistant DA Robb Catalano said. "This gathering is a powerful reminder that justice is not pursued in isolation. It is built through collaboration, compassion, and unwavering dedication to doing what is right."



"Justice calls for us to work together and create a network of support that is strong, responsive, and helpful for the victims of crime."

The event was hosted in partnership with our Victim Services Unit, the Tarrant County Sheriff's Victim Services, and the Tarrant County College Victim Assistance Unit.

Speakers included Assistant DAs Kim D'Avignon and Emily Dixon, DA Investigator Dara De Wall, Victim Advocate Carma Anderson, and Victim Services Director Christi Garcia.

Drawing on her years as a prosecutor, D'Avignon shared how deeply she has come to understand the challenges victims face when navigating the justice system. She continues to be inspired by "the resilience, the bravery, the absolute compassion I have seen in the courtroom from victims and survivors who have suffered losses that I can't even imagine."

"I am proud to represent victims," she said.



Honoring the Fallen

Twenty-two names.

Each one is carved into stone.

And each one represents a life given in service to Tarrant County.

At a May 1 ceremony, District Attorney Phil Sorrells stood with County Judge Tim O'Hare and community members to honor the officers whose stories now live on at the Tarrant County Law Enforcement Memorial.

Sorrells reflected on the profound role law enforcement plays, often stepping into people's lives in their darkest moments.



"In my office, we know that every case begins with someone willing to answer that call," he said. "Before a prosecutor ever stands in a courtroom, before a jury ever hears the evidence, before a victim's voice is heard in the justice system, there is usually an officer who responded, investigated, protected, comforted, and served."

Sorrells emphasized that the work officers do is difficult and too often underappreciated.

But it's essential.

"They chose a calling that required them to stand between order and chaos, between victims and violence, between the innocent and those who would do harm," he said. "As District Attorney, I know that public safety doesn't happen by accident."

"It's built by men and women with courage. It's protected by people of conviction. And it's defended by those willing to sacrifice for people they may never meet and for a community that can never fully repay them."

The ceremony concluded with the reading of each name engraved on the Memorial, a solemn reminder of the lives lost and the legacy left behind.

Sorrells noted that every one of their lives mattered.

"Because of them, this community is safer, stronger, and more just," he said.

Victory Over Violence

We show up every year.

We show up for the Victory Over Violence walk/run that raises money for The Women's Center of Tarrant County because we believe in the center's anti-violence initiatives.

The Center, a key community partner to our office, is a lifeline for women, children, and men working to heal from the trauma of assault and violence. More than 140,000 people turn to The Women's Center every year.

Funds raised through the Victory Over Violence walk/run help keep their 24-hour crisis hotline open, provide counseling, strengthen education and prevention programs, and ensure that survivors never have to stand alone in a courtroom or a hospital room.

Our team – "State's Ready" (because we always are) – was prepared to show up in force at the event.

Unfortunately, the 29th Annual Victory Over Violence Walk/Run in Fort Worth was cancelled due to hazardous weather.

To honor the spirit of the day, we gathered some of our DA employees who planned to participate and took a makeup photo to show our continued support.

Rain or shine, we remain steadfast in our mission to #StandWithSurvivors – today and every day.



Officer Down

Lisa Randolph lowered her head into her hands as the sentence was read.

Life in prison.

That's what a Tarrant County jury gave De Aujalae Evans, the 27-year-old woman who pled guilty to intoxication manslaughter for the crash that killed 56-year-old Sgt. Billy Randolph nearly two years earlier.

"I want you to know, Ms. Evans – you just heard my husband's voice," Lisa Randolph told the defendant after the verdict was announced on March 30, 2026, adding that it had been 569 days since she heard his voice.

The Crash

On August 12, 2024, Sgt. Randolph, a 29-year veteran of the Fort Worth Police Department, was assisting with an early-morning crash investigation on I-35W. While standing outside his patrol vehicle, he was struck by Evans, who had driven the wrong way on an exit ramp.

The radio call went out: Officer down.

Evans continued driving for a quarter mile before stopping.

"She drove her car 100 yards past where Sgt. Billy Randolph lay bleeding out," Assistant District Attorney Brittane Hamilton, who prosecuted the case with Assistant District Attorney Lloyd Whelchel, told jurors.

Even after she stopped, Evans ran from the scene, showing clear signs of intoxication. Officers quickly apprehended her. They reported smelling alcohol on her breath and observing slurred speech, unsteady balance, and watery eyes.

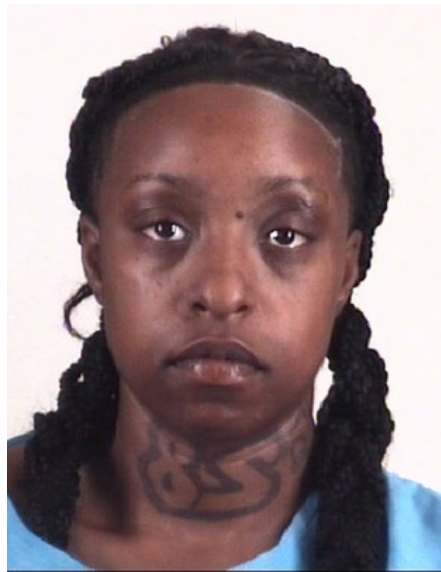
Evans admitted to drinking at least 10 shots of tequila before driving. Her blood alcohol concentration several hours after the accident measured 0.12%, well above the legal limit.

Officers didn't wait for an ambulance for Sgt. Randolph. They placed him in a patrol car and rushed him to the hospital. He later died from blunt-force head trauma.

"There have to be consequences to actions or nothing we do up here matters," Whelchel told the jury in closing arguments.

Sgt. Billy Randolph "died the way he lived – serving you," he said. "Give justice to the life he lived by sentencing her to life."

The jury did just that.



De Aujalae Evans

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A Life of Service

Former Fort Worth Police Chief Neil Noakes described Sgt. Randolph as “one of the good ones,” a leader with high standards who continued working the midnight shift for years after he was eligible to retire.

“Billy was one of a kind,” Noakes testified. “It was like winning the supervisor lottery.”

Current Police Chief Eddie Garcia sat beside Lisa Randolph in the courtroom as the verdict was read. More than a dozen of Sgt. Randolph’s family and friends wiped away tears when they heard it.

Lisa Randolph shared stories that moved jurors and many in the courtroom to tears.

Before every shift, she said she and her husband exchanged the same words.

“I love you,” they each said.

“Be careful,” she said.

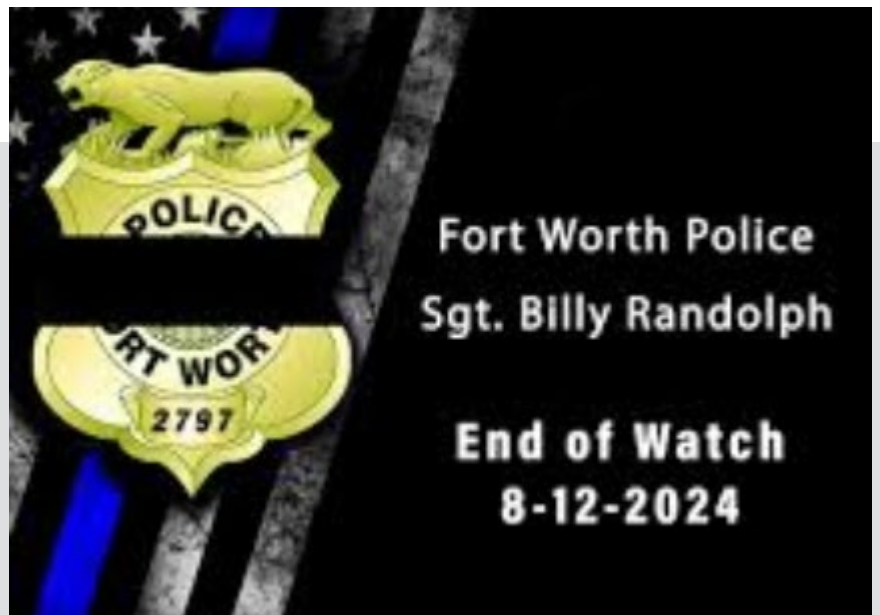
*“It’s a walk in the park, babe,” he would reply.
“I’ll be home in the morning to snuggle with you.”*

Those were the last words she ever heard him say.

DA Investigator Lester Couch and Victim Coordinators Carma Anderson and Christi Garcia also assisted on the case.



Sgt. Billy Randolph



A Calculated Murder

Elizabeth Hearn will never forget the last moments she spent with her oldest son.

Lying in a hospital bed, Matthew Stuart said: "I love you, Mama." She told him that she loved him too.

Stuart, 41, soon died at the hospital. He and his mother had both been shot by Reid Rothenberg, who also killed Hearn's ex-husband, George Nitsche.

Nearly four years later, on March 11, 2026, a Tarrant County jury found 37-year-old Rothenberg guilty of capital murder. He was automatically sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

"This was a calculated murder," Hearn tearfully told Rothenberg after the verdict was announced. "You tore my life apart."

On the night of April 10, 2022, Rothenberg kicked in the front door of a home on Ivy Hill Drive in Arlington and opened fire.

George Nitsche, 84, was lying on a couch in the back of the house when Rothenberg shot and killed him.

"That's his final resting place," Assistant District Attorney Matt Rivers, who prosecuted the case with Assistant District Attorney Tad Schmidt, told the jury. "He never saw it coming."

Rothenberg then chased Stuart and Hearn, 67, into the front yard, firing repeatedly.

Stuart was killed. Hearn survived the attack.

"Matt saved my life," Hearn said. "He was behind me and took (almost) all of the bullets."

Schmidt told the jury during closing arguments that this wasn't just a killing.

"This is a brutal homicide by someone who came to kill that night," he said

DA Investigator James Desmarais and DA Victim Coordinator Elizabeth Garcia also worked on this case.



Reid Rothenberg

"You tore my life apart."

"He never saw it coming."

Executions

Two convicted murderers from Tarrant County have been executed this year.

The First

More than a decade ago, on May 1, 2013, Cedric Ricks was arguing with Roxann Sanchez, his girlfriend, at her Bedford apartment.

Sanchez's two sons from a previous relationship – Anthony, 8, and Marcus, 12 – tried to break up the fight.

Ricks grabbed a kitchen knife and repeatedly stabbed Sanchez and Anthony, killing both. He also stabbed Marcus more than 20 times, but Marcus survived. Ricks left the apartment and drove to Oklahoma, where he was arrested.



A Tarrant County jury found him guilty of capital murder in 2014 and gave him the death penalty.

On March 11, 2026, Ricks, 51, was given a lethal dose of pentobarbital at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Huntsville Unit.

He was pronounced dead at 6:55 p.m.

The Second

Edward Busby abducted retired TCU professor Laura Lee Crane outside a Tom Thumb grocery store in Fort Worth on January 30, 2004.

He and his co-defendant, Kathleen Latimer, forced Crane, 77, into the trunk of her car. Busby stole more than \$775 from her using her credit cards and a blank check.

Crane suffocated in the trunk because her face was wrapped in 14 layers of duct tape. Her body was found a few days later in a wooded area near Davis, Oklahoma.

In 2005, a Tarrant County jury found Busby guilty of capital murder and gave him the death penalty. Busby's co-defendant was sentenced to life in prison in 2006.

Busby's execution previously had been delayed, and his latest execution date was up in the air, as court rulings addressed his claims of intellectual disability. Those claims were rejected.

The execution moved forward on the evening of Thursday, May 14, 2026.

That evening, Busby, 53, was given a lethal dose of pentobarbital at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Huntsville Unit. He was pronounced dead at 8:11 p.m.

Busby's execution was the 600th execution in Texas since the death penalty was reinstated in 1982.



Getting Life

From March 1 to June 1, five people in addition to De Aujalae Evans and Reid Rothenberg were sentenced to life in prison by Tarrant County juries or judges. Here's a look at their cases.



Larry Dewayne Reed, 31, pled guilty to capital murder and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. On January 25, 2024, Reed went to the Chatham Green Apartments in Arlington and shot and killed three people – Shannen Jones, 29, Monique Smith, 29, and Dreyon Glenn, 31. He fled the area, was arrested in Mississippi, and was returned to Tarrant County. Reed previously was in prison for the murder of Obeth Hernandez, 18. He was released about six weeks before the triple slaying. Prosecutors Tim Rodgers, Lucas Allan. Investigator Timothy Pinckney. Victim Coordinator Angela Stevens. March 6, 2026.



Craig Armstrong, 40, was found guilty of assaulting a family member by impeding breath and sexual assault. On August 2, 2023, Armstrong repeatedly assaulted and sexually assaulted his girlfriend as she tried to get away from him. She even was strangled to the point of unconsciousness during the brutal ordeal. During the punishment phase of the trial, the jury learned that Armstrong had assaulted 14 other women and sexually assaulted a child. Prosecutors Jaimie Jernigan, Courtney Mowdy. Investigators Kevin Hilliard, Kristina Gonzalez. Victim Coordinator Carrie Farley. March 13, 2026.



Jaquan Wright, 20, was found guilty of engaging in organized criminal activity and murder. He was given two life sentences in prison. Prosecutors said Wright, a documented member of the Ape Gang, was riding around with friends on November 30, 2022, hunting for rival gang members to avenge the murder of a friend. Wright opened fire on a crowd in the 1500 block of East Robert Street. Courtney Guy, 32, was killed. Prosecutors Dani Wojciak, Katie Owens. Investigator Steve Groppi. Victim Coordinator Laura Medina. April 17, 2026.



Jimmy Ray Horton, 62, was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault of a child. He was given two life sentences in prison. In July 2024, the victim told her mother that Horton had been sexually abusing her whenever she was in his bedroom. During the investigation, child sex abuse material was located on Horton's devices. The victim was 4 years old. Prosecutors Olivia Stoner, Sydney Brock. Investigator Brent Ezelle. Victim Coordinator Laura Medina. May 6, 2026.



Erik Erazo, 31, pled guilty in February to aggravated sexual assault of a child and was placed on probation. After he was sentenced to probation, Erazo failed to move to an approved address within 30 days as required. The court revoked his probation and sentenced him to life in prison. Prosecutors Tyler Coleman, Matt Hinojosa. Investigator Bradley Gantt. Victim Coordinator Cristina Rangel. May 26, 2026.

The Community Board

District Attorney Phil Sorrells and our staff frequently meet with groups throughout Tarrant County and Texas. Here's some of our recent community involvement.



Our first Citizen Prosecutor Academy of 2026 kicked off in March with First Assistant DA Robb Catalano welcoming participants and sharing how we pursue justice, support victims, and protect our community. In May, DA Sorrells closed out the Spring Academy by congratulating graduates on completing the 11 week program.



Assistant DAs Dale Smith, Allenna Bangs, Kim D'Avignon, and Charlie Boulware spoke at the Texas District and County Attorneys Association conference in Sugar Land, sharing their knowledge on prosecuting adult sexual assaults and homicides. We're thankful for their leadership and their dedication to strengthening our criminal justice system.

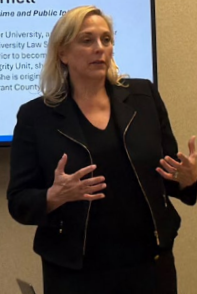
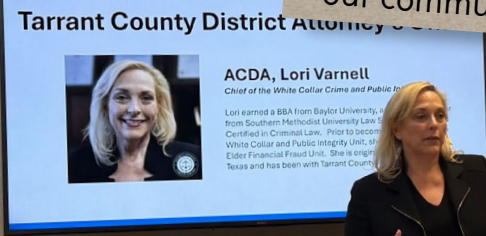
The Community Board



Several of our prosecutors took part in the Mid-Cities Celebrity Chefs event, a fundraiser supporting one of our community partners, The Archway. The Archway's mission is to provide safety, resources, and hope to women and children experiencing domestic abuse.



Sorrells and Assistant DA Lori Varnell met with the Colleyville Police Academy, sharing how our office fights for justice and works to protect our community.



The Community Board



Stuart Neal



Kyle Morris



Jessica Theriot

Juvenile prosecutors Stuart Neal, Kyle Morris, and Jessica Theriot taught a seminar on Juvenile Law to law enforcement officers across Tarrant County. The seminar was held in partnership with Alliance for Children, one of our community partners.

We're lucky to have interns in our office almost year-round. Each group brings fresh energy and a commitment to learning what it means to serve as a prosecutor. Our interns from TCU have been no exception. Here are some of the Horned Frogs who've been part of our team along with Deputy Chief Bill Vassar.



The Community Board



470 pairs of shoes. Each one belongs to a child or young adult who turned to North Texas Unbound Now for safety, support, and justice in 2025. Our Human Trafficking and Adult Sexual Assault Units stand with Unbound Now, honoring their tireless commitment to survivors and the hope they help restore.



Assistant DA Nathan Martin spoke at North Richland Hills' Elder Fraud Seminar, covering many frauds targeting seniors. Awareness and education are crucial when it comes to preventing these trending issues.

The Community Board



Assistant DA Tori Ford represented our office at the Robert O. Dawson Conference on Criminal Appeals in Austin, joining attorney Rob Daniel (left) and Court of Criminal Appeals Judge David Newell (right). We appreciate her dedication to our criminal justice system.

Assistant DA Stephanie Simpson spoke at the Crimes Against Women Conference in Dallas with crime survivor Ashleigh Persons. They gave an inside look into the case against Matthew Osborn, who attacked Ashleigh, and the impact trial preparation has on victims.



Recognition

Assistant DA Michael Ferry was appointed by Governor Greg Abbott to the 213th Judicial District Court in Tarrant County. District Attorney Phil Sorrells administered the oath of office to Ferry, swearing him in as a judge, on May 7, 2026.

Ferry served in the District Attorney's Office for more than five years, most recently in the Narcotics Unit. In 2024, he also became a Special Assistant United States Attorney.

He replaced Judge Chris Wolfe, who recently became District Judge for the Western District of Texas in the Waco Division.



DA Sorrells gave the oath of office to Michael Ferry.

Citizen Prosecutor Academy



Congratulations to our latest group of Citizen Prosecutor Academy graduates!

These 11 people sat through weekly classes where prosecutors, investigators, and staff explained how the criminal justice system works in Tarrant County – and how our office pursues justice.

In the end, District Attorney Phil Sorrells gave each of them certificates showing they completed the class.

"The class was more than expected," one person said.

"I was blown away by all the information that was shared with me," another noted.

"This was such an amazing experience and I'm glad to be a part of it," a third classmate said.

If you want to be part of the CPA community, sign up for the Fall 2026 session, which runs from September 3-November 12. Apply by August 7, 2026.

[Online Application](#)

Taking Care of Jurors

The Tanner Horner capital murder trial brought nationwide attention to our courthouse.

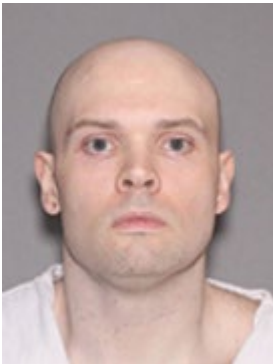
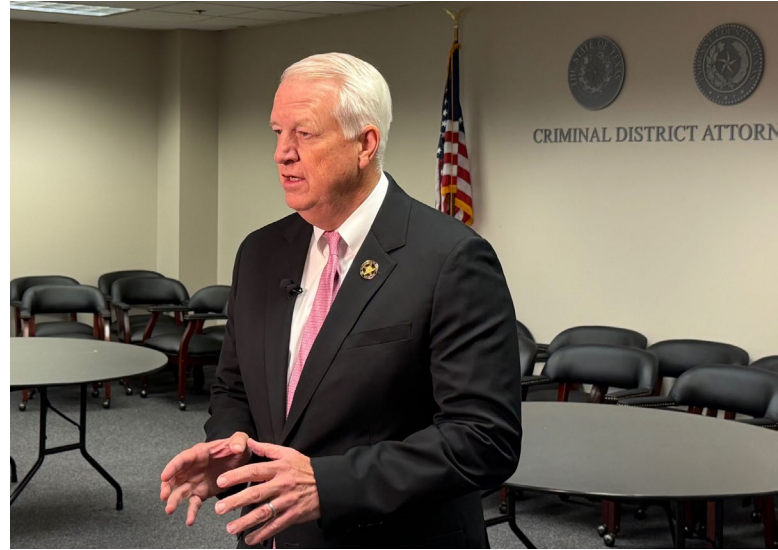
It was a Wise County case moved to Fort Worth to ensure that an impartial jury would hear the case.

A Tarrant County jury ultimately sentenced Tanner Horner, who pled guilty to killing 7-year-old Athena Strand, to the death penalty.

District Attorney Phil Sorrells recognized that our jurors, who sat through a month of testimony including the gruesome audio of Horner killing the young girl, might need counseling.

After the verdict was announced, our Victim Assistance Unit met with jurors and provided information about available counseling services for anyone who wanted or needed support.

“This was a Wise County case, but we had it in our courthouse,” Sorrells said. “Wise County prosecutors came and prosecuted it; a visiting judge came and heard the case. But citizens of our county sat and heard these horrific facts.”



Tanner Horner

“When they came for jury duty, they didn’t know they were going to hear a murder, see these horrific things,” Sorrells said. “They’re not prepared for that, and it’s going to create trauma.”

These jurors have up to six months to access approximately 10 hours of counseling services to help them process the difficult testimony and evidence they encountered.

“These are citizens of Tarrant County,” Sorrells said. “We want to make sure they are taken care of.”



Editorial

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

Tarrant County Graphics Assistant
Dakota Wyatt designed this newsletter.