The DOCKET

Phil Sorrells - Tarrant County District Attorney

Spring 2026

A Message from DA Phil Sorrells

One week.

Nine trials.

The results: Six defendants sentenced to a combined total of 222 years in prison. Two others were sentenced to life.

We prosecute tough trials – and this week in February was no exception.

Every day, our prosecutors step into the courtroom prepared to take on the hardest trials because justice demands courage and commitment.

In these February cases:

- One man fired an automatic rifle into a garage where children were playing, killing two youths in 2022.
- Another man strangled and killed his wife in 2019. Still another murdered his sister's boyfriend. And a woman shot and killed the man she was dating.
- Several men sexually abused family members, acquaintances, or strangers.
- One man shot and paralyzed his girlfriend's adult son.
- Another repeatedly smashed a glass blender over a man's head.

Behind every case is a victim. A family. A life forever changed.

This work is not easy. But it matters.

Every day we fight for victims, families, and a safer community.

And we are making a difference.

THIS WEEK'S TRIALS

Week of February 9, 2026

Search items by entering keyword(s) in the search field. The table will filter the results as you type. Click the header of a column to alphabetically sort the items. Click again to reverse the order of the sort.

Search:

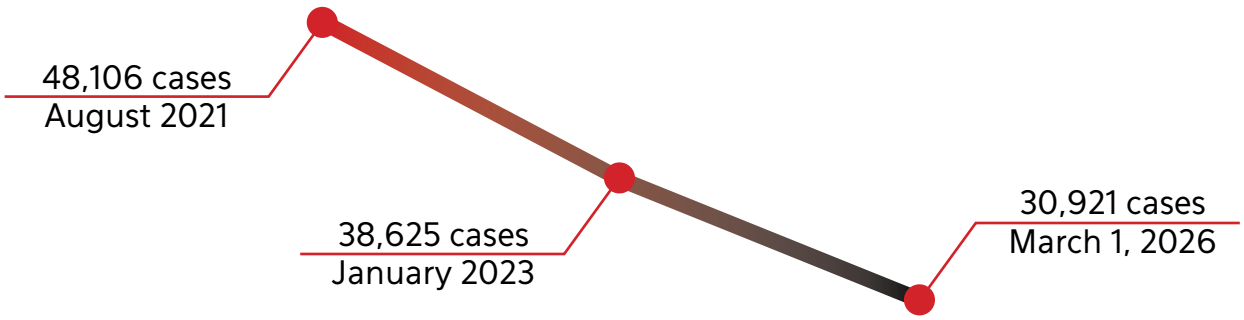
Court	Defendant	Charge	ADA	INV/VAC	Defense	Status
CDC1	Brown, Darius (1746460)	Murder	S Fant J Truglio	Briant Thomas Angela Stevens	Andrew Wilkerson Michael Campbell	15Y TDC
CDC2	BellJohnson, Anthony (1747138)	Cap Murder Multiple Prsns	B Vassar M Hogan	Scott Giovannelli Danny Nutt Imelda Lopez	Gary Smart Kevin Rousseau	Life + $20K Fine
CDC2 (IPV)	Leitao, Bridget (1890395)	Murder	J Banks C Payne	Victor Espino Nevarez Clara Salvatierra	Steve Gebhardt	Guilty Punishment-Defense Case
CDC3	Gardner, Bennie (1755795)	Sex Abuse Child Cont Vic U/14	D Bonanno E Ledford M.Rivers	Darran Gabbert Elizabeth Garcia	Lisa Mullen Alicia Cooper Megan Bradshaw	Jury Out
CDC4	Ward, Murphy (1905262)	Agg Aslt Date/ FM/H SBI w/WPN	D Elder M Mayfield	Brad Grantt Cristina Rangel	Robert Gill Preston Spivey	35Y TDC
213th						
297th	Gray, Hasani (1860613)	Agg Robbery	M Morris A Rhee	Brian Johnson Angela Stevens	Brian Salvant	42Y TDC Ct:2 Agg Aslt SBI
372nd	Boscan, Luis (1904872)	Agg Sexual Aslt Child	K Messina S Simpson	Lee Blaisdell Candace Burnett	Marcus Olds Eric Labovitz	40Y TDC
396th	Alkayyali, Tareq (1899580)	Murder	A Bangs M Jones	Steve Groppi Laura Medina	Kobby Warren	40Y TDC
432nd						
485th	Dalton, Donald (1809410)	Sex Abuse Child Cont Vic U/14	B Hamilton F Tomlin	Michael McGuire Imelda Lopez	Abe Factor Pamela Fernandez	50Y TDC

By the Numbers

DA Phil Sorrells is continuing his effort to shrink the criminal court caseload that swelled during the Covid era. The numbers show steady movement:

- The backlog reached its peak in August 2021 with 48,106 cases.
- By January 2023, the pending caseload dropped to 38,625.
- As of March 1, 2026, it fell further to 30,921.

Caseload Backlog



Read All About It

If you haven't checked out our 2025 Annual Report, you can still read it online.

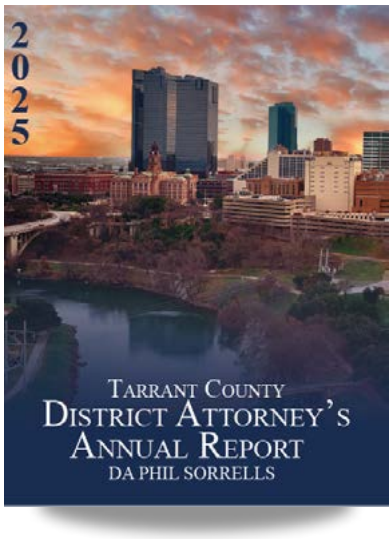
Learn about this office's accomplishments last year, such as the 34 defendants sentenced to life in prison and the one given the death penalty.

Read about some of our biggest trials and cases last year – and how some people are reacting to verdicts on social media.

A quick look at our 2025 numbers:

- More than 48,000 new cases were filed with this office.
- There were more than 320 jury trials.
- There were 201 briefs filed in appeals from convictions.
- And more than 2,600 public information requests were processed.

Read about the work our office did in 2025 at tinyurl.com/3jucpbnx.



"Give Them Some Justice"

Jamarrien Monroe, 17, was a superstar to his family.

They knew he had a great future ahead of him, so much to accomplish. He hadn't even turned 18 yet, gone to prom, or had the chance to go to college.

His cousin, Rayshard Javon Scott, 5, also was a shining light to those who loved him. He was excited about recently starting kindergarten, which he called "big boy" school. His future was just beginning, and his potential was limitless.

But their lives – and their futures – were stolen in 2022, when they were shot and killed while playing in the garage of a home in northwest Fort Worth.

Anthony Bell-Johnson

A Tarrant County jury found Anthony Bell-Johnson, 24, guilty of two counts of murder and gave him two life sentences in prison. The jury also ordered him to pay $20,000 in fines.

"This verdict does not make me feel better," Jamarrien's mother, Tijuana West, told Bell-Johnson after he was sentenced. "It makes me sad."

"When I look at you, I feel nothing."

Tarrant County Assistant District Attorneys Bill Vassar and Melinda Hogan prosecuted this case.

On August 28, 2022, Bell-Johnson and several acquaintances drove through a neighborhood in northwest Fort Worth and parked near a home on Steel Dust Drive.

For three minutes and 19 seconds, the group sat and watched the residence, where teenagers and children were playing in the garage with the door open.

Then Bell-Johnson and co-defendant Jay Shawn Nixon-Clark exited the vehicle wearing masks and carrying high-powered automatic rifles. They ran toward the house and opened fire into the open garage. Bell-Johnson fired his weapon at least 16 times.

After they finished shooting, the men returned to their vehicle and fled the scene. Five days later, the keys to the getaway car were found in Bell-Johnson's pocket.

Monroe and Scott were killed. Other family members, including Monroe's 18-month-old son, were injured.

"They executed two of those children," Hogan told the jury.

Vassar said that the evidence in this case was overwhelming.

"This family has been waiting for justice for 3 1/2 years," he said. "Let's give them some justice."

Nixon-Clark, now 20, was found guilty of capital murder in this case last year. He was sentenced to life in prison.

DA Investigators Scott Giovennelli and Danny Nutt, along with Victim Coordinator Imelda Lopez, also worked on this case.

"I Knew You Were Evil"

Esperanza Lopez wrestles daily with thoughts of her son's final moments.

Was he afraid?

Did he call out for her?

For nearly a week, Lopez and other loved ones of Michael Cantu and the family of Martin Hernandez Jr. sat in a Tarrant County courtroom, reliving the unimaginable as the man accused of killing both young men stood trial.

A jury found Alfredo Cantu Martinez, 45, guilty of capital murder for the 2024 shooting deaths of Cantu, 24, and Hernandez, 26. The verdict brought an automatic sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

"I want to thank the judge and jury for getting justice for my son, Michael Cantu," Lopez said after the verdict was read. "He can finally rest in peace."

The tragedy unfolded on April 23, 2024, after Hernandez picked up Martinez, his cousin, in Dallas. The two drove to Fort Worth, where they planned to visit several people, including Cantu.

What began as a conversation outside Cantu's home in a quiet alleyway ended in gunfire.

Hernandez and Cantu lay wounded in the alley. Martinez fled.

Martinez "stole the lives of Michael Cantu and Martin Hernandez by shooting them with a firearm," Tarrant County Assistant District Attorney Lauren Lawrence told jurors. She prosecuted the case alongside Assistant District Attorney D.J. Estes.

Cantu, shot in the chest, was pronounced dead at the scene. Hernandez, shot multiple times, was transported to a hospital where he later died and became an organ donor.

Martinez, who was seen by several civilian witnesses with the firearm trying to enter people's vehicles, was located by officers roughly a mile from the crime scene and was taken into custody.

"You have to ask yourself – would any of you do what he did that day?" Estes asked the jury during closing arguments. "The answer is no."

"We should all be frightened of that man," she said.

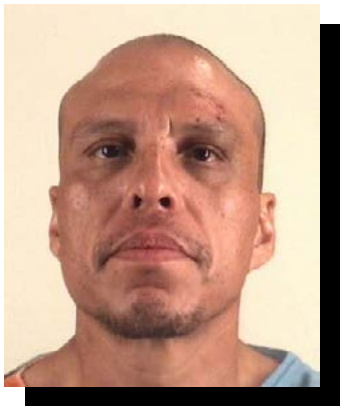
DA Investigator Ben Lopez and Victim Advocate Imelda Lopez also worked on this case, supporting families throughout the trial.

After the verdict, Esperanza Lopez and Hernandez's sister, Anita Favela, spoke about their loss.

Favela spoke through tears as she recounted her final moments with her brother, describing the instant he drew his last breath and the heartbreak of seeing him lying in his casket.

"His life was taken by a blood relative," she said as family members and some jurors wiped away tears. "You betrayed us in the most foul way possible."

Facing Martinez directly, she added: "You executed Martin and you executed his friend. … I knew you were evil."



Alfredo Cantu Martinez

Cold Cases

They thought time would protect them.

They were wrong.

Our office in January launched a Cold Case Task Force geared to unite local law enforcement agencies and our office in working to expose long-hidden offenders who thought they'd escaped justice.

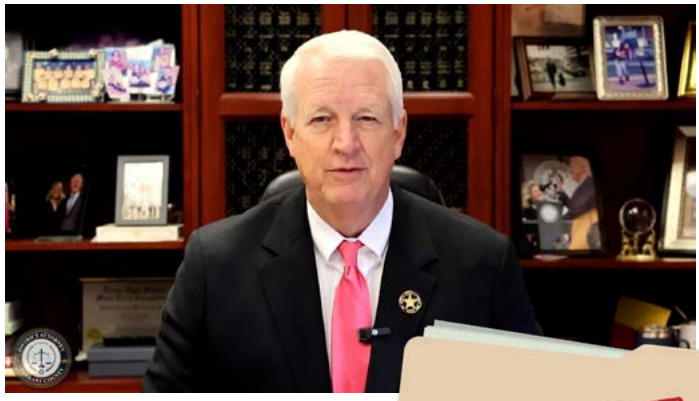
"Families with unsolved cases live with unanswered questions and with a sense of loss that never truly fades," District Attorney Phil Sorrells said. "For too long, many have waited without closure."

This task force of prosecutors and investigators will collaborate with law enforcement partners and forensic laboratories. They will use advances in DNA technology and digital forensics to identify offenders, hold them accountable, and bring long-awaited answers to victims' families.

"This task force isn't simply an investigative unit," Sorrells said. "It's a promise to victims, families, and Tarrant County residents that justice will always be pursued here."

"Every victim deserves justice, and every family deserves answers."

This is the right time to begin this task force, Assistant District Attorney Kim D'Avignon said.



"The clock is ticking on some of these cases. People are dying," she said. "If we are ever going to do this, this is the time."

"Maybe we solve one case. Maybe we solve ten," D'Avignon said. "Either way, we solve cases and there finally will be justice for some families."

This worked in one local case that went unsolved for 46 years.

In that case, Carla Walker, 17, was abducted, sexually assaulted, and strangled after a Western Hills High School dance in 1974. Her body was found three days later in a culvert near Benbrook Lake.

The case, closed with no resolution, was reopened in 2019. New advanced testing matched DNA from Glen McCurley to stains found on Carla Walker's clothes. He was arrested in 2020 and went to trial in 2021. Three days into the trial, McCurley pled guilty, and the judge sentenced him to life in prison. He died in prison less than two years later at the age of 80.

"Testing is the key to finding justice for families," Sorrells said. "This task force sends a clear message that we do not forget crime victims, and we will never stop fighting for justice."

Getting Life

From January 1 to March 1, four people in addition to Anthony Bell-Johnson and Alfredo Cantu Martinez were sentenced to life in prison by Tarrant County juries or judges. Here's a look at their cases.

Labertrand Bell, 20

Bell pled guilty to two charges of capital murder and was given two life sentences, one without the possibility of parole. On July 18, 2023, Bell went to buy drugs at a house in Fort Worth. Once there, Bell shot and killed two men inside the house – Jesus Rodriguez, 19, and Manuel Guzman, 19. Prior to police solving the case and apprehending Bell, he went on to commit a second capital murder in Forrest Hill. In that case, on August 7, 2023, Bell went to a house in Forrest Hill with two co-defendants to gamble with other individuals. While there, Bell and his co-defendants robbed the group and Bell shot and killed Corey Wallace, 45, before fleeing the scene. Prosecutors Lloyd Whelchel, Madeline Jones. Investigator Caleb Blank. Victim Coordinator Elizabeth Garcia. January 7, 2026.

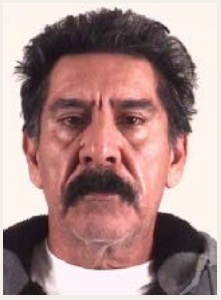
Michael Lee, 28

Lee was found guilty on two charges of indecency with a child by sexual contact. He was given two life sentences. On December 29, 2024, Lee met a 16-year-old girl online through a social networking app. They chatted and he encouraged the girl to meet him in person. In the early morning hours of December 30, 2024, she snuck out of her house to meet him. The next day, she made an outcry that Lee sexually assaulted her. Prosecutors Charlie Boulware, Erika Staif. Investigator Matt Hardy. Victim Coordinator Elizabeth Garcia. January 9, 2026.

Bridget Leitao, 45

Leitao was found guilty of murder. On May 27, 2024, Leitao and the 40-year-old man she was dating were driving to a grocery store when they began arguing about his absence earlier that day. During the argument, he turned the vehicle around and returned to the motel where they were staying. After arriving at the motel, both exited the vehicle. Leitao retrieved a firearm and pointed it at the victim. She lowered the weapon, then raised it again and fired, killing him. Prosecutors Jasmine Banks, Chase Payne. Investigator Victor Espino Nevarez. Victim Coordinator Clara Salvatierra. February 13, 2026.

Pablo Garcia, 64



Garcia was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault of a child, sexual performance by a child, and indecency with a child. The jury gave him eight life sentences in prison. On October 18, 2023, a boy reported that Garcia sexually assaulted him numerous times when he was between 4 and 15 years old. Once, when the boy said no, Garcia strangled him before sexually assaulting him. The boy said Garcia took photos and videos of him and threatened to show everyone the images if he told what was happening. The jury later learned that Garcia had previously sexually assaulted two other children over the years. Prosecutors Katherine Messina, David Tamez. Investigator Brian Johnson. Victim Coordinator Candace Burnett. February 27, 2026.

The Community Board

Our staff regularly meets with community organizations and speaks to media outlets throughout Tarrant County and across Texas. Here are some of the recent events where DA team members have presented or spoken.

Assistant DAs Dale Smith and Lloyd Whelchel were interviewed by the UK-based production house First Look TV that creates true crime TV shows. They spoke about the prosecution of Lamont Cousins, who was found guilty of shooting and killing three people – Veronica Del Jones, Virginia Lewis, and Clayton Turrentine – in 2020 over a car deal. A Tarrant County jury in 2025 sentenced Cousins to life in prison without parole.

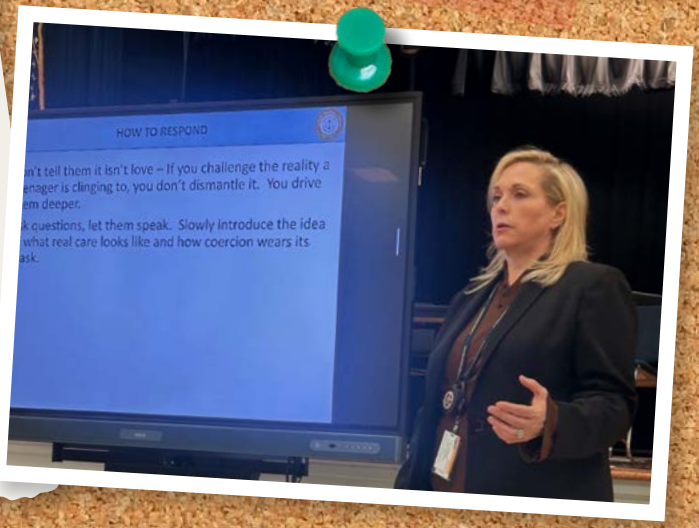
It's a new year with new scams, Assistant DA Nathan Martin told residents of Ladera at Tavolo Park in Fort Worth. If someone pressures you to withdraw money from your bank and deposit that cash into a Crypto ATM, it is a scam! Criminals pretend to be with your bank's Security Team or the Federal Trade Commission. These are imposters. Protect yourself and your bank account.

The Community Board

No dream is out of reach!

Students at Eastern Hills High School asked Assistant DA Jim Hudson how he found his way into the career he loves. He shared his own journey: long days of hard work, taking out loans to afford college and law school, and then years of sacrifice to pay every dollar back. His message was simple and powerful: No dream is out of reach.

Assistant DA Lori Varnell warned parents gathered at McLean Middle School about online predators and how they deliberately target kids, especially through platforms like Roblox and Discord. She stressed that students shouldn't share personal information, pictures, location, or daily routines. She also said they shouldn't send money, gift cards, or game currency to anyone. And she cautioned them to never allow conversations to be moved into private or hidden chats.



Deputy Chief Bill Vassar welcomed visiting Texas A&M University political science students to our office and shared how we work every day to serve the people of Tarrant County. We are proud to connect with the next generation of leaders and provide insight into the vital role our office plays in keeping our community safe.

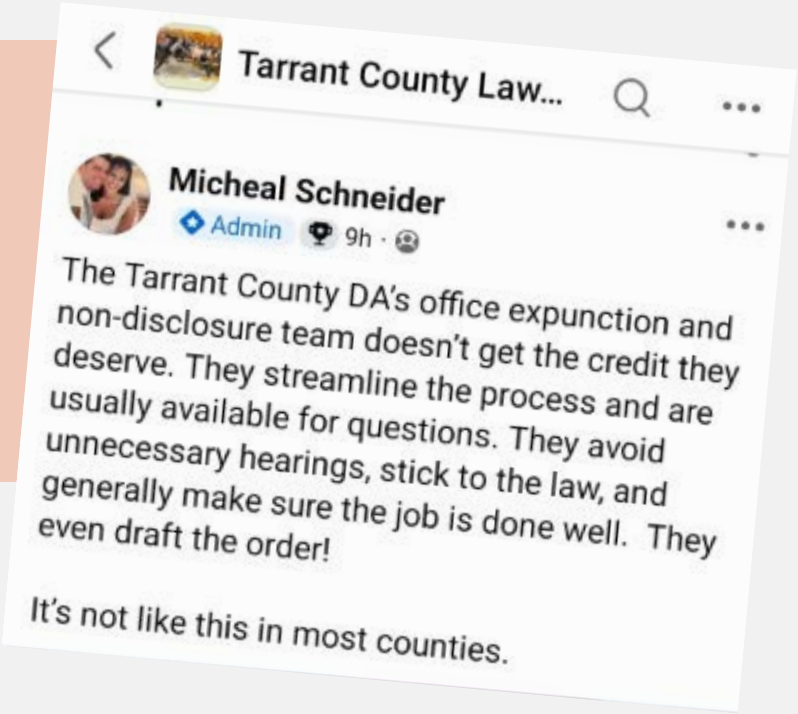
The Community Board

Trial Specialist Kim D'Avignon and Arlington Police Detective Donalson spoke about a years-long fight to stop a serial rapist during the Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Masterclass Summit by the California District Attorneys Association in Newport Beach, California. Thank you, Kim and Detective Donalson, for taking a leading role in educating professionals across the country and helping strengthen the criminal justice system.

The Alliance for Children is a key partner in our mission to protect the most vulnerable members of our community. We are honored to stand with them in this work and proud to support their annual fundraiser, "Let's Play Bingo," which helps make that mission possible.

Recognition

One of our divisions got a shout out on the Tarrant County Lawyers Facebook page: “The Tarrant County DA’s office expunction and non-disclosure team doesn’t get the credit they deserve. They streamline the process and are usually available for questions. They avoid unnecessary hearings, stick to the law, and generally make sure the job is done well. They even draft the order! It’s not like this in most counties.”



Three of our prosecutors were featured in the February issue of the Texas Prosecutor, the official journal of the Texas District & County Attorneys Association. Assistant DAs Allenna Bangs and Chase Payne were mentioned for their work on the Tarrant County Intimate Partner Fatality Review team. Assistant DA Dan Cleveland was mentioned for his work on combatting motor vehicle crimes and working with the Tarrant Regional Auto Crimes Task Force.

Citizen Prosecutor Academy

Interested in learning how the criminal justice system works in Tarrant County?

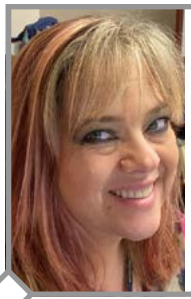
Join our office's Citizen Prosecutor Academy, which is offered twice each year. Our Spring class is already underway, but you can go ahead and submit your application for our Fall class!

Participants get a behind-the-scenes look at every stage of the prosecution process and learn firsthand how the system operates. Classes are taught by Assistant District Attorneys and Investigators, and participants even can tour the Tarrant County Corrections Center.

Classes meet on Thursdays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and there's no cost to attend. Apply now to be part of this unique educational experience! The Fall CPA will run from September 3 to November 12.

For more information about the program, call 817-884-1400 or go online to cda.tarrantcounty.com 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.