



**Sharen Wilson, Criminal District Attorney**

[cda.tarrantcounty.com](http://cda.tarrantcounty.com)

**SPRING 2019**

# The Docket



In our office, we consider hundreds of child abuse cases each year. Our Special Victims unit is a team of prosecutors specially-trained to handle the unique and highly sensitive challenges of crimes involving our community's most vulnerable victims: children, the elderly and disabled.

In a recent child sex abuse case prosecuted by our office, a seven-and-a-half-year old boy was sexually assaulted by his mother's live-in boyfriend on several occasions. Once, the mom was going to run an errand and the child begged her to let him go to the store with her. Mom unknowingly said she would be back quickly and that the child needed to stay at the house with Mom's live-in boyfriend. Later the child described acts of sexual abuse to his mother and she immediately reported what her son said to the police.

In child abuse cases, the victim is interviewed by a highly-skilled and -trained forensic interviewer. The forensic interview is a fact-finding conversation where the trained professional asks non-leading questions. Forensic interviewers are trained in child development and linguistics, which allows them to communicate with children of all ages and at all stages of development. Children who are victims of sexual abuse also receive a comprehensive medical exam to make sure their bodies are okay, and to receive treatment if necessary. This child was referred to Cook Children's Hospital for examination following his forensic interview.

At trial, the now ten-year-old child appeared for court dressed smartly in a button down and bow tie. The child's courage and demeanor had a profound effect on the people in the courtroom – including our prosecutors. He testified fearlessly to the multiple sex acts he was forced to endure. At the conclusion of the trial, the twelve jurors stood up for the victim and sentenced the defendant to 47½ years in prison for continuous sexual abuse of a child. After trial, jurors told prosecutors the extra seven-and-a-half-years were to honor the victim, because he was seven-and-a-half when the abuse started.

April is National Child Abuse Month, and Texas State Law requires that anyone "having cause to believe that a child's physical, mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect" MUST report the cause immediately. Failure to report child abuse is a misdemeanor punishable by law.

Suspected child abuse is not something anyone should ever keep quiet or "mind their own business." If you suspect a child you know may be abused, please make a report. If a child confides in you, believe the child and let law enforcement, medical, and forensic experts sort out the facts.

You can make a report by calling the Texas Department of Family & Protective Service hotline at 1.800.252.5400, report online at [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org), or contact your local police department. If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Sincerely,



*A note to one of our Special Victims attorneys from the victim in a recently prosecuted child abuse case.*

## EXPERTISE BY REQUEST

One of the most critical tools in fighting crime in our community is ongoing public education. Our attorneys, investigators, and staff are available to speak to your school, business, club or other organization on almost 70 different topics of interest, from child abuse prevention to bullying to financial fraud. In 2018 alone, our experts participated in 440 speaking engagements around the region.

To request an expert speaker for your upcoming meeting or event, please contact our Community Outreach Coordinator, Amy Bearden, at 817.884.3126 or [AHBearden@tarrantcountytx.gov](mailto:AHBearden@tarrantcountytx.gov) for more information.



## BACK TO CLASS

Our Spring 2019 Citizen Prosecutor Academy classes are underway, and we are already taking applications for the Fall. This 11-week program gives residents an in-depth look at the divisions of this office, and the cases we handle on the community's behalf.

Each class is led by one of our attorneys or investigators, reviewing each step of the prosecutorial process, from when a case is filed by law enforcement, through its disposition. Participants also have the opportunity to attend a tour of the Tarrant County Jail, and to observe a criminal trial in progress.

Classes meet on Thursdays, and are held at the Tim Curry Criminal Justice Center in downtown Fort Worth. If you are interested in learning more about our Citizen Prosecutor Academy or applying for Fall 2019, please visit our website at [cda.tarrantcounty.com](http://cda.tarrantcounty.com).

*Pictured:  
CDA Wilson discusses  
current events with  
our Spring 2019 class  
participants.*



**HEALTH & LIFESTYLE  
FOR BOOMERS, SENIORS & CAREGIVERS**

*Our elder financial fraud attorneys and investigators will  
be on hand at this year's Senior Synergy on May 9th!  
For more information, please check out:  
<https://www.facebook.com/SeniorSynergyExpo/> or  
<http://www.seniorsynergyexpo.com>*

## BOARD CERTIFIED

Board certification is objective evidence of the expertise of the attorney who has met the requirements of certification - years of experience, references by other experts and passing a demanding exam. Since victims of crime are only represented by the prosecutors of the CDA office - it is vitally important that we be the best attorneys we can be. Board certification is proof that we are some of the top attorneys in Texas.

Two more of our attorneys recently achieved this honorable designation:

- Robin Dettmer, Prosecutor, Department of Family Protective Services – Child Welfare
- Lori Varnell, Prosecutor, Elder Financial Fraud – Criminal Law



Approximately 7% of attorneys licensed to practice in Texas have earned the right to be recognized as Board Certified specialists. There are 25 Board Certified attorneys among the 177 attorneys in our office. That's twice the state average!

## Recent Cases of Note

### *The State of Texas v. Rodolfo Arrellano*

Rodolfo Arrellano's case received national attention when in April 2016 he was charged with tying a concrete block around the neck of his estranged wife, Elizabeth, and throwing her off the Lake Worth bridge. Given the brutal circumstances, once the Capital Murder case was filed against Arrellano, the decision was made to seek the death penalty.

Arrellano vehemently denied any role in the crime, but after two years in prison and nearing his trial date, his attorneys contacted prosecutors to let them know he was willing to accept responsibility and plead guilty to Capital Murder in exchange for life in prison without parole.

The victim's family, who are raising the former couple's 4 young children, were given the opportunity to face Arrellano in court and give allocution statements about the tragedy he had committed against their beloved daughter, sister, and friend.

**Sentence:** Life in prison without parole

**Prosecutors:** Allenna Bangs, Kimberly D'Avignon

**CDA Investigator:** Jim Rizy; **CDA Victim Advocate:** Laura Flores

**Fort Worth Police Department:**

Detectives Jerry Cedillo & Ernie Pate

### *The State of Texas v. Kevin Ashley Parnell*

Kevin Ashley Parnell was charged with the September 2017 murder of Fort Worth resident Sammie Jones.

Parnell strongly disliked his stepdaughter's boyfriend, who was Jones' roommate. After a day of heavy drinking and sending the boyfriend threatening messages via Facebook and text, Parnell went to the house shared by Jones, Parnell's stepdaughter and her boyfriend. Jones, who Parnell did not know, answered the door and attempted to calm the irate Parnell. After a short verbal exchange, Parnell shot Jones and fled. Witnesses tried to render aid, but Jones died at the scene.

Due to many racial slurs used in his messages to the boyfriend, our office also requested a finding against Parnell based on bias or prejudice. Although it would not have legally affected the penalty range for 1st degree felony Murder and was not found by the jury, we felt the evidence was so compelling it must be included in the charges against Parnell.

**Sentence:** 46 years. 2 years in prison (for Tampering with Evidence)

**Prosecutors:** Tracey Kapsidelis, Ryan Hill

**CDA Investigators:** Chris LaChance, Jose Fonseca

**CDA Victim Advocate:** Laura Flores

**Fort Worth Police Department:** Detective J.W. Galloway