

The DOCKET

Sharen Wilson – Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney



Fall 2022



Numbers don't lie.

Domestic violence continues to be a major problem in our country, state, and our community.

In Texas, more than 40% of women and nearly 35% of men at some point have been victims of intimate partner violence, rape, or stalking. Across the country, one in three women and one in four men have been harmed by an intimate partner.

Family violence is the fifth most frequently committed crime in Tarrant County, with 1,593 pending cases in mid-September.

This is unacceptable.

This crime touches every corner of our community, no matter the victim's race, gender, income, religion, or neighborhood.

In 2016, I created a special team called Intimate Partner Violence to prosecute these offenders.

That year, there were 16 IPV homicides. By 2018, those homicides were down to seven. And in 2019, there were eight cases. Then COVID hit, and people were forced to stay home. In 2020, 19 adults and two unborn babies were killed by someone they loved or trusted. But by 2021, the number of IPV homicides dropped to seven, the same number of cases so far this year.

Even though that's an improvement, that's still too many deaths.

That's why this office created an annual educational campaign called Not in My County.

Our goal every October during National Domestic Violence Month is to spread the word on social media and beyond about how widespread domestic and family violence is – and that the number of cases is unacceptable.

We take these cases seriously. We prosecute them and seek the harshest sentences possible.

Domestic and family violence will not be tolerated here.

Not in My County.

Very truly yours,





Best Practices



Creating a better path to prosecution. Virtually teaching students about criminal justice.

Two programs in this office that reach those goals have been honored with 2022 Best Practices Awards by the Texas Association of Counties (TAC). Every two years, TAC recognizes innovative efforts to solve challenges facing local governments.



Prosecution of Adult Sexual Assaults

Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney Sharen Wilson created an Adult Sexual Assault prosecution team in November 2019. The goal was to take a new approach to prosecuting these cases, train law enforcement officers on how to handle these cases, improve how



Adult Sexual Assault Team

victims are treated, and create a better path to prosecution. This team adopted a new approach, the vertical prosecution of sexual assaults, and saw the number of cases true billed by grand juries increase by 18.5% since the team was created.

There has been a 9.7% increase in overall cold cases filed with this team. Between November 1, 2019, and December 31, 2021, 320 cases were filed with this prosecution team.

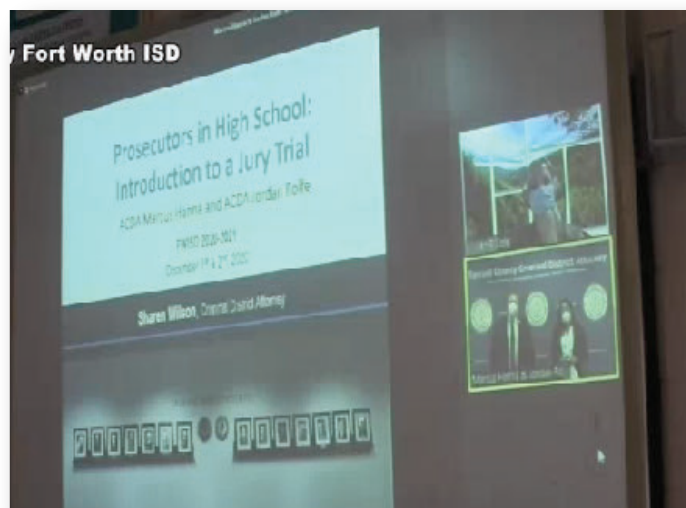
Prosecutors in High Schools

This office partnered with the Fort Worth Independent School District to teach high school students about the criminal justice system during the 2020-21 school year. Prosecutors, investigators, and staff members taught interactive classes over Zoom that were broadcast into multiple classrooms. Topics ranged from First Amendment Rights to Digital Forensics. The success of this program prompted expansion into the Crowley school district in 2021.

* * *

“These programs make a real difference in our community,” Sharen Wilson said.

TAC officials will present these awards during an October 11 Tarrant County Commissioners meeting. These programs also have been recognized by the National Association of Counties.



Prosecutors in High Schools Zoom



A Life Changing Experience



Leslie Eaton

Leslie Eaton had no idea that being chosen to serve on a Grand Jury would change her life.

But it did.

Eaton was chosen by Judge Robb Catalano in April 2021 to serve on one of Tarrant County's

two grand juries, which are made up of groups of citizens who evaluate evidence on felony cases and determine whether a person should be indicted.

"During this time, I discovered a passion I did not know I had for the for the criminal prosecution process, court-rooms, and criminal law," she said. "I was able to interact with the many different prosecutors that presented to us each day. Grand Jury felt like a big family, and I have to say I was a little teary eyed when it was over."

The experience made Eaton realize that she wanted to work for the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Office.

As she applied for every job she was qualified for, she also participated in the TCCDA's Citizen Prosecutor Academy, a 12-week class that teaches citizens about criminal justice in Tarrant County.

"I strongly encourage everyone I meet to apply and go through the class," she said. "The knowledge you gain by understanding what each area does, meeting all the unit chiefs, Investigators and ACDAs who present each week, along with getting to talk to CDA Sharen Wilson, was a very neat experience."

The class made Eaton more determined than ever to find a job at this office.

Her previous working experience was in the medical field, but she knew her skills could transfer to any business job. She had been staying home with her youngest child, who has autism, since 2009. As her son grew and became more independent, Eaton realized she was able to go back to work.

Finally, after months of applying for jobs, her persistence paid off. She accepted an offer to be a general office clerk for the Civil Division and her first day was January 24, 2022.

"I want others to know that the TCCDA's Office works hard daily to make sure justice is served to those who commit crimes and are guilty," Eaton said.

"They are also focused on the integrity of the office.

"I am very proud to say I work for the TCCDA Office and so thankful I have been given this new opportunity, a new career. I look forward to all the future holds."

Sea Cadets

A group of students in the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, a national youth leadership development organization, met



with TCCDA attorneys and staff for four days this summer to learn about the criminal justice system and how it works.

They listened to prosecutors talk about topics ranging from Elder Financial Fraud and Intimate Partner Violence to Adult Sexual Assault and Conviction Integrity. They even participated in a mock trial.

This program, sponsored by the U.S. Navy, is geared to build leaders of character by offering hands-on experience. These cadets, who mainly range in age from 13 to 18, are training to potentially become JAG officers who work with legal matters involving the military. This cadet program was created in 1962 to "create a favorable image of the Navy on the part of American youth."

"The ones that have interest in being lawyers, this gives them a taste of what it's like," said Lt. Abby Bounds, a municipal court judge in the city of Robert Lee, Texas, who is the Officer in Charge of this group. "Sharen Wilson and the open door she has is great."

Justice for a fallen officer

Nearly four years after undercover Fort Worth police officer Garrett Hull was killed in the line of duty, one of the people responsible for his death – Timothy Huff, 36 – was convicted of capital murder and sentenced to life in prison.



Timothy Huff

Officer Hull was killed September 14, 2018, during a confrontation with armed robbery suspects who had been targeting Hispanic-run bars.

Police had staked out the area where a robbery was planned at the Los Vaqueros bar. After robbing customers inside, three men –

Huff, Dacion Steptoe and Samuel Mayfield – came out, saw police, and ran in different directions.

Hull was among the officers who chased Steptoe. Steptoe fired at them; they fired back. Hull was shot in the head and rushed to the hospital, where he later died. Steptoe was shot and killed on site.

The other two suspects – Huff and Mayfield – were caught and charged with capital murder. Texas law allows a person to be criminally responsible for the actions of someone else when there was a conspiracy to commit one crime and another felony occurs.

"This case is textbook for how someone is guilty of capital murder even when they didn't pull the trigger," said Tarrant County Assistant Criminal District Attorney Tim Rodgers, who prosecuted the case with ACDA Lloyd Whelchel. "He's as guilty as if he pulled the trigger himself."

A Tarrant County jury on June 29, 2022, convicted Huff. He was automatically sentenced to life without parole.

Life Without Parole

A Tarrant County jury took about two hours August 5, 2022, to find Q'Juan Tiakei Holmes, 35, guilty of the 2017 capital murder of his girlfriend, Angela Gagne. He automatically was sentenced to life in prison without parole.



Q'Juan Tiakei Holmes

Tarrant County Assistant Criminal District Attorneys Marcus Hanna and Collin Ashworth told the jury that on June 4, 2017, Gagne, a 41-year-old mother of five, called 9-1-1 to report that her boyfriend was beating her. Six days later, Holmes and Gagne argued at her Fort Worth duplex while

Holmes' older brother, Xondadic Antonio Holmes, visited.

Q'Juan Holmes dragged Gagne into a spare bedroom and kept her there as he and his brother stole TVs and personal items. Two days later, during a welfare check, police found her body in a pool of blood – naked, brutally beaten and shot in the head four times – in that same room.

After the shooting, Q'Juan Holmes, who had been living with Gagne for a few weeks, took a bus to Florida. Police tracked him down and extradited him to Texas.



Teamwork

Victim Services professionals constantly are looking for better ways to help crime victims.

That’s why our office hosts quarterly meetings for Crime Victim Liaisons from local police departments and Victim Assistance Coordinators from our office. The focus of these meetings is to share best practices, discuss crime victim rights, and hear presentations from various prosecutors.



Marvina Robinson

“We believe collaborating with other victim service professionals will help keep citizens in Tarrant County safe,” said Allison Bowen, director of Victim Services.

Discussions at a meeting this summer focused on crime victim rights and protective orders in Tarrant County. The meeting was facilitated by Marvina Robinson, Assistant Criminal District Attorney and chief of our office’s Mental Health/Protective Orders Division. Attendees learned about legislative changes concerning protective orders from the last session. They also participated in interactive workgroups.

Victim Service professionals are crucial in Tarrant County, so much that our office was one of the first to staff a team of Victim Assistance Coordinators in the 1980s, before it was required by Texas law. Their work is key to the criminal justice system. They keep victims informed, work closely with prosecutors, provide court accompaniment, and support crime victims throughout the process.

Candidates: Follow the law

As we near the November 8 general election, it’s a good time to remind candidates to follow the rules.



Every election year, this office receives complaints about candidates. “We get five to six complaints every election cycle about people who are running

for office who do not meet residency requirements,” said Lloyd Whelchel, an assistant criminal district attorney who heads the White Collar/Public Integrity team.

Tarrant County isn’t alone.

Residency complaints are being reviewed in cities and counties across the country, addressing cases ranging from a Senate race in Warren County, North Carolina, to a City Council race in Trenton, New Jersey.

In Texas, similar complaints have drawn headlines even in the least populated county, Loving, where state election officials are looking into whether a county commissioner actually lives in that county or a nearby community.

In Tarrant County, there are more than 500 locally elected officials and each post has a requirement that candidates live in the district they represent.

“If you intend to run for office, talk to officials to see if you meet the residency requirement,” Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney Sharen Wilson said. “To be on the ballot, you have to honestly state where you live.”



Honors



Kristina Gonzales

Investigator Kristina Gonzalez was recognized by Texas Governor Greg Abbott for her work as a member of the Sexual Assault Survivors’ Task Force. “Your input will ensure survivors and their families throughout the Lone Star State continue to receive the support they need to heal and flourish,” according to a proclamation Governor Abbott signed.



Aulstin Gardiner



Sarah Brown

Hats off to ACDAs Aulstin Gardiner, the new president-elect, and Sarah Brown, the new member of the board of directors, for the Tarrant County Young Lawyers Association.



Matthew Jackson

Matthew Jackson is being honored with the Rising Star Award, one of the 2022 Alumni Legacy Awards from the Texas A&M University School of Law. The award recognizes graduates who made noteworthy contributions to the legal field and the community. Matthew is a 2013 Texas A&M Law School graduate.

Sharen Wilson received two key honors in September – the Colleen Colton Award from Guardianship Services, Inc. and the Lone Star Prosecutor Award from the Texas District & County Attorneys Association.



**Lyn Scott - GSI
Sharen Wilson**



**Sharen receives
Lone Star Prosecutor Award**

The Colleen Colton Award is given to someone who compassionately works to serve Tarrant County’s at-risk adults.

Wilson created the Elder Financial Fraud team in her office and collaborated on the Financial Exploitation Prevention Center with Guardianship Services, Inc. The EFF team prosecutes cases; the center is a network of partners dedicated to helping vulnerable adults who have been financially exploited. If you need help, call the Financial Exploitation Prevention Center at 817-720-6556.

Wilson was also honored in September with the Lone Star Prosecutor Award. Wilson – the first woman elected as Tarrant County’s Criminal District Attorney – was honored for her years-long work of seeking justice for victims. She has served on the TDCAA Board of Directors and on various committees for the board.

“Sharen routinely invites personnel from the smaller rural prosecutors’ offices surrounding Tarrant County to the in-house CLE training her office provides on ethics and other topics,” said Kriste Burnett, the Palo Pinto County DA who serves on the TDCAA nominations committee.

“I accepted these awards on behalf of those in my office and in our community who tirelessly work with me to seek justice for all,” Wilson said. “Thank you for recognizing the work we all do. We are working hard to make a difference and ensure that all victims receive justice.”