

The DOCKET

Phil Sorrells - District Attorney



Summer 2023



OFFICIAL JURY SUMMONS

TIME SENSITIVE

**Answer the call to duty.
We need you.**

Efficiency

Reducing the backlog of criminal cases from the Covid era

Enforcement

Shutting down a strip club breeding violence in the county

Accountability

Taking dangerous criminals off the streets with life sentences



Message from DA Phil Sorrells

We need you.

That's my message to Tarrant County residents.

We need you – all of you – to serve on juries.

Jury service might not sound exciting, but it's critical to ensure that justice is served in our community.

When a jury summons shows up in a mailbox, many people start thinking of ways to avoid it. Some people have even asked on social media for ways to get out of jury duty.

But here's the situation.

We need jurors who want to keep our community safe. We need impartial citizens who can find the facts and follow the law.

This issue is so important that my office shared a video and posts about it on social media during the first week of May, Jury Appreciation Week in Texas.

Just so you know, only a small number of those called for jury duty end up serving, according to data from Tarrant County Jury Services:

- 2022: 221,715 Tarrant County citizens were summoned; 67,202 were excused or disqualified; and 4,522 people served on a jury.
- 2021: 87,026 Tarrant County citizens were summoned; 26,284 were excused or disqualified; and 1,543 served on a jury. Covid restrictions were still affecting the court system this year.
- 2020: 75,425 Tarrant County citizens were summoned; 15,267 were excused or disqualified; and 910 served on a jury. Few trials were held after March due to Covid restrictions.

Jurors are privileged to learn about and help maintain public trust in the legal system. Serving on a jury promotes civic engagement.

When you receive a jury summons, please serve. We need you.

If you aren't willing to serve on a jury, then who will?



Efficiency



Since taking office on January 1, DA Sorrells has worked consistently to reduce the case backlog that dramatically grew under Covid restrictions. Here's an update on the numbers:

On January 1, 38,625 cases were pending in Tarrant County. By June 1, under DA Sorrells' leadership, the office reduced that number to 34,908. For perspective, the caseload was at its peak with 48,106 pending cases in August 2021.

Regarding the worst of the worst, 482 murder and capital murder cases were pending in our office on January 1. As of June 1, we resolved 91 of those homicide cases.

A Good Cause



Thank you to all the DA employees, family members, and friends who showed up April 15 for the Victory Over Violence 5K walk/run in Fort Worth. Our office is proud to support The Women's Center.

This year's annual walk/run raised money for the center's initiatives, such as trauma training, counseling, and a 24-hour crisis hotline. These programs are so important for survivors.

DA Sorrells said the Women's Center, which he toured in early June, is a vital partner helping us prosecute those who commit domestic violence.

Thank you to all the volunteers, sponsors, organizers, and participants. Together, we can make a difference.

An Honor

In late April, DA Sorrells traveled to Austin to swear in his good friend state Sen. Kelly Hancock, a North Richland Hills Republican, as “Governor for a Day.”

Texas Senate tradition calls for the President Pro Tempore, which Hancock was this year, to serve as temporary governor for one day when the Governor and Lieutenant Governor are out of state or unavailable.

After Hancock was sworn in April 29, he designated the day as “Donate Life Day” in Texas.



His goal is to raise awareness for the new National Donate Life Living Donor Registry and the need for living donors. Hancock successfully received a kidney transplant last year from a living donor, his son-in-law.

Sorrells said he was proud to play a small role in Hancock’s big day.

Enforcement

DA Sorrells is working to keep the community safe by suing a crime-infested strip club.

Temptations Cabaret, a strip club on Highway 80 West, has long been an epicenter of crime and violence; in fact, a Memorial Day weekend shooting left one dead.

The Tarrant County Sheriff’s Office received 247 calls for service at Temptations between 2020 and



2022. During that time frame, the sheriff’s office made 57 arrests for crimes including aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, discharging a firearm in a public place, murder, and unlawful carrying of a weapon.

On May 30, this office filed a public nuisance lawsuit against Temptations on behalf of the State of Texas. The goal: shut down the club.

On June 20, Tarrant County’s sexually oriented business license and review board revoked the operating permit for Temptations.

“As District Attorney, I am concerned about the escalation of criminal activities at Temptations Cabaret constituting a nuisance,” Sorrells said. “That is why I filed a lawsuit seeking injunctive relief to curtail this menace.”

“My number one priority is keeping our community safe,” he said. “Allowing Temptations to continue its operation is counterintuitive to this goal.”

We Serve

Population: 2.145 million

15th largest county in the U.S.

3rd largest in Texas

41 Municipalities

76 Law Enforcement Agencies

file cases with the Tarrant County DA.



Tarrant County is tough on crime.

If you break the law here, you will face the consequences.

That's what Phil Sorrells promised when he took office as Tarrant County's District Attorney. And that is what he delivers.

Under his leadership, six Tarrant County men recently were sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in prison:



Cameron Marble, 26, pled guilty to murdering David Allen Plotts, 26, in exchange for a life sentence in prison.



Plotts was shot during a home invasion robbery in June 2019, when masked intruders broke into the apartment he was

visiting. Police tracked down the intruders in the following days and arrested them. The court sentenced Marble to life in prison on May 18.



Eric Fobbs, 50, was found guilty by a jury for the sexual assault of a child and indecency with a child on June 20. He went to prison in 1994 on similar charges of sexual assault and indecency with a child. The jury sentenced Fobbs to life in prison on June 20.



Joseph Matthew Welborn, 31, pled guilty to injury to a child causing serious bodily injury regarding the death of his 10-week-old son, Christian.

Welborn was home alone with Christian on December 21, 2018.

When Christian's mother and grandfather returned home from a shopping trip, they found the baby unresponsive, pale, and unconscious. They called the police. The baby was taken to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Prosecutors told the jury that Welborn slammed the baby's head onto a hard surface and then made up several stories of how the baby could have been hurt. An autopsy showed Christian suffered blunt force trauma to the head and had two complex skull fractures.

On June 1, the jury sentenced Welborn to life in prison.



Jarvis Franklin, 40, pled guilty to murdering his girlfriend, Karen Finney, in 2019.

Franklin, who had an extensive criminal history, shot Finney several times, including twice in the face, at her east Fort Worth home. Three of

Finney's four children were home at the time.

"He cannot ever be on the streets of this county – or anywhere else," Assistant District Attorney Allenna Bangs told the court during the sentencing hearing.

The court sentenced Franklin to life in prison on May 10.

After the sentencing, Finney's family told Franklin the children are traumatized and have night tremors.

"You left my cousins without a mother," one relative said. "You don't deserve another minute to breathe."



Tyrone Coleman, 40, took a woman to a secluded location to assault her on August 26, 2021. She tried to escape his car, but he trapped her arm in the car window and ran over her.

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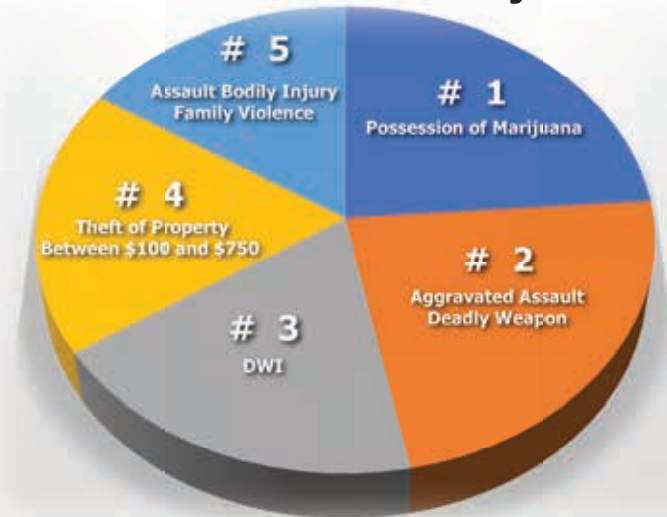
Coleman has a 15-year history of arrests and investigations for sexual assault where he similarly took women to secluded locations to assault them. He previously was convicted in 2017 of aggravated sexual assault.

On April 28, the jury convicted and sentenced Coleman to life in prison for aggravated assault and 25 years in prison for aggravated robbery.



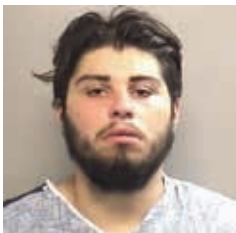
Keith Anthony Hubbard, 49, was found guilty of continuous sexual abuse and indecency with a child between 2013 and 2018. The court sentenced him to life in prison without the possibility of parole on March 16.

Top 5 Most Committed Crimes in Tarrant County



Taking the lead

Our office was proud to take the lead in representing Texas in the federal government’s appeal of United States v. Rahimi.



In this case, **Zackey Rahimi** was involved in five shootings in and around Arlington from December 2020 to January 2021. During this time, he was under a protective order obtained by Tarrant County. The order found that Rahimi committed domestic violence and was a threat to his child’s mother. It also prevented Rahimi from having a gun – and he was warned that possessing one could be a felony under federal law. In September 2021, Rahimi pled guilty to a federal indictment and was sentenced to prison. Rahimi’s conviction was upheld by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

After he asked for a rehearing, the U.S. Supreme Court issued Bruen, a ruling that changed the way Second Amendment challenges are analyzed. Considering Bruen, the Fifth Circuit ruled that the federal statute preventing domestic violence offenders under protective orders from possessing guns is unconstitutional.

The federal government appealed that decision to the Supreme Court.



In April, our office filed an amicus brief arguing that the Fifth Circuit’s decision puts domestic violence victims at even more risk. SafeHaven of Tarrant County, as well as more than a dozen district attorneys in Texas, cosigned the brief. On June 30, 2023, The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case.

We are honored to give those victims a voice.

“For those who are subject to a protective order, the overwhelming evidence establishes that their firearms are not for self-defense,” our brief stated. “They are not being kept for a lawful purpose. They are weapons of intimidation, fear, and control.”



Final Resolution



The courtroom was quiet when Anthony Shaw Young uttered one word:

“Guilty.”

Young, 45, pled guilty to killing his girlfriend Laurel Schick in 2021. On March 22, he was sentenced to 40 years in prison for the crime.

Young and Schick, 65, planned to marry the weekend before January 25, 2021; however, they called off the wedding. On January 25, neighbors at their Hurst apartment complex said they heard yelling and the sound of furniture and glass being broken.

Police were asked to do a welfare check. They

found broken furniture and glass – and Schick’s bruised and bloody body under a couch.

Several members of Schick’s family attended the sentencing because they wanted to deliver a message to Young.

“You took an old woman and used her ... beat the hell out of her,” said Sam McElwee, one of Schick’s sons, after Young was sentenced to prison.

His brother Thomas McElwee echoed: “What did she do that was so bad that you had to bash her head in and cut her throat?”

And a letter from Schick’s younger brother Paul was read in court. He described his sister as having a “beautiful soul” and said his heart is broken.

“I ache inside that I was unable to protect her,” he said.

Graduates



Congratulations to the 21st graduating class of the Citizen Prosecutor Academy.

In May, 23 people graduated from this class, the first taught since DA Sorrells took office.

Our office is now getting ready for the Fall 2023 academy, which meets every Thursday night for 11 weeks. Prosecutors, staff, and investigators explain the Tarrant County criminal justice system, including topics ranging from Elder Financial Fraud and Adult Sexual Assault to Conviction Integrity and Intimate Partner Violence.

If you’re interested in signing up for the Fall class, call our office for information at (817) 884-1400.



In Our Community

DA Sorrells continues to build strong bonds in our community.



As he speaks to local organizations, Sorrells boosts trust in the criminal justice system, shares information about the DA's Office, and empowers community members.

He's talking about what he has done so far in the DA's Office, and what he still plans to do.



Sorrells also tours facilities such as the Alliance for Children and SafeHaven, and attends several annual memorial services for law enforcement officers.

"We can never forget the sacrifice of those who serve," he said.

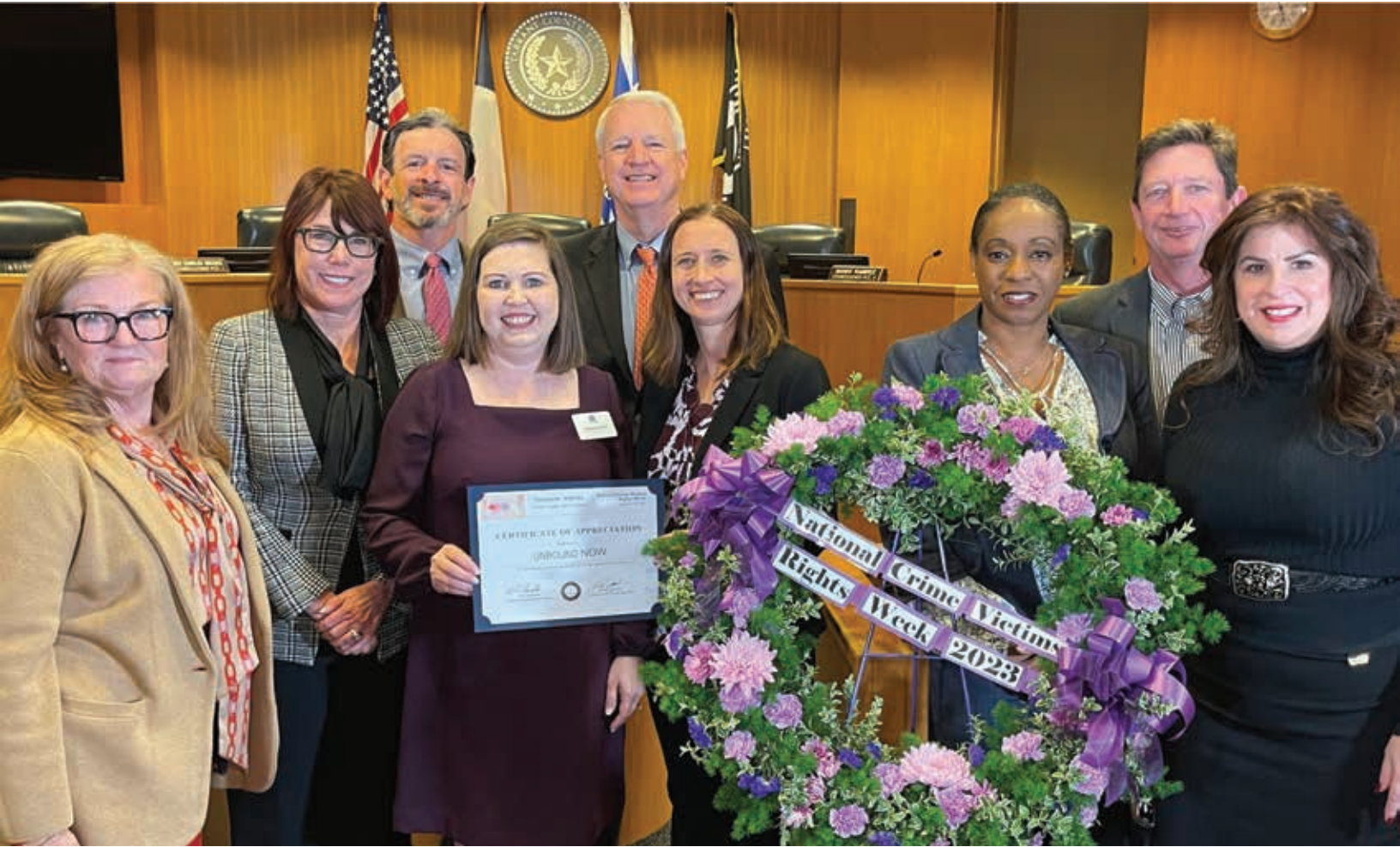
Sorrells is just one of many people in our office talking to groups in the community.

First Assistant Robb Catalano has spoken to a variety of groups, including our Citizen Prosecutor Academy and Bench Bar.

Other prosecutors addressed groups including the Parker County Sexual Assault Response Team, an SMU law school class, National Crime Victims' Rights ceremonies, a Texas District & County Attorneys Association Prosecuting Crimes Against Children conference, a Women in Criminal Justice conference, and the Colleyville Citizens Police Academy.



Honoring victims



L-R: Victim Assistance Coordinator Carma Anderson, Assistant DA Lindy Borchardt, First Assistant DA Robb Catalano, COO of Unbound Stephanie Byrd, DA Phil Sorrells, Executive Director of Unbound Sandy Hennip, Director of Victim Services Allison Bowen, Director of The Underground Drop-in Center Chris Cage, and Victim Assistance Coordinator Laura Flores.

Our goal has long been to respect and support victims of crime.

That’s why we honored crime victims in April by placing wreaths at the county administration building and at subcourthouses throughout Tarrant County during National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. That week is a time to promote awareness about crime victim rights and honor survivors.

We have a team of victim assistance coordinators who work with victims by listening to them, going to court with them, and making sure they understand everything that is happening during trials. They also make sure victims understand their rights and refer them to services that can help.

This week of national recognition began in 1981, providing a way for law enforcement to renew its commitment to crime victims every year. This year’s theme was Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change.

“We support victims’ rights throughout the year,” DA Sorrells said. “We help victims through some of the most difficult days of their lives.”

Sister Cities

A delegation of young professionals from Kazakhstan got a crash course on how domestic violence cases weave their way through the criminal justice system in Tarrant County.

These cases are handled much differently here than they are in the group's homeland where the crime is handled through administrative law, which carries lesser penalties.

DA Sorrells greeted the group of five that visited our office in early April. First Assistant Robb Catalano, ADAs William Knight and Kim D'Avignon, and Victim Services Director Allison Bowen explained Texas laws addressing domestic violence, how Intimate Partner Violence cases are prosecuted, and what services are provided for victims. The group also visited a courtroom and a holding cell.

During their visit to Fort Worth, the delegation also met with One Safe Place, Alliance for Children, SafeHaven of Tarrant County, the Fort Worth Police Department, and other groups.

The delegation's visit was facilitated partly by the Congressional Office for International Leadership, which is an agency of the U.S. Congress, and Fort Worth Sister Cities International. This was the first visit to the United States for all five Kazakhstan visitors.



Volunteers



(L-R) Paul Vigiletti, Pamela Morin, and Mary Meador

Thank you!

That is the message we want to deliver to volunteers in our office – and everywhere.

Volunteers are the backbone of many organizations and communities. So many projects would be stalled, or never started, without the countless volunteers who step up to help.

In our office, we have three invaluable volunteers – Paul Vigiletti, Pamela Morin, and Mary Meador. These three, who have helped our Victim Services team since 2018, became interested in volunteering after finishing our Citizen Prosecutors Academy.

These volunteers notify victims, ensure our office has contact information for victims, mail Victim Services packets, and perform general office tasks.

This trio has volunteered thousands of work hours with our office – and they also volunteer for the Colleyville Police and Fire Departments.

DA Sorrells thanks them – and all who selflessly give their time to help others and to promote good causes.

“You make our community a better place to live,” Sorrells said. “We appreciate all that you do.”

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