



From the corner:



Why we try

This week marks the beginning of Human Trafficking Awareness Month and our Office is positioned to continue to play an important role in working with others to stamp out this evil. Human Trafficking is a modern form of slavery that ensnares over 18 thousand men, women, and children each year in the United States. The Houston region is particularly vulnerable to human trafficking because of I-10, two major airports, the Ship Channel and our proximity to the Mexican border. Victims of trafficking may be found working at massage parlors, brothels, strip clubs, sweatshops, construction sites, in homes as housekeepers or nannies or on farms as laborers.


Our Office has the statutory power to close down enterprises that serve as fronts for human trafficking. Chapter 125 of the Civil Practices and Remedies Code authorizes the County Attorney to obtain civil injunctions against any business that promotes or compels prostitution or engages in organized criminal activity. We have used that power during the past two years to close down a number of businesses whose activities amounted to that were public nuisances.

Our Office has developed relationships with local, state, and federal agencies to work collaboratively on the challenge of human trafficking. Our work with the District Attorney, the Constables, the Sheriff, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, and many others have led to positive results for the victims of human trafficking.

As public servants we educate the public about important issues and we have raised public awareness by meeting with the media, holding press conferences, and making presentations to interested groups. Our Office hosted Gov. Rick Perry and Attorney General Greg Abbott at a press conference to endorse tougher human trafficking legislation. We provided statistics and other information to Texas Monthly for a major article on this subject.

Even in a time of shrinking budgets we have been creative in obtaining additional resources. We entered into a contract with local management districts to obtain funding for an additional attorney position. We expanded our Lawyers on Loan program and developed training classes for volunteer lawyers who wish to donate their time in this endeavor.

Our Office is committed to the proposition that good government demands that we as a society protect those who cannot protect themselves. If we continue to do our part we will fulfill that commitment and we can make a difference. - Vince



The Office of Vince Ryan
County Attorney

WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, BOTH LAWYERS AND NON-LAWYERS, ADHERE TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ETHICS AS WE SERVE THE PEOPLE OF HARRIS COUNTY AND STRIVE TO BE THE BEST PUBLIC LAW FIRM IN THE UNITED STATES.

Upcoming Events

- September 1** Lead Class: *Lessons Learned about the Trial Record*, given by Sandra Hachem 2:30 pm
- September 15** CLE: Legislative Update presentation by Cathy Sisk, 1:30 pm
- September 16** HBA Constitution Day Reading
- September 17** Harris County Night, Houston Dynamo
- September 21-23** TDCAA Update



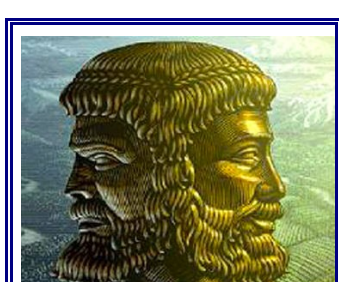
Mary Baker 15 Yrs



- County Attorney [Intranet Portal](#)
- County Attorney [Website](#)
- Your payroll reports & benefits [on-line](#)
- County Personnel [Regulations](#)
- Texas Legislature [on-line](#)
- County Attorney [Directory](#)
- TDCAA [Website](#)
- [Admin Help Desk](#)
- [Commissioners Court Video](#)
- [Commissioner Court Orders](#)



- Judge says author can use title, "Don't Mess with Texas." [Houston Business Journal](#)
- Houston jobless rate down. [KUHF](#)
- "Pole tax" on strip clubs upheld [Statesman.Com](#)
- Swiss political party seeks ban on PowerPoint [MacWorld](#)
- Hardy downtown connector project map [Chon.com](#)



"He who promises more than he is able to perform, is false to himself, and he who does not perform what he has promised, is a traitor to his friend."
-George Shelley

Re-dedication of 1910 Courthouse



Many HCAO employees attended last week's re-dedication of the 1910 Courthouse. The building now looks much as it did when it was first built in 1910. Additions made in the 1950's have been stripped away, revealing architectural details like a sweeping marble staircase and a sky-lit rotunda. [Click here](#) to watch a video of the event. [Click here](#) for a self guided tour brochure.

Sarah Utley joins HCAO

Sarah Utley has been appointed Assistant County Attorney to work in the Environmental Practice Group. She comes to our Office from the Attorney General's Office where she served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Environmental Protection and Administrative Law Division. Sarah earned a bachelor's degree in Animal Science from Texas A&M, and holds a juris doctorate and a Master of Science in Environmental Toxicology from Texas Tech University. Sarah grew up in Goliad, Texas where she worked on the family ranch including taking care of her own herd of registered Santa Gertrudis Cattle.



County honors Jim Downes



Paul Taparuskas, Bruce Powers, Lisa Hulsey, Jim Downes, and Mary Baker. August 23rd was James Downes Day in Harris County by official proclamation of Commissioners Court. Jim was recognized for his years of public service and upon the occasion of his retirement from the Office of the County Attorney after 20 years of service.

Following ceremonies at Commissioners Court friends and co-workers gathered in the Mike Driscoll Courtroom to say good bye and wish Jim and his wife Paula, well. Jim and Paula plan to re-locate to Boston where they have family.

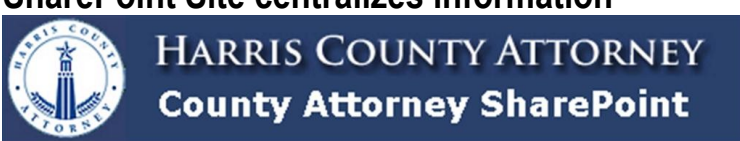
Employment claim against HCHD dismissed

Judge Kenneth Hoyt granted summary judgment in favor of the Harris County Hospital District on all claims filed by a former employee against the District. The employee filed two EEOC claims, the first leading to a lawsuit which was dismissed. The employee then filed a lawsuit based on the second EEOC claim alleging employment discrimination hostile work environment, and retaliation. The Court held that the plaintiff's claims are barred by res judicata because they are all based on the same nucleus of operative facts and either were or could have been asserted in his first lawsuit. Assistant County Attorney Sara Thomas, represented the Hospital District. The case is *Konnetu vs Harris County Hospital District*.

14th Court dismisses claim against deputy

The 14th Court of Appeals ruled last week that a plaintiff who sued both a deputy sheriff and the County for intentional torts, including slander, civil conspiracy, trespass, assault and battery, wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, and malicious prosecution is barred from pursuing her claims against the deputy because of the election of remedies provision of the Texas Tort Claims Act. The Court dismissed the plaintiff's law suit and said plaintiffs who are injured by governmental employees must make a choice of whether they wish to pursue tort claims against the employee or the employer. The case is *Fontenet v Stinson* and was handled by Fred Keys in the Litigation Practice Group. Fred points out that there is a split of opinion between the 14th and 1st Courts of Appeal arising from *Alexander v. Walker*, No. 01-10-00147-CV, — S.W.3d —, 2011 WL 2500482 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.]). The Alexander case is currently on appeal.

SharePoint Site centralizes information



Please check out [SharePoint](#). SharePoint is a website designed to be the hub for all HCAO data and information. It provides a quick and easy way to share and store documents, calendars, and useful information. The front page features a Centralized Calendar, the updated CAO Phone List, and the latest news. Links take you to requests for travel and CLE training, archived CLE materials and videos, and HR documents. Check it out and offer suggestions by emailing CAOHelpDesk. Thanks to Clyde Leuchtag for getting this project together.

Last chance to get photo made

Thanks to all County Attorney employees who participated in Photo Days last week and thanks to Debbie Dillard for coordinating this event. Those few employees who have not had their photo taken will be contacted this week with a date and time when they can go to Photographer Bob Cowan's studio 1243 W. 30th Street, Houston. We do not want any employee left out.



Debbie Dillard poses during HCAO Photo Days.

HCAO persuades apartment to comply with law

Clarissa Kay Bauer, attorney in the Environmental Practice Group, recently settled a lawsuit against an apartment owner who violated the Texas Water Code and Texas Health & Safety Code. Clarissa brought suit against American Opportunity for Housing 2002 Portfolio, L.L.C. for repeated illegal discharges of raw sewage. The owner also had outdoor burning and swimming pool violations. The owner made extensive improvements to its pump station and sewage pipes so that the problems would not reoccur and agreed to pay \$123,550 in civil penalties, \$8,630 in attorney's fees, plus court costs.

New look for Law Library website

The [County Law Library](#) has a re-designed website thanks to the work of Associate Librarian Judith Jackson and Clyde Leuchtag. The site includes a searchable catalog of all holdings and a listing of legal research sources. The site features a survey about the Law Library. Please [click here](#) to participate in the survey.

HCAO presents planning for seniors

Cecilia Longoria, manager for the Disability and Elder Law Group, met with seniors at the Galena Park Recreation Center to let them know how important it is to plan and prepare for life's unexpected events. The group talked about having a power of attorney and planning for any future incapacity that some seniors face as a result of the aging process. Attorneys and staff in the Disability and Elder Law Group provides legal services to the Harris County Guardianship Program, assisting over 1,300 wards in the program.



Manufacturers Association learns about ERS

Snehal Patel, Environmental Regulatory Section, and Bob Allen, Director of Harris County Pollution Control Services, hosted a presentation to the East Harris County Manufacturers Association on August 23rd. Snehal discussed the environmental regulatory functions of the Office of the County Attorney and how we work with Pollution Control Services. ECHMA represents more than 125 refineries, chemical plants, and other manufacturers along the Houston Ship Channel area.

OLR issues report on legislative session

The Office of Legislative Relations has produced a [Summary of the 82nd Regular and First Called Session of the Texas Legislature](#). Click the link to view. The report offers special acknowledgment to our office: "Special thanks go to the County Attorney's Office, especially Rose Garcia, who reviewed every single bill that was filed and forwarded those impacting the county to the Office of Legislative Relations and the impacted departments. ... Marva Gay, Chief of General Counsel Division, along with Doug Ray and the rest of the attorneys in the County Attorney's Office, also deserve recognition. They never failed to get us the information we needed on a timely (meaning immediate) basis and testify when needed. Cathy Sisk will present an update regarding legislation passed during the Texas Legislature's 82nd Session from 1:30 – 2:30 pm on September 15, 2011 in the Mike Driscoll Courtroom on the 16th floor, 1019 Congress.