



APR 2024 ISSUE 04



TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

WORDS FROM THE SHERIFF



Counsel at First Appearance (CAFA) has been a topic of keen interest in Travis County for several years. CAFA provides legal representation to defendants at their first appearance in court. That first court appearance happens in Central Booking before a magistrate judge. It's the point at which charges and probable cause are reviewed and the judge sets bail and other release conditions.

CAFA is a justice system process, not a jail process. The efforts of Pre-trial Services, County Attorney's Office, District Attorney's Office, Public Defenders, Magistrate Judges and TCSO are required to make it happen.

In April of 2022, CAFA launched in TCSO's Central Booking Facility as part of a grant issued to Travis County by Texas A&M's Public Policy Institute. The need to facilitate private meeting spaces for counsel to meet with clients, securely move inmates through the process and manage the docket, while continuing to safely and securely receive and process arrestees proved overwhelming for all parties involved in the effort.

TCSO employees gave up their break room so attorneys could meet privately with clients. Officers picked up overtime shifts, giving up time with their families, and the Central Booking unit banded together to pull CAFA off. In nine days, five TCSO employees resigned. That's when I said stop; we have to step back and find a better way to do this.

In the two years since CAFA was suspended, TCSO has been busy implementing technology upgrades in Central Booking to offer virtual solutions. Our engineers assisted Travis County in developing plans to rebuild part of our jail facility to properly accommodate the program and those plans have been approved by the Commissioners Court.

Last week, Travis County embarked on CAFA pilot testing once again. This time, the program took place in an auxiliary courtroom inside the County Courthouse. This required defendants to be taken outside a secure facility into a public courtroom. What required six corrections officers to accomplish in 2022, now required 13 officers. TCSO staff once again rose to the challenge and I'm so proud of them.

While there are still details to work out when it comes to technology, infrastructure, staffing and processes, we continue to learn from these pilot tests. Of course, CAFA still needs a permanent home, but forward progress is happening. Additional pilots are scheduled in May. I'm confident TCSO will be ready and able to do its part to make CAFA a reality in Travis County.



VICTIM SERVICES TRIVIA NIGHT

In recognition of National Volunteer Appreciation Month, the TCSO Victim Services Unit (VSU) hosted a trivia night for their volunteers on April 24. They partnered with the VSUs from Lakeway and Pflugerville Police Departments to join in on the fun. It was a great way to connect with other agencies and show appreciation for all the hard work VSU volunteers do.



EID AL-FITR DINNER

On April 26, TCSO was delighted to be invited by The Dawoodi Bohras community of Austin to celebrate Eid-al-Fitr in Pflugerville. Members of the Dawoodi Bohras come from all over the world, but one thing they have in common is their willingness to serve the Austin-area community united in their Islamic faith. Eid is one of two major holidays celebrated by Muslims commemorating the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in which faithful fast each day before dawn and until sunset. Eid is usually celebrated with prayer service in the morning to be followed by meals and conversations with loved ones. The sheriff's office thanks you for sharing your meals and fellowship!



CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH

April is an important month because it's the time we work toward child abuse awareness. This year, we partnered with Travis County Health & Human Services, the Center for Child Protection and the Travis County Commissioners Court to officially get April designated as Child Abuse Awareness Month. But our efforts didn't stop there! On April 4, TCSO participated in the Project Safe Childhood Act round-table with Senator John Cornyn, where state leaders gathered to discuss online child exploitation and how to fight it. We also celebrated Wear Blue Day county-wide on April 5, helping to spark conversations in the office and around the community about child abuse. Finally, on April 22, we again joined Travis County Health & Human Services, the Center for Child Protection and 126th Civil District Court Judge Aurora Martinez Jones for a reception, where employees from across the county gathered to discuss their work in fighting child abuse this month and year round.

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CRIME VICTIMS' PROCLAMATION

On April 23, Sheriff Hernandez joined other community leaders as the Travis County Commissioners Court voted to proclaim April 21-27 as Crime Victims' Rights Week. Along with her fellow speakers, Sheriff Hernandez shared a personal story on why she has dedicated her career in law enforcement to helping victims of crime. From her time as a dispatcher to her time at the Travis County District Attorney's Office, she has met and listened to countless victims, like Ellen Halbert, a sexual assault victim who later became appointed to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice and made numerous accomplishments in the field of victims' rights. It's because of inspiring and resilient people like her that the community must continue to fight for and uplift those impacted by crime. TCSO sends its gratitude to the Texas Advocacy Project, the Travis County Attorney's Office, People Against Violent Crime and the Christi Center for sharing their stories and helping to make this proclamation happen.



ANNUAL TCSO AWARDS CEREMONY

On April 18, TCSO hosted its annual award ceremony, honoring employees who perform at the highest level. From corrections officers and law enforcement deputies to civilian staff, some of the county's best public servants were recognized. We recognized employees celebrating 20, 25 and 30+ years with the agency. Numerous employees earned commendations and life-saving awards and the audience heard incredible stories of how lives were saved and our community was made stronger through exceptional efforts.

This year, we had the unique opportunity to honor several members of the community for their incredible acts: Dr. Jessica Preddy for assisting TCSO Deputy Victor Montalvo in life-saving CPR at a local neighborhood pool; Eric Estrada for aiding an unconscious deputy who had fallen in a roadway; and Narciso Luviano Santibanez, who used a deputy's radio to call for help when he was trapped beneath an 18-wheeler in a horrific accident.

We congratulate all award recipients and thank you for your dedicated service!

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CENTRAL TEXAS PUBLIC SAFETY CADET COMPETITION



On April 20, TCSO and Travis County Constable Precinct 2 co-hosted the 2nd Annual Central Texas Public Safety Cadet Competition for Public Safety Cadet and/or Explorer programs. The one-day competition event is designed to have challenging scenarios based on current Texas law enforcement standardized training which test Cadets/Explorers' knowledge and skills.

We proudly hosted over 40 teams from around the state, and awarded 1st, 2nd and 3rd place trophies in the following team scenarios: Active Threat 1, Active Threat 2, Burglary In Progress, Crash Investigation, Criminal Trespass, Crisis Intervention, Domestic Disturbance, Felony Traffic Stop, Robbery and Suspicious Unknown. There were also awards for the top performer in the following individuals events: Crime Scene, Fitness Challenge and Marksmanship. Congratulations to the Fort Worth Police Department's Explorers Post 511 for winning the Top Overall Team trophy! We look forward to an even bigger and better competition next year!

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MENTAL HEALTH SYMPOSIUM

On April 26, Sheriff Hernandez had the honor of joining Bee Cave Police Chief Brian Jones and Lake Travis Fire Rescue Assistant Chief Michael Engage for a panel discussion at Prather and Panel Foundation's Mental Health Symposium in Lakeway. The panel discussed the increase in calls for service related to mental health crises or drug addiction. They also shared myriad ways their agencies are addressing the mental health and wellbeing of their employees, who deal with critical incidents and crises as part of their daily duties.



THRIVE FEST

On April 27, TCSO joined its partners at Texas System of Care, Austin ISD, Texas ACE and the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Austin Area for an event called "Thrive Fest." This family-friendly festival hosted at the Boys and Girls Club of Austin featured live performances from students, engaging activities and inspiring speakers from around the community. It was all part of an effort to connect young families with local organizations who work toward promoting mental health and physical well-being for Austin-area youth.

EMPLOYEE MASTHEAD (L TO R): Security Coordinator Dennis Tumlinson, Chief Inmate Psychiatrist Dr. Andrea Wright & Corrections Officer Keneniah Villanueva



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