The Death Penalty in Harris County

- New death sentences in Texas have decreased precipitously since peaking in 1999, when juries sentenced 48 people to death. In the mid-1990s, Harris County juries routinely sent as many as 15 people to death row each year.

- Overall, Harris County prosecutors have secured death sentences for 297 people since 1974. There currently are at least six cases in which the Harris County District Attorney plans to seek death.

- While Harris County remains the top sentencing county in Texas, jurors there have imposed just three new death sentences since 2015. A jury sentenced Lucky Ward to death in March 2020.

- There are 78 inmates on death row who were convicted in Harris County; this constitutes more than one-third of the current Texas death row population.

- 20 of the last 21 defendants sentenced to death in Harris County are people of color (16 are African American, 3 are Hispanic, and 1 belongs to another race/ethnicity).

- In October 2019, a Harris County jury sentenced Ronald Haskell to death, making him the first white person to receive the death penalty in Harris County since November 2004.

- In the 1990s, the Harris County District Attorney’s Office was more than three times more likely to seek the death penalty against African-American defendants than similarly-situated white defendants.

- Harris County accounts for 130 executions since 1982, more than any state in the country except Texas and twice as many as any other county.

- Of the 13 death row exonerees in Texas, 3 were convicted in Harris County. In 2019, Alfred Dewayne Brown was declared “actually innocent” after spending a decade on death row; he was released in 2015 after charges against him were dropped. Prosecutors withheld important phone records that corroborated his alibi.

- According to the Houston Area Survey for 2016, conducted by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, only 27 percent of respondents think the death penalty, rather than life imprisonment, is the most appropriate punishment for murder.