

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. *04/01/20*