The Death Penalty in Harris County

- Harris County prosecutors have secured death sentences for 297 people since 1974.

- In the 1990s, Harris County juries routinely sent as many as 15 people to death row each year.

- While Harris County remains the top sentencing county in Texas, jurors there have imposed just three new death sentences since 2016. A jury sentenced Lucky Ward to death in March 2020, just before the pandemic brought all other capital trials to a halt.

- There are 77 people on death row who were convicted in Harris County; this constitutes more than one-third of Texas’s current death row population.

- 20 of the last 21 defendants sentenced to death in Harris County are people of color (16 are Black, three are Hispanic, and one identifies with another race/ethnicity).

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

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

- Since 2016, 33 people have been removed from death row because of sentence reductions or deaths in prison; 40% of these cases came from Harris County.

- Of the 13 death row exonerees in Texas, three were convicted in Harris County. Alfred Dewayne Brown spent a decade on death row for a crime he did not commit. He was released from prison in 2015 after the Harris County District Attorney’s Office dropped the charges against him; in 2019, he was declared “actually innocent.” Prosecutors had withheld important phone records that corroborated his alibi.

- According to the Houston Area Survey for 2020, conducted by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, only 20 percent of Houstonians think the death penalty, rather than life imprisonment, is the most appropriate punishment for murder.

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