

The DOCKET

Phil Sorrells - Tarrant County District Attorney

Fall 2024



A Message from DA Phil Sorrells



Five.

That's how many life sentences Tarrant County jurors gave to child predators over a span of two weeks this summer.

These juries sent a strong message: They will not tolerate people who sexually abuse the children in their lives.

The stories the juries heard were horrifyingly similar.

Fathers, stepfathers, uncles, father-figures – some of the people children trust the most – sexually assaulted young members of their families.

In some cases, the assault went on for years.

Many of the victims were younger than 10.

Prosecutors, investigators, victim advocates, and staff diligently worked on behalf of victimized children to hold their offenders accountable.

On one day alone, three men who sexually abused children were given life sentences. The next day, another pedophile was given a life sentence. Within days, another child molester was sentenced to life in prison. (Read about these cases on pages 7 and 8).

Not only that, but other sexual child abuse cases were prosecuted around the same time, sending other predators to prison for years.

Tarrant County prosecutors aren't finished.

We will continue prosecuting these cases. And we will keep asking juries to give defendants the longest sentences possible.

We are fighting for justice every single day.

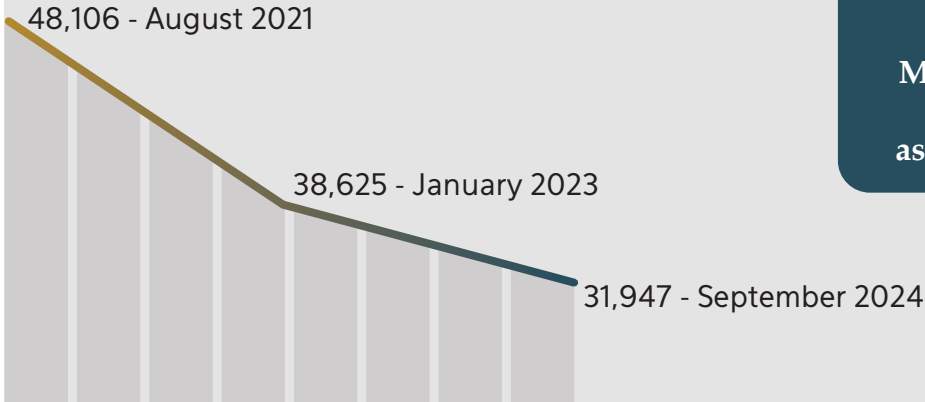
And we are making a difference.

Highlights from the DA's Office

By The Numbers

DA Sorrells has diligently worked since he was sworn in January 1, 2023, to reduce the backlog of cases that ballooned because of Covid restrictions. Here's a look at updated numbers.

Pending Cases



120

Murder & Capital Murder
Cases Resolved
as of early September 2024

New Leadership

DA Investigator Don Pilcher is our office's new Chief Investigator.

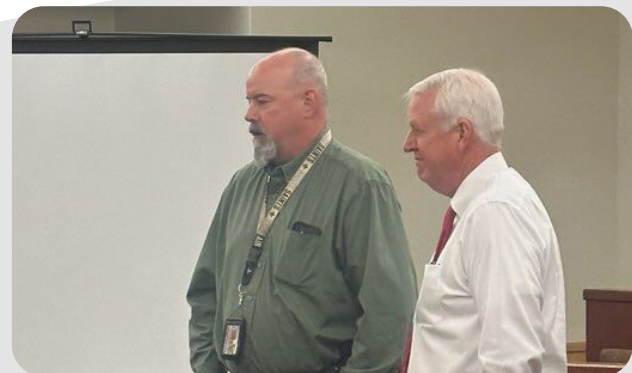
Pilcher, 58, was chosen this summer to replace retired Chief Investigator Maria Hinojosa. He oversees the Investigative Division, which is staffed by certified Texas peace officers. These investigators assist prosecutors by evaluating and helping prepare cases for trial.

Pilcher has worked in this office since June 2012, since he retired from the Arlington Police Department where he served for 21 years.

He will be a strong leader for this office.



Congratulations, Don!



Teamwork

The goal of this office is to serve and protect.

Most of the time we do that by prosecuting criminals in the courtroom.

Other times, we help people outside the courtroom.

Recently, a group of five DA employees worked with Tarrant County Sheriff's deputies to save a man's life.

"I'm very proud of my staff," DA Sorrells said. "The right people were in the right place at the right time."

On the morning of August 23, Assistant DA Tyler Coleman was looking out the window on the 4th floor of the Tim Curry Criminal Justice Center, toward the Two City Place Garage.

He noticed that the driver's door was open on one vehicle. A man appeared to be slumped backwards inside the vehicle.

Coleman talked with Legal Secretary Samantha Ramirez and the two agreed, along with Assistant DAs Ken Cutrer and Jess Gambrell,

that a man had passed out in the vehicle. They used binoculars and a cell phone camera to zoom in and see the man. He was sweating and they believed he was having convulsions.

They told Investigator Lee Blaisdell about the man; Blaisdell used his police radio to contact the Tarrant County Sheriff's Office Judicial Dispatch. There, Dispatch Officer Colleen Giles sent Deputies Robert Gallardo and Humberto Orozco to the scene.

Blaisdell directed the deputies to the car, and they believed the man likely had overdosed. The deputies gave him Narcan, which is used to treat drug overdoses in an emergency, and the man regained consciousness after a few moments. He later told deputies that he had taken an unknown substance.

"Take anyone out of the chain, and the results may have been completely different for this young man," Blaisdell said.

Awake and alert, the man was taken to Harris Hospital.

"It felt good we were able to help him out," Cutrer said. "I found Tyler and I said, 'I think you saved that guy today.' "



Samantha Ramirez, Tyler Coleman, Ken Cutrer, Lee Blaisdell, Jess Gambrell

'Weapons of Intimidation'

Zackey Rahimi was warned.

The 24-year-old Arlington man was under a protective order after attacking his girlfriend. He was told that he shouldn't have any guns.

Then he was accused of committing five crimes that involved him shooting firearms while that protective order was in place.

In September 2021, Rahimi pled guilty to a federal indictment and was sentenced to prison. But on appeal, he claimed that he had a right to keep his guns, and the Fifth Circuit agreed. His conviction was overturned.

Until June 2024.

That's when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Rahimi was wrong.

Our office filed an amicus brief in this case, arguing that the Fifth Circuit's decision giving domestic violence offenders the right to possess firearms puts domestic violence victims at even greater risk.

"For those who are subject to a protective order, the overwhelming evidence establishes that their firearms are not for self-defense," our brief written by Assistant DA Fredericka Sargent stated. "They are not being kept for a lawful purpose."

"They are weapons of intimidation, fear, and control."

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed.

"When an individual has been found by a court to pose a credible threat to the physical safety of another, the individual may be temporarily disarmed consistent with the Second Amendment," the court wrote in its 103-page decision.

We are honored to give victims a voice.



Assistant DAs Fredericka Sargent,
Kim D'Avignon,
Emily Kirby

Giving to Others



There were no Trix about it.

Our office was cereal-ously determined to make a difference in the Tarrant County Employee Virtual Food Drive this year.

As Tony the Tiger would say, it was grrr-eat that we topped the list of donors, giving \$2,075. In addition to that, we cheeriously donated more than 500 containers of cereal, mostly single-serve boxes.

We are proud to join the Tarrant Area Food Bank's effort to help provide meals and snacks for children, families, and senior citizens with

limited incomes. The Food Bank, founded in 1982, supplies food to partner agencies such as churches that then gives food directly to families and individuals.

Every dollar donated through this food drive provides five nutritious meals for people in need.

If you want to make a difference, you, too, can donate to the Tarrant Area Food Bank. Give them a call at 817-857-7100 to see how you can help.

Go coco-nuts!



Rose Anna Salinas, chief of the DA Criminal Division, helped deliver cereal to the Tarrant Area Food Bank.

'A Blight on Society'



Debra Mae Carter, 65, was part of a massive Christian Ponzi scheme.

She was the mistress of William Neil "Doc" Gallagher, who was given three life sentences in 2021 for the investment scam he operated that bilked around 170 local senior citizens out of more than \$31 million over 10 years.

At the end of a two-week trial that featured an ex-spouse, investors, and even "Doc" Gallagher himself, on July 8 a Tarrant County jury found Carter guilty of money laundering for the role she played in Gallagher's illegal scheme.

Gallagher ran the "Gallagher financial Group" that advertised on Christian radio with the tag line "See you in church on Sunday." He promoted his investment business in books such as "Jesus Christ, Money Master."

Carter represented herself in the trial that was marked by brief delays when witnesses weren't available and when Carter briefly checked herself into the hospital.

Carter was sentenced by the court to life in prison on July 30, 2024.

Tarrant County Assistant DAs Lori Varnell, Nathan Martin, and Anastasia Frane prosecuted the case.

"These were hard-earned retirement (dollars) which ... got put into her account over and over again," Varnell said. "She is a blight on society."

Prosecutors proved that Carter laundered money she received from Gallagher through rental homes, land, fake charities, and more. About \$200,000 in gold and silver was seized after it was found in her travel trailer.

"She's just a liar," Varnell said. "That's what she does."

The Ponzi scheme created a long-lasting financial hardship for many seniors who chose to invest with Gallagher.

Brenda Wilkerson, 84, invested with Gallagher money she and her now late husband inherited. If she had that money now, she could pay off the mortgage on her home. Instead, she will be making payments until she dies.

"Debbie Carter deserves life in prison," Wilkerson said. "She has ruined so many lives. ... It's despicable."

DA Investigators Kyle Truly and Dara Couch and Victim Coordinator Carrie Farley also worked on this case.

Getting Life

Between June and August 2024, eight people in addition to Debra Carter were sentenced to life in prison by Tarrant County juries. Here's a look at those cases:

Israel Santiago, 51



Santiago was found guilty of sexual assault of a child. In July of 2020, just three months after being paroled for homicide, Santiago sexually assaulted a 15-year-old family member. Witnesses later discovered the offense had been recorded on a home camera and turned it over to police. The jury heard evidence that Santiago had previously been convicted of several family violence assaults, driving while intoxicated, and murdering his wife in front of their children.

Prosecutors: Amy Allin, Allenna Bangs. Investigator: Josh Neiswender. Victim Coordinator: Imelda Lopez. July 11, 2024.

Paul Good, 51

Good was found guilty of the aggravated sexual assault of a child. In 2001, Good sexually assaulted a 7-year-old family member as punishment for receiving a bad conduct mark at school. The jury heard from additional victims who testified that Good also sexually abused them when they were children.

Prosecutors: Megan Bradshaw, Matthew Jackson. Investigator: Matt Hardy. Victim Coordinator: Imelda Lopez. July 11, 2024.



Brian Ricker, 42



Ricker was found guilty of the continuous sexual abuse of a child under the age of 14. Ricker sexually abused a young family member over the course of six years.

Prosecutors: Steven Elliott, Kassidy Durfee. Investigator: Kevin Hilliard. Victim Coordinator: Carma Anderson. July 11, 2024.

Juan Gonzalez Quiles, 43

Quiles was found guilty of the continuous sexual abuse of a child under the age of 14. He sexually assaulted a young female family member over the course of several years. The girl made an outcry about the sexual assault in August 2022 to a psychologist she was seeing for social anxiety.

Prosecutors: Sydney Brock, Courtney Mowdy. Investigator: Brian Johnson. Victim Coordinator: Angela Stevens. July 12, 2024.



Getting Life

Michael Dillon, 43



Dillon was found guilty of the continuous sexual assault of a child under the age of 14. Dillon sexually abused a young female family member for several years, starting when she was 2 years old. CPS was made aware of the abuse and reported it to police on February 14, 2023.

Prosecutors: Marina Thomas, Courtney Mowdy. Investigator: Brent Ezelle. Victim Coordinator: Laura Medina. July 17, 2024.

Jacoby McCloud, 24

McCloud pled guilty to the murder of his roommates – Darion Deen, 26, and Shelby Amerson, 22. On January 2, 2022, McCloud shot and killed one roommate who was unarmed and then stabbed the other roommate to death.

Prosecutors: Stuart Neal, Danielle Bonanno. Investigators: Brian Johnson, Zachary Long. Victim Coordinator: Angela Stevens. July 26, 2024.



Thomas Boykin, 53



Boykin pled guilty to aggravated assault with a deadly weapon causing serious bodily injury. On May 16, 2023, Boykin shot his 13-year-old son three times while he was asleep and his 21-year-old stepdaughter twice as she begged him not to shoot her. He also physically assaulted his wife. Both his son and stepdaughter survived their life-threatening injuries after they were taken into surgery.

Prosecutors: Allenna Bangs, Chris Dewitt. Investigator: Briant Thomas. Victim Coordinator: Angela Stevens. August 9, 2024.

David Wilkinson, 49

Wilkinson was found guilty of the continuous sexual abuse of a child under the age of 14. For more than a year, he sexually assaulted a nine-year-old family member. The abuse occurred repeatedly until she outcried to a family member. Evidence of his crime was found in the defendant's bedroom during a search of his home.

Prosecutors: Ashton Moore, Steven Elliott. Investigator: Kevin Hilliard. Victim Coordinator: Carma Anderson. August 22, 2024.



Justice Delivered

Not every case gets a life sentence. But we are prosecuting tough cases and juries are giving colossal prison sentences to those convicted of heinous crimes. Here's a look at some massive sentences meted out in recent months.

99 YEARS



Brandon Williams, 42, was found guilty of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. On May 23, 2023, law enforcement officers executed search warrants for several rooms at the Relax Inn in Fort Worth where Williams was selling drugs and sex trafficking teenagers. Among the narcotics found: fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine.



Steven Mayle, 53, was found guilty of continuous sexual abuse of a child. On July 10, 2021, a woman observed Mayle sexually assaulting her 10-year-old daughter. Her daughter later told investigators that Mayle sexually abused her multiple times starting when she was 9, including taking inappropriate photos of her.

75 YEARS



Andrew Fox, 46, was found guilty of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. On September 13, 2023, narcotics officers with the Fort Worth Police Department executed a search warrant at a hotel room where Fox was staying. Officers found methamphetamine and a firearm in the room. Fox was on parole at the time of the offense.



Steve Brashear, 67, was found guilty of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. On March 23, 2020, police were called after an MHMR employee conducting a home visit heard a violent attack taking place inside a Fort Worth home. Inside, officers discovered the victim had broken bones and other injuries Brashear had caused by beating her with a baseball bat and electrocuting her with a cattle prod.

70 YEARS



Donavin Copeland, 20, pled guilty to aggravated robbery and animal cruelty. Copeland committed six aggravated armed robberies. It was common

for Copeland to shoot at the store clerk and steal the robbery victim's vehicle to leave the scene. In one robbery, Copeland pistol-whipped the victim and in another, he shot and killed the store clerk's two-pound dog named Peanut.

66 YEARS



Alejandro Garcia, 29, was found guilty of numerous counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child. In 2018, the victim told

her mother that Garcia had inappropriately touched her and began sexually abusing her when she was in the 2nd grade.

In Our Community

DA Sorrells and his prosecutors meet with groups throughout Tarrant County, sharing information or helping with community efforts. Here's where some of our staff have been lately.



Assistant DAs Marina Thomas and Megan Bradshaw worked at Alliance For Children to fill backpacks for children going back to school. Alliance For Children is a vital partner helping us prosecute those who commit crimes against children.



DA Sorrells spent time with our interns this summer, sharing some of his legal experiences with them and asking about their experience in our office.



DA Investigator Kevin Brown talked to Burleson Police Department's Teen Academy. He explained the dangers of fentanyl and other drugs and encouraged teens to say no to drugs and yes to a healthy life.



In Our Community

Assistant DAs Chase Payne and Kim D'Avignon posed for a photo with Katharine Esser, of The Women's Center of Tarrant County. Esser spoke to our prosecutors about the trauma victims face during the criminal justice process.



First Assistant DA Robb Catalano this summer met with a task force of law enforcement officers dedicated to reducing violent crime.



Assistant DA Hilary Wright talked about sex crimes against teen victims – particularly one case where a father figure kept a teenage girl with him for nearly a year before dropping her off at the hospital to have his baby – at the 36th Annual Crimes Against Children Conference in Dallas.

In Our Community



Assistant DA Lori Varnell was interviewed by FOX 4 about the case of Staci Blackmon, a woman who pleaded guilty to stealing \$1.2 million from her former employer, a Southlake home building company. She spent the money on a Dallas Mavericks suite, home furniture, and lavish trips. Blackmon used most of the money to buy and send “Tik Tok” coins, which are in-app currencies bought with real money, on the Tik Tok social media site.

Our Elder Financial Fraud team – Investigator Dara Couch, Assistant DA Nathan Martin, and Investigator Kyle Truly – represented our office at the Empowering Seniors Expo, teaching seniors how to avoid being scammed.



Recognition



Assistant DA Katie Owens, chief of the Gang Unit, in June was honored as Criminal Prosecutor of the Year from the Texas Gang Investigators Association. In her nomination, she was described as “everything that makes a good prosecutor.”



Assistant DA Michael Ferry has been sworn in to serve as a special assistant United States attorney, in addition to working as a prosecutor in our office. Ferry is a member of this office’s Narcotics Unit and a former DEA agent.



Tarrant County Bar Association honors: Assistant DA Ann Diamond, who celebrated 40 years in our office this year, received the President’s Award; Assistant DA Marvinna Robinson, chief of our Protective Order Unit, was installed as president-elect; First Assistant DA Catalano was installed as a director. DA Sorrells celebrated all three of the honorees.



Editorial

DA Communications Officer Anna Tinsley Williams wrote and compiled this newsletter.