

**Kim K. Ogg**  
**Harris County District Attorney**



**COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**Diversity in the HCDAO**

**A Policy/Program Plan Based On  
2017 Community Impact Transition Committee Recommendations.**

**Committee Members:**

Glen Austin, Esq., Chair

Hon. Kristin Guiney

Dr. Linda B. Robinson

Gere' Cole, Esq.

Patricia Limón de Rodríguez

Ray Shackelford

Alexius Marcano

Jon Humphries

Carlos Doroteo, Esq.

*Since taking office, Kim Ogg and the new Administration at the Harris County District Attorney's Office (HCDAO) have been guided by a core set of principles that have shaped policy change and resulted in the implementation of new program initiatives. Because difficult decisions arise every day during the administration of justice, the District Attorney and her staff rely upon these principles in seeking fair and equal justice for the people of Harris County. These guiding principles can be found on the HCDAO website under "The Office" tab.*

## **Overview**

Harris County is home to the most diverse populous in America. Therefore, as guardians of justice, the HCDAO should employ individuals representative of the many communities within our area and when possible reflect shared values between the HCDAO leadership and those populations. As an immediate initiative, qualified and seasoned attorneys of diverse ethnicities and practice areas were installed into leadership positions. This Administration looks to these guiding principles to guide in the growth the HCDAO's diversity;

- **To strive for equality in the use of prosecutorial discretion;**
- **To actively seek input and participation by the diverse communities of the greater Houston area;**
- **To be mindful of (our) duty to see that justice is done, and as representatives of the people, to be transparent in (our) actions;**

HCDAO leadership embraces diversity among employees as a strength in terms of connecting with and serving crime victims and those accused with fairness and respect. They believe that differing viewpoints are a necessity in maintaining public trust and confidence among Harris County residents. There is no shortage of diversity in the graduating classes of law schools in Harris County to supply new, qualified talent for recruitment to the HCDAO. The goal to diversify is not only a response to the community's growth but a natural product of the diverse talent graduating from law schools and the reflection of more minority attorneys taking on leadership roles in their practice areas and the legal community itself.

## **Action**

### **Recruitment/Advancement**

In selecting Yvonne Taylor to serve as the HCDAO's Professional Development Director, the Administration gained valued relationships with Texas Southern University, the University of Houston, and South Texas College of Law. Relationships with law schools are crucial to recruiting the best local talent available. Once new recruits join the office, the Administration is taking measured steps to insure professional growth and interaction with senior, more experienced attorneys. Establishing pathways to success within the HCDAO is especially important to minority recruits and interns, so training and assignments must reflect real opportunities for advancement within the organization. Advancement for minority attorneys has been a historic problem within the HCDAO, so establishment of fair employee evaluations that reflect work areas other than numbers of trials and numbers of wins has been a change implemented to insure all employees share the opportunity for promotion.

### **Recruitment initiatives**

- Strategic partnerships with local universities and law schools, including Thurgood Marshall School of Law have been forged.
- The new leadership under DA Ogg is more reflective of Harris County, and their hiring practices are reflective of the same diversity.
- Increased participation in local chapters of bar associations is an outreach goal for HCDAO and the assistance of transition team members is welcomed.
- In direct response to the Diversity Committee's suggestion, the HCDAO is working to market lesser known, more specialized prosecutorial tracks to potential interns and to practicing attorneys interested in lateral hires.

### **Advancement initiatives**

- Under the Ogg administration, ADAs are responsible for important decisions at the line prosecutor level, and are encouraged by leadership to do so. This is meant to promote the individual talent of every line prosecutor and to help them develop the important skills and judgment required for promotion. Additionally, it makes it easier for those with leadership talent to surface.

- Increased CLE training designed to acknowledge past injustices and prejudices encourage ADAs to adopt the values of this Administration, including promotion of purposeful actions that avoid poor treatment of minority defendants and of one another.
- The quality of work will be the greatest determining factor advancement. Wins and number of trials will be scrutinized for quality of work when performance is evaluated, as will plea bargaining, judgment about the value of cases, and service to constituents and crime victims will also be utilized in insuring that HCDAO employees maintain a fair practice towards all people touched by their work. These evaluations are considered when advancement opportunities arise.
- Reoccurring department meetings assist HCDAO leadership in identifying ADAs who display growing leadership qualities.
- The creation of Employee Resource Groups are being considered by HCDAO management and the Committee may be consulted on their creation.

## **Related Issues**

### Community Outreach

- The Community Outreach Division of the HCDAO was created by DA Ogg upon taking office January 1, 2017. It is headed by Shekira Dennis, who works in conjunction with Yvonne Taylor, to help recruit diverse applicants directly through community forums, speaking engagements and events.
- A HCDAO speakers bureau has been created and is comprised of diverse individuals reflective and representative of the diverse communities of the Greater Houston Area. They regularly appear in front of service organizations, civic clubs, chambers of commerce, schools and many other forums in which the HCDAO is represented publicly..

### Internal Examination

The new leadership installed under DA Ogg brought to the HCDAO a wealth of professional and personal experiences that are an integral part of this Administration's policies, including those that mandate diverse recruiting, hiring and advancement practices. These same individuals had seen qualified minority ADAs passed over early on in their careers and are dedicated to insuring a new history of inclusion at the HCDAO.

### Workplace Considerations

- The functions of Human Resources are now overseen by Chief of Staff Vivian King who brings corporate experience along with an extensive legal history. Under her leadership, roles in Human Resources have become more defined and streamlined.
  - DA Ogg encourages her leadership staff to have open communication, and official trainings now echo inclusiveness in every consideration.
  - The Professional Development and Community Outreach Divisions are partnering with professional and community groups to insure diverse cultural experiences are also part of this Administration's practices. This includes ride-alongs with law enforcement, visiting drug rehabilitation centers, area high schools, jails and non-profits working with the mentally ill. The purpose is to expand the perspective of all prosecutors about the true impact of the criminal justice system on every community.
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The Harris County District Attorney's Office and DA Kim Ogg are dedicated to continued community involvement in the criminal justice system and the application of fair and equal justice to all of Harris County. We would like to thank all the participants of Transition Team for their time and dedication to improving our criminal justice system. The communities voice will always be part of the Ogg administration.

*The Harris County District Attorney's Office is comprised of 329 prosecutors, 90 investigators and 277 support personnel who are dedicated to making our community safer through evidence-based prosecution. This means guaranteeing a fair process with the goal of obtaining a just result for the victim, the accused and the community in every case.*

***To accomplish these goals, we promise:***

- *To use taxpayer money efficiently;*
- *To make decisions about criminal cases based on evidence, not relationships;*
- *To strive for equality in our use of prosecutorial discretion;*
- *To treat all crime victims with dignity and fairness;*
- *To also treat those accused of criminal offenses with dignity and fairness;*
- *To recognize mental illness as a public-health concern;*
- *To collaborate with other governmental and law enforcement agencies so that we can solve and prosecute crimes more effectively;*
- *To utilize the expertise of specialty division prosecutors for crimes requiring subject matter knowledge;*
- *To actively seek input and participation by the diverse communities of the greater Houston area;*
- *To utilize technology to improve case management, service to our constituents, and employee accountability;*
- *To be mindful of our duty to see that justice is done, and as representatives of the people, to be transparent in our actions;*
- *To act with professionalism in every situation.*