

Kim K. Ogg
Harris County District Attorney



COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

Immigrant and International Communities

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

Committee Members:

Claudia Ortega-Hogue, Chair

Jessica Chen

Oscar Hernandez

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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 one of the most diverse counties in America and is home to dozens of ethnic and international communities representing more than a million people. The influx of these international communities has strengthened the economy and culture of the entire greater Houston area. It is the responsibility of the elected District Attorney to serve all those who live, work and visit Harris County through responsible public safety policy and prosecution of those who violate the criminal laws. The Ogg Administration is committed to insuring equal justice for all, including protecting immigrant and international communities from criminals as well as insuring the integrity of the justice system itself. These guiding principles directly apply and benefit such communities and their people:

- **To treat all crime victims, as well as those accused of crimes, with dignity and fairness;**
- **To utilize the expertise of specialty division prosecutors for crimes requiring special subject matter knowledge;**
- **To actively seek input and participation by the diverse communities of the greater Houston area.**

Community trust requires competent communication with people before and after crimes occur, and this often means overcoming cultural or language barriers. The equal and fair treatment of both crime victims and those accused of crimes who are from different nations and ethnic groups will be the hallmark of the new HCDAO Administration.

Action

Community Education and Outreach

Under DA Ogg's direct leadership, the HCDAO has initiated a working partnership with approximately 85 area foreign consulates and community leaders representative of dozens of international and immigrant communities. The District Attorney's collaborative efforts with consulate and community partners is directed at educating all who live, work or visit from other countries about how to avoid, report and respond to crime. Victimization is terrifying and often as confusing to American citizens as it is to crime victims from international communities. A Additionally, the frequent targets of local criminals are storefront businesses owned and operated by those from other countries. Criminals bank on the fearfulness of foreign born victims whom they believe will not call the police and report crimes due to their own fear of police and prosecutors....so understanding crime victims' rights and knowing who to call and what to expect as a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, fraud and other crimes is the first step in educating those unfamiliar with the American justice system about their own rights in this country.

Because our justice system guarantees equal application of the law to everyone in America, as crime victims, U.S. citizens and immigrants share the same legal rights. DA Ogg believes it critical that such an important message must be delivered to Houston's diverse communities in the many native languages spoken in Houston. The HCDAO has prepared written victims' rights materials to be printed and distributed by every consulate in Houston to the populations they represent. Further, the new Administration is requesting that the consulates permanently post the information on their websites so that their non-English speaking populations have a consistent source of critical information when and if they are victimized. The intent of this effort and partnership is to promote understanding by foreign-born nationals of the need to report crime to local police and to do this without fear of arrest or prosecution. It is also to ensure that they receive constituent assistance equal to anyone else who is victimized by a criminal in Harris County. The inclusion and focus on international consulates is based on the presumption that such institutions are often the primary sources of information for foreign nationals.

The HCDAO also employs four full-time translators in its Victim Witness Division to assist crime victims whose cases have been solved, filed and are pending against their perpetrators. The same division helps translate to and for witnesses to crimes who have been subpoenaed by prosecutors in the pursuit of justice against the responsible criminal. Program caseworkers work hard to build trust and to deliver services to non-English speaking crime victims and witnesses to crimes necessary for successful prosecution of criminals.

The HCDAO Community Outreach Division assembled a Speakers Bureau of line prosecutors who help educate all communities requesting trainers, speakers, and presenters. Recently, Special Crimes Bureau Chief Ruben Perez addressed 300 primarily Spanish-speaking church members to discuss the potential impact of recent anti-immigration legislation. Perez, like many of the diverse prosecutors being hired and promoted by the new Administration, is bilingual and reflective of the diversity in leadership DA Ogg believes necessary to a 21st century District Attorney's Office. The Speakers Bureau includes prosecutors fluent in Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Farsi. Obviously, the Speakers Bureau intentionally reflects the diversity of Harris County.

Both international and immigrant communities are more vulnerable to crime because they are targeted by criminals who count on their victims' fear and silence. DA Ogg has responded by launching a special unit of prosecutors in the Special Crimes Division of the HCDAO whose mission is to dismantle robbery and burglary crews preying on the Asian business communities prominent on Houston's Westside. Additionally, she created a Sex Crimes Division responsible for investigation and prosecuting of human traffickers, which to date has filed more felony sex trafficking cases against pimps and human traffickers than the two prior Administrations put together.

At the recommendation of our International and Immigrant Communities Committee, the HCDAO will seek additional future partnerships with other governmental departments such as The City of Houston's Office of New Americans & Immigrant Communities. Using trusted messengers like the consulates and city government allows the HCDAO to communicate at will with community leaders and neighborhood residents. Additionally, DA Ogg personally attends

international events at every opportunity to underscore her professional and personal commitment to protect people of all nations from criminal victimization.

Media Outreach

The transition committee's recommendation about improved and increased media communication in the international and immigrant communities will be a new initiative embraced by this Administration. Transition team members have offered to connect the HCDAO office with trusted media outlets that service specific international communities and Communications Director Dane Schiller is the point of contact for all media interaction. The HCDAO agrees to promote its news releases to such international media outlets to keep vulnerable communities up to date on issues such as U-Visas and high-profile crimes involving international victims and perpetrators. These media opportunities will also provide the opportunity to update others about specific policy changes being implemented by the District Attorney such as bail and drug policy reform. Some specific media suggestions the District Attorney will pursue are:

- Appearances on South Asian Radio;
 - Partnering with existing hotlines to help report crime anonymously;
 - Using public service announcements on Spanish language TV and Asian Radio; and
 - Identifying partners to provide translations for important press announcements.
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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.*