



Gavel & Badge

The Official Newsletter for the Justices of the Peace and Constables Association

February 2025

GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT HOLLY WILLIAMSON

Dear JPCA Members,

I am excited to invite you to an event that promises to be both exciting and enriching: JPCA Day at the Capitol on March 4.

This is an incredible opportunity to represent Judges, Constables and JPCA, the largest association of elected officials in Texas. Join me for a day filled with excitement, networking, and camaraderie with fellow Justices of the Peace and Constables, as well as esteemed members of the legislature.

Don't miss out on the chance to engage with key decision-makers, share insights about our vital roles, and celebrate the impact we make in our communities. This event is not just about advocacy; it's also about building connections and having fun in the vibrant atmosphere of Our State Capitol.

Mark your calendars and be part of this special day. Your presence will be invaluable in showcasing the strength of our association and the important work we do.

Warm regards,

JPCA President

Judge Holly Williamson



JPCA DAY AT THE CAPITOL

THANK YOU!

*To Constable Mark Herman,
Harris County, and the Texas
Apartment Association for
sponsoring the 2025 JPCA Day at
the Capitol*

**March 4,
2025**
Austin, Texas



COME JOIN US THE LARGEST ASSOCIATION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE STATE



The JPCA Day at the Capitol is always a tremendous success, providing Justices of the Peace and Constables from across the state with a valuable opportunity to engage with lawmakers, strengthen relationships, and advocate for key issues affecting our offices and communities.



Strong Ties



Through productive discussions, we ensure that our positions are clearly understood and that the voices of JPs and Constables are heard.



81ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Let's Have Fun in Sun City



Why Choose JPCA?

- State approved training for Constables, Deputies, Clerks, and Judges
- Professional development and networking
- Meet industry experts
- Vendor Room
- Evening fellowships
- Board meeting

Area Attractions:

- Plaza Theatre
- El Paso Zoo & Botanical Gardens
- Wet 'N' Wild Waterworld Waterpark
- White Sands National Park
- Franklin Mountains State Park
- Hueco Tanks State Park

Learn more:
<https://jpca.com>





87th ANNUAL JPCA CONFERENCE

Expand your knowledge and network in the vibrant city of El Paso—where learning opens doors to new opportunities!

June 23 - 27



Hotel Paso del Norte



El Paso, Texas



REGISTRATION OPENS
THE WEEK OF MARCH 10



For More Information
<https://jpca.com>



JPCA LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE TRACKS IMPACTFUL BILLS

Each year, members of the Justices of the Peace and Constables Association (JPCA) serve on the Legislative Committee, closely monitoring the thousands of bills filed in the Texas House and Senate. These dedicated officials work to ensure that proposed legislation affecting justices of the peace and constables is thoroughly reviewed and that lawmakers understand the real-world impact of their policies.

This year's Legislative Committee includes:

President Holly Williamson, Judge Wayne Mack (Legislative Committee Chair), Constable Larry Gallardo (Legislative Committee Chair), Judge Gregory Johnson (Legislative Committee Vice-Chair), and Constable Chad Jordan (Legislative Committee Vice-Chair).

As the legislative session progresses, the committee will focus on several priority bills that could significantly impact justice courts and law enforcement in Texas. Below is a brief overview of some key legislation the committee is tracking.

Justice of the Peace Priorities

HB 2176 by Rep. Harless – Addresses the composition and duties of a court security committee, ensuring courts remain safe and secure environments for judicial proceedings.

SB 303 by Sen. Perry – Aims to improve access to spoken language interpreters for individuals involved in justice and municipal court proceedings, promoting fairness and accessibility.

SB 539 by Sen. Johnson – Would allow defendants to appear by telephone or videoconference in justice and municipal courts, potentially reducing court backlogs and increasing efficiency.

Constable Priorities

HB 2282 by Rep. Lopez – Proposes adjustments to the reimbursement fee paid by defendants for a peace officer's services in executing or processing arrest warrants, capias, or capias pro fine. This bill seeks to ensure fair compensation for law enforcement efforts.

SB 428 by Sen. Hinojosa – Focuses on the qualifications for sheriffs and constables, as well as candidates for these positions, with the goal of maintaining high professional standards in law enforcement leadership.

The JPCA Legislative Committee will continue tracking these and other bills throughout the session, engaging with lawmakers to advocate for policies that support the justice system, public safety, and the communities they serve.

For updates on legislative developments, JPCA members and stakeholders are encouraged to stay informed through official association communications.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

*By Deputy Constable Dwain Read,
Ochiltree County*

There was a well-known comic strip that showed a boy sitting in a rocking chair in the corner of the room. He said, "Mom doesn't use bad words, but she sure knows them when she hears them."

How we use our tongue, our speech, is one of several ways the author of the New Testament book of James used as a test of faith. To James the test of our faith was one of consistent living.

You see what we say is overtly evidence of what we really are on the inside. In the book of James, following his practical approach to Christian living, James contrasted worldly attitudes and conduct with what is expected of those who profess to follow Christ.

In Ephesians 4:1, the Apostle Paul said, "I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

"Walk" refers to one's manner of life but the keyword in this verse is worthy. The idea in it, is the idea of balances or scales. If you put your life as you are living it on one side of the scales does it balance with what you profess?

How balanced or consistent is your life?

My prayer is that as you all serve in your capacities as Justice of the Peace, Constable, Deputy Constable, and Clerks, your lives reflect consistent living, worthy of the vocation that you have been called to.

2025 TJCTC EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Don't miss the chance to enhance your understanding and skills at the upcoming educational events hosted by the Texas Justice Court Training Center (TJCTC)! These sessions provide a deep dive into crucial topics relevant to judges, constables, and court personnel. Register today!

Judges

Austin, 10 hour: Mar. 2-4
Grapevine, 20 hour: Mar. 23-26
Secrets of the Dead Workshop: May 11-13
Lubbock, 20 hour: June 1-4
El Paso, 20 hours: June 23-27

Constables & Clerks

Austin, 20 Hour Civil Process: March 4-7
Virtual 20 hour Civil Process: April 21-24
Galveston, 20 Hour Civil Process: May 4-7
El Paso, 20 hours Civil Process: June 23—27



GREAT ADVICE FOR YOUR PRECINCT

QUESTION: May a defendant choose Deferred Disposition for a "No Seat Belt" offense that was NOT given in a construction or work zone?

Answer: YES. That offense is eligible for deferred disposition regardless of whether it was in a construction/work zone with workers present or not. Please see pages 41-42 of the Criminal Deskbook.

QUESTION: Judges that have a bench exchange... an inquest occurs, and one JP starts the process. Orders an autopsy. Authority to cremate is received by clerk. Judge is out of town for JP Conference. Can a JP that has a bench exchange with this JP sign the authority to cremate? Normally no, but with the bench exchange does that allow it happen?

Answer: We agree with your statement that the general rule is that only the person who completed the inquest should sign the certification of cremation. However, our position is that if there is a bench exchange agreement, the judge may legally act on behalf of the judge who conducted the inquest. Our concern would be that a body would be improperly cremated because the person who has the most information about the inquest and relevant circumstances would not be making the decision. Under the facts presented, we are less concerned because the autopsy has already been ordered.

QUESTION: What steps must be taken to obtain and serve a writ of attachment on an individual residing 200+ miles outside of our court's jurisdiction? The plaintiff has filed a Motion for Contempt after the defendant failed on two separate occasions to provide discovery with our court having issued orders to compel.

Answer: The requirements for a writ of attachment of a person are located in Rule 692.

"A Justice of the Peace may not enter a finding of indirect contempt until the alleged contemtor appears before the court." Officeholding and Ethics Deskbook, page 42 (emphasis in original). That does not mean that the alleged contemtor must be physically present; an appearance by zoom will be sufficient. Furthermore, Officeholding and Ethics Deskbook, page 54 states, "Confinement for contempt is serious and should be used sparingly. Before confining someone, the justice should consider if there are other options the court may employ to get the same results."

It may be difficult to have the writ of attachment enforced, as you will probably need your local constable to be willing to expend the resources to bring the defendant into custody.

QUESTION: Can a plaintiff in a debt claim file one petition against one Defendant but have multiple claims? Plaintiff SPS Funding filed one petition against Defendant Mary Jane listing count 1 - Discover bank charge off account purchased by SPS funding. Count 2 - AMEX CC charge off account purchased by SPS Funding Shouldn't the plaintiff file a petition for each separate debt?

Answer: YES, if the case is between the same plaintiff and defendant (looks like it is, because SPS now owns all of the debts), then they can be filed in the same case, even if there are multiple contracts/debts. The plaintiff could also choose to file as two separate cases. It is up to the plaintiff on how they choose to file the case.

CT JPCA TO HOST ANNUAL TRAINING SEMINAR IN BELTON

District 7 – The Central Texas Justices of the Peace and Constables Association (JPCA) is set to host its annual seminar on March 20, 2025, in Belton, Texas. This one-day event will bring together justices of the peace, constables, deputies, and clerks for a day of networking, education, and professional development.

The seminar kicks off with a free breakfast taco reception, offering attendees a chance to connect before the board meeting and officer elections. Following these key organizational proceedings, the event will feature opening remarks from state officials, providing insights into legislative updates and policy matters affecting justice courts and law enforcement across Central Texas.

A highlight of the event will be a BBQ luncheon, giving participants a taste of Texas hospitality while fostering camaraderie among elected officials and their staff.

The afternoon is dedicated to training and professional development. Thea Whalen with the Texas Justice Court Training Center (TJCTC) will lead a four-hour training session for justices of the peace, ensuring they stay up to date with the latest legal standards and procedural requirements. Simultaneously, constables and deputies will have the opportunity to complete four hours of TCOLE-certified training, enhancing their law enforcement knowledge and skills. Clerks are welcome to attend either session based on their interests and professional needs.

This annual seminar is free for all CT JPCA members. Non-members can purchase memberships on site the morning of the event. For more information or to register for the event, please contact the Central Texas JPCA or visit their official website.

SUBMIT YOUR STORIES, SHOUT OUTS, and PHOTOS!

Brag about your precinct! Submit your awards, accolades, and success stories to the Gavel & Badge.

Share your funny stories, heartwarming moments, and educational anecdotes with other members. Photos are always welcome!

Send items via email to Sylvia.Holmes@Traviscountytx.gov or by using the QR code (right).



JUDGE RALPH SWEARINGIN HONORED AS ADR “PIONEER”

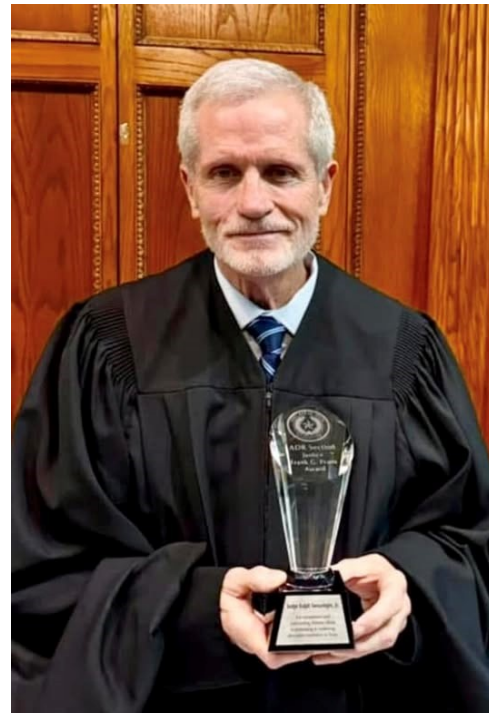
Judge Ralph Swearingin of the Tarrant County Justice Court, Precinct 1, has been awarded the highest honor in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Mediation in Texas. Judge Swearingin was recognized with the Justice Frank G. Evans Award, which serves as a living tribute to Justice Evans, widely regarded as the founder of the ADR movement in Texas. This award honors individuals who have made exceptional contributions to promoting, researching, or advancing alternative dispute resolution methods in Texas. This prestigious recognition places him among an elite group of Texas ADR pioneers and longtime advocates who have significantly advanced mediation and dispute resolution.

A trailblazer in court innovation, Judge Swearingin developed the award-winning In-Court Mediation Program, which was recognized by the Texas Association of Counties in 2009 as a “Best Practices” model. Additionally, he has mentored numerous law students in practical ADR applications and provided invaluable experience to lawyer-mediators. His leadership in the Tarrant County Fort Worth Court has set a standard for efficiency and case management statewide. His longtime Court Manager, Daisy Ramoz (formerly Espinoza), has been a dedicated and integral part of these efforts.

Judge Swearingin has devoted his life to public service, law enforcement, and the judiciary. Since 2007, he has served as the Judge of Tarrant County Precinct 1 Justice Court, bringing with him decades of legal and law enforcement experience. His career includes over 30 years in policing, with nearly 20 years in command-level leadership. He was awarded the Fort Worth Police Department’s Medal of Valor, is a graduate of the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia, and holds a Master Police Officer Certification. A distinguished legal scholar, he graduated with Honors from Texas Wesleyan University School of Law in 1994 and has been a licensed attorney since then.

He has played a critical role in shaping Texas judicial procedures, serving on numerous Texas Supreme Court committees. Notably, he was appointed by the Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court to the Task Force for Rules in Small Claims Cases and Justice Court Proceedings, leading to a complete overhaul of procedural rules for 819 Justice Courts in all 254 Texas counties in 2013. Additionally, he serves on the Texas Supreme Court’s Mental Health Task Force, Judicial Information and Technology Committee, and Landlord-Tenant Forms Task Force.

As a respected legal educator, Judge Swearingin frequently presents Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses. Judge Swearingin’s dedication to the law, judicial innovation, and public service continues to have a profound impact on Texas courts and the field of ADR.





ATTENTION, MEMBERS!

JPCA WEEK OF SERVICE IS APRIL 15 - 22!

Share your office's plans for helping your
community at

<https://jpca.com/service/>





APRIL 15 - 22, 2025

JPCA'S WEEK OF SERVICE



**SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS
GO A LONG WAY**

SHARE YOUR PLAN FOR HELPING
YOUR COMMUNITY AT
[HTTPS://JPCA.COM/SERVICE/](https://jPCA.com/service/)





APRIL
15th - 22nd



HELPING TEXAS SINCE 1958

JPCA's Week of Service



SHARE YOUR PLAN TO HELP

<https://jpca.com/service/>

