



Gavel & Badge

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

September 2025

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARLOS LOPEZ

Greetings to all as we remember those who lost their lives in 9/11 and those who continue to suffer from the horrific attack on our country.

Thank you to all who supported my election to President of this great organization as we stand strong together and move forward towards a better future.

The 2nd special session just ended and I'm happy to report that we had 4 bills filed and had 4 bills passed this session. Considering that over 8000 bills were filed and only 1300 passed with 28 bills vetoed by the Governor. It goes to show that we continue to have a strong voice at the Capitol thanks to the leadership of our legislative teams under the direction of our Legislative Committee Chairs, Constable Larry Gallardo and Judge Trisha Krenek.

We have just returned from our JPCA board of directors' strategic planning session, and I am excited about the prospect of improving our organization.

Our membership has grown due to the success of our immediate past presidents, Judge Holly Williamson and Constable Christopher Bates.

Let's keep it going. Remember we are only as strong as our weakest link; we are stronger together. If you have an issue, resolve it and let's move forward, not backwards.

Stay safe, stay strong.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS BEGINS WORK FOR THE YEAR

The Justices of the Peace and Constables Association of Texas (JPCA) held its annual board meeting and planning session with a strong showing of leadership and collaboration. In attendance were board members; district directors; Amy Bruno, our TAC representative; Buffy Crownover, JPCA's lobbyist; and Thea Whalen, the executive director of the Texas Justice Court Training Center. Together, they reviewed ongoing priorities, provided updates, and advised on future needs for the organization. Among the actions taken, the board approved the 2025–2026 budget, set the TJCTC education schedule, and began laying the groundwork for upcoming annual conferences scheduled for Sugar Land in 2026 and Rockwall in 2027.

Despite this progress, the board faced the difficult reality of reduced state funding. A legislative cut of 20% to JPCA's grant has created a \$400,000 shortfall, forcing the organization to make hard decisions about the future. In addition to removing Galveston as a venue for educational sessions beginning in January 2027, other necessary budget cuts included eliminating hot breakfasts and converting several in-person trainings to virtual. These measures will provide modest savings but are not sufficient to cover the full loss in funding. To help bridge the gap, JPCA encourages members in mid-size cities with suitable conference facilities to reach out to association leaders about potentially hosting future events. These changes reflect both the resilience and adaptability of the organization in continuing its mission to support judges, constables, clerks, and the communities they serve.



In the spirit of good fun, Carlos Lopez, JPCA president and devoted Texas Longhorn fan, had to pay up on a friendly wager after his team fell to Amy Bruno, our TAC representative's Ohio State Buckeyes in the season opener.

True to his word, he spent the entire board meeting proudly wearing her team's shirt. The lighthearted rivalry brought plenty of laughs and reminded everyone that even in the midst of serious work, there's always room for camaraderie and good sportsmanship.



JPCA 89th - NEW LAWS IMPACTING YOUR OFFICES

Justices of the Peace

- HB 75 – Magistrate duties for no probable cause determinations
- HB 1306 – Benefit or compensation eligibility for death investigation professionals
- SB 9 – Bail and release reforms and restrictions
- SB 38 – Revising eviction procedures
- SB 293 – Judicial discipline, notice, compensation, and transparency (some pending SJR 27 passage)
- SB 2878 – Omnibus courts bill; judicial compensation; judicial training; court security (VETOED)

Constables

- HB 33 – Active-shooter and emergency event response training and preparation
- HB 45 – Attorney General duty to prosecute human trafficking
- HB 201 – Financial Crimes Intelligence Center addressing motor fuel theft
- HB 331 – Benefit claim presumptions for first responders
- HB 1024 – Execution of warrants for certain releasees who violate electronic monitoring conditions
- HB 1893 – Allowing disclosure of vehicle license plate numbers captured in law enforcement videos
- HB 2217 – Grant program for bullet-resistant assets for peace officers
- HB 2282 – Increasing fee for executing warrants
- HB 2854 – Procedures and notifications required for hospital visit for certain parolees
- HB 4264 – Grant program for peace officers holding Master Proficiency Certificates
- HB 4341 – Critical infrastructure facility emergency response maps & grant program
- HB 4350 – Confidentiality of personal information of LEOs & certain federal officials in property records
- HB 5033 – Elimination of motor vehicle emissions inspections if Congress eliminates
- SB 53 – Delivery requirements for mental-health related court proceedings
- SB 305 – Criminal offense of passing certain vehicles on a highway
- SB 857 – Authorized removal of certain motor vehicles
- SB 1333 – Unauthorized entry, occupancy, or conveyance of real property
- SB 1362 – Prohibition on red flag laws

County-wide

- HB 229 – Governmental information regarding biological sex
- HB 2715 – Applies prosecutor removal statute to all officers of political subdivisions
- HB 4996 – Increased criminal penalty for refusal to execute release of a fraudulent lien
- HB 5081 – Criminal offense for posting personal information of judges and judicial staff
- SB 370 – Confidentiality of information about current or former AG staff & prosecutor staff

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

*By Deputy Constable Dwain Read,
Ochiltree County*

In today's world, issues of the mental health of folks are an increasing problem in our society. It seems to many that the troubles of life can seem so heavy to bear. But the truth is, the Lord asks us to put those burdens at His feet. In 1 Peter 5:7, the apostle Peter tells us to "cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." I hope you agree that prayer and faith help us to find peace and strength in the storms of life.

The reality of mental health issues has become more real to our circle as we serve either as a Judge, Constable, or Clerk. The problem of mental health is increasingly relevant in today's environment. People from every spectrum of the human experience are struggling with anxiety, depression, and emotional distress, and so many are looking for answers.

I would suggest as people of faith; the Bible addresses the issues we struggle with and the hope for healing we seek. In Psalm 34:18 it reminds us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." This verse comforts us that God is aware of our suffering and is willing to help us through it.

Experiencing struggles with mental illness can feel isolating. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." This gives us the admonition to "carry each other's burdens," a reminder of the strength of fellowship and support. The Bible speaks about the necessity of seeking counsel.

Proverbs 11:14 tells us, "Where there is no guidance, a people fall, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety." This combination can produce the most healing and restorative results for people. To members of our association, we are reminded that recent disasters and world events can create mental health challenges. But it is important to remember that faith can be a powerful resource for comfort and hope.

May God bless each of you as you serve!

STRONGER MINDS, STRONGER JUSTICE

Our jobs are unique. As Justices of the Peace and Constables, we're often the first line of the justice system. We hear cases that are deeply emotional. We deal with people at their most frustrated, frightened, or angry. We carry the responsibility of public safety, courthouse security, and community trust. And we do it all while balancing budgets, staffing challenges, and the nonstop pace of our calendars. It's no wonder stress can sneak up on us.

Why This Matters

Mental health isn't just about feeling good—it's about being able to do our jobs well. When we're stretched too thin, we're more likely to be short with staff, less patient with the public, and slower to make good decisions. Taking care of ourselves is part of taking care of our office.

Common Warning Signs

We all react to stress differently, but here are a few red flags to watch for in yourself or your colleagues:

- Trouble sleeping or feeling exhausted all the time
- Snapping at others more than usual
- Avoiding coworkers or friends
- Feeling numb or detached after hearing tough cases
- Struggling to focus on daily tasks

Simple Things That Help

You don't need to overhaul your life to make a difference. A few small, steady habits can go a long way:

- Check in with each other. A quick call to another JP or Constable to vent or share ideas can remind you that you're not alone.
- Set some boundaries. Even if we're always "on call," it's okay to protect family time or unplug for an hour
- Move your body. A short walk, stretching at your desk, or climbing the courthouse stairs can clear your head.
- Use your resources. Many counties offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or counseling services—confidential and free.
- Keep perspective. We can't solve every problem we see, but we can listen, make fair decisions, and treat people with respect. That matters.

WELLNESS TOOLS FOR JPS & CONSTABLES

Leading by Example

Our clerks and deputies watch how we handle stress. If we're open about the importance of taking care of our mental health, we give them permission to do the same. That creates a healthier, stronger team. Taking care of ourselves is not selfish—it's part of serving our communities with fairness, patience, and integrity. Let's look out for ourselves and each other.

Resources for Law Enforcement, First Responders & Justice Professionals

- **Texas Blue Chip Program**—Offers free, confidential counseling for first responders during emergencies, accessible via a poker chip system or a digital equivalent; can be used in-person or via telehealth. Emergency access: COPLINE at 1-800-267-5463, or dial 988.
- **Heroes Helpline**—A free, confidential, 24/7 helpline for first responders and healthcare workers in Texas. Offers peer support, treatment navigation, and referrals. 833-367-4689 (833-EMS-IN-TX)
- **Texas Law Enforcement Peer Network (TLEPN)** - Part of the Heroes Helpline offerings, TLEPN provides peer-support pathways for law enforcement professionals. Visit their site for more information: <https://www.untDallas.edu/cpi/tlepn/>
- **Texas Lawyers Assistance Program (TLAP)** - If you're experiencing stress, burnout, or emotional overwhelm, consider reaching out to TLAP (1-800-343-TLAP) or the ABA helpline (1-800-219-6474) for peer or emotional support—even though designed for judges generally, both are open to non-lawyer adjudicators.

Resources for the General Public and Community-Facing Programs

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**—Available 24/7, free and confidential via call, text, or chat. If the line is dialed from within Texas, it auto-connects to your regional crisis center.
- **NAMI Texas**—Provides free support groups, educational programs, peer-led workshops, and help navigating treatment—all across the state. Crisis lines: at 1-800-950-NAMI (6264), and NAMI Texas at 512-693-2000.



GREAT ADVICE FOR YOUR PRECINCT

QUESTION: We are needing clarification on OMNI holds. Jane Doe received a class C ticket a year ago and never took care of it. Her case was sent to OMNI. She can't renew her license, so she comes in and pleas n/g. At Pre-Trial, the DA offers her a deal \$200 (including OMNI fee) and deferral period. She pays the \$200 within the week, but still has time left on deferral.

When do we release the hold? After the fine is paid? Or after final judgment/dismissal of the deferral? We are confused on this situation, because even though the fine has been paid, the final outcome (either conviction or dismissal) has not been satisfied in the court.

Answer: The OMNI hold should have been released the day that she was put on deferred and paid the OMNI fee, because she made other suitable arrangements to satisfy the fine and costs within the court's discretion. See Transportation Code § 706.005(a) and page 25 of the Criminal Deskbook. You should release the OMNI hold now if you have not done so.

QUESTION: An inquest was done on the mother of a family. The siblings (children of deceased) are squabbling over who has the right to receive information on the medical examiner report of the autopsy and the death certificate when it is completed. What would be the best way to handle this situation? The autopsy is still in a pending status.

Answer: The deceased's surviving adult children are fourth on the list. If there are no specific written directions from the deceased, no person designated in a written instrument signed by the deceased, and no surviving spouse, then any one of the adult children can make the decision. See Health and Safety Code Section 711.002(a). If the children disagree as to what should happen with the body, they will need to resolve the matter in probate court. The autopsy report, once received by your office, is an open record, so any of the children would be entitled to a request it from your court. The same would go for the death certificate so far as it is a record in your inquest file. Any child of the deceased could also request a death certificate online here: <https://ovra.txapps.texas.gov/ovra/order-death-certificate> (once it is finalized).

QUESTION: Can the landlord and tenant submit an agreed judgment to conclude an eviction?

Answer: Yes, the court can enter an agreed judgment in an eviction case. Note, however, that the judgment may only contain orders that the court has authority to order in an eviction case. So you can award possession, court costs, delinquent rent, attorneys fees if applicable, and post-judgment interest. You may not award other amounts other than rent or include a move-out date, payment plan, etc. The parties can agree to these other things and can even file something in the case about what they've agreed to if they want to, but the judgment signed by the court may not include anything other than what is specifically authorized by law as described above. For more information about judgments, please see Ch. 4, Section (D)(8) of TJCTC's Evictions Deskbook: <https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/deskbooks.html>. And note that if the plaintiff wishes to dismiss instead, the court may also grant a non-suit and dismiss the case.

EVERY INCIDENT COUNTS—REPORT IT!

What the Reporting Site Exists For

Texas law (specifically, Article 102.017(f) of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure) requires that any sheriff, constable, or other law enforcement body responsible for court security must submit a written report for any court security incident that takes place in or around a building housing a court.

The term “court security incident” covers adverse events that either threaten persons or property, or cause (or might cause) a serious disruption of court operations. Examples include threats, violent or disorderly conduct, assaults, escape or attempted escape, weapons or contraband being introduced, etc.

Why Reporting Incidents is Important

First, the system ensures accountability and transparency in court operations. By documenting security incidents, it helps courts, law enforcement, judicial administrators, and oversight bodies understand what kinds of security challenges are occurring, how often, and where. That data can support policy decisions, allocation of resources, training, or changes to security protocols. Without reports, risk factors or recurring vulnerabilities might go unnoticed.

Second, timely reporting is critical for public safety and maintaining trust in the justice system. When incidents are reported promptly, judges, court officials, law enforcement, and the Office of Court Administration can respond quickly to prevent escalation, implement corrective measures, and protect court staff, litigants, and the public. It also helps ensure that disruptions to court functions are minimized.

Judges May Also File Reports

Judges also have the ability to file incident reports directly when events impact their courthouse. By allowing judges to report, the system ensures that significant security concerns are not overlooked and that the Office of Court Administration still receives a complete picture of threats or disruptions affecting court operations. This safeguard helps maintain accurate records and supports proactive measures to strengthen courthouse security.

For more information, visit the OCA Court Security Incident Reporting website: **<https://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/court-security/court-security-incident-reporting/>**

The flyer on the next page contains a QR code directly to file a report. Print this flyer out and post it in your office for quick reference and reminders about the importance of reporting every incident, every time.

SCAN HERE



TO REPORT A SECURITY INCIDENT

➡ PROTECT

Yourself and
others in the
courthouse

➡ PREVENT

Future incidents
from occurring or
recurring

➡ PROVIDE

Data to support
increased funding,
training, and
resources

BEHIND THE SCENES: WHAT JPCA DOES FOR MEMBERS

JPCA has historically been the primary advocate that lobbies the Legislature to secure and maintain funding for the TJCTC (Texas Justice Court Training Center). Without JPCA's influence, TJCTC would not have the resources to provide hundreds of hours of training each year at low or no cost to judges, constables. JPCA works closely with TJCTC to shape the education schedule, course offerings, and conference locations. At board meetings, TJCTC's executive director attends to give updates, gather feedback, and advise on needs. This ensures the training reflects what JPs and constables actually face in the field.

Through JPCA membership, you're part of the statewide community that gets direct alerts about new legal requirements, changes to education rules, and priority access to events. Being "in the loop" via JPCA means you don't just meet the mandatory hours — you stay current in real time. Because JPCA represents over 2,000 elected officials, it carries weight when advising TJCTC about what types of classes are most needed (for example, more civil law, magistration, or clerk-focused training). As a member, your feedback channels through JPCA to influence the education you receive.

INVESTING IN A LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP PAYS FOR ITSELF

The Lifetime Membership (\$410 one-time) pays for itself in just under 6 years of service. After that, every year you serve is essentially "free" from a dues perspective. If you plan to stay in office beyond a single term, or even if you're just optimistic about re-election, the return on investment for a lifetime membership is excellent.

As a court or constable's clerk, you are the backbone of your office, often serving in your office for decades. JPCA membership gives you access to the tools, training, and support you need to succeed. Through our partnership with the Texas Justice Court Training Center, you'll receive specialized clerk education that's designed just for you — covering court procedures, records, civil process, and customer service. Add in scholarships, friendship, and professional development opportunities, and JPCA membership becomes one of the best investments you can make in your career. Join today — because your work matters, and your voice matters too.

With annual dues of \$45, a clerk will spend more than the \$410 lifetime fee in just nine years. Lifetime membership is a cost-saving way to show long-term commitment to your career and the justice system you support.

Join today! Visit <https://jpca.com/become-a-member/> or scan below:



2025—2026 TJCTC TRAINING SCHEDULE

Learn about the latest legislation at an upcoming events from the Texas Justice Court Training Center (TJCTC) or the Texas Association of Counties (TAC)! Register today for in-person or virtual training!

Judges - 20 Hour

Galveston - November 30 - December 3, 2025

Corpus Christi - January 25 - 28, 2026

Round Rock - March 30 - April 2, 2026

Denton - April 20 - 23, 2026

Lubbock - May 31 - June 3, 2026

Constables

Denton—February 2 - 5, 2026

Galveston—May 3 - 6, 2026

VIRTUAL—April 6 - 9, 2026

San Marcos—July 26 - 29, 2026

Clerks

New, VIRTUAL—January 13 - 15, 2026

Experienced, Galveston—February 23 - 25, 2026

Experienced, VIRTUAL—March 10 - 12, 2026

Experienced, San Marcos—April 14 - 16, 2026

Experienced, Corpus Christi—May 19 - 21, 2026

Experienced, VIRTUAL—June 9 - 11, 2026

Experienced, Denton—August 4 - 6, 2026

New Court, San Marcos—August 18 - 20, 2026

82nd ANNUAL CONFERENCE: SPOTLIGHT ON SUGAR LAND

Sugar Land began as a company town for Imperial Sugar and still proudly honors that history with the iconic refinery and smokestack that gave the city its name. Today, it is one of Texas's fastest-growing and most diverse cities, home to residents who speak more than 90 languages and contribute to a rich cultural and culinary scene.

Visitors can enjoy a wide variety of international dining, explore unique shops, and attend concerts and performances at the nationally recognized Smart Financial Centre. Outdoor enthusiasts will appreciate the city's more than 25 parks and 3,000 acres of green space, offering trails, lakes, and bird-watching opportunities. Sports fans can also catch the Sugar Land Space Cowboys, the Triple-A affiliate of the Houston Astros, at Constellation Field. With its mix of history, entertainment, and southern hospitality, Sugar Land offers the perfect backdrop for the 82nd Annual JPCA Summer Conference in June 2026.

JPCA HONORS FLOOD-HIT COUNTIES WITH COOKOUT & GIFTS

The July 4 floods in Kerr County and across the Hill Country stand out as one of the most devastating natural disasters in recent memory. With lives lost, communities uprooted, and infrastructure washed away, the impact went far beyond property damage. For our profession, the demands placed on the justice courts were unprecedented. Inquests from over a hundred flood-related deaths fell heavily on a single county and one JP's shoulders, while constables navigated dangerous conditions to assist with recovery and coordination. At the same time, an influx of outside agencies descended to help—a blessing, but also a challenge that required constant oversight and coordination. What was asked of those offices would have been historic for any jurisdiction, yet it fell upon some of the smallest and leanest operations in our state.

Clerks, too, carried a heavy burden in the aftermath. With normal dockets disrupted and records threatened, clerks became the link between grieving families, law enforcement, the public, and outside responders. They processed inquests, managed paperwork under extraordinary conditions, and fielded media and community questions while supporting their judges and constables through long days and nights. These offices showed not only competence but resilience, professionalism, and compassion under impossible circumstances. As an association, it is important we recognize the weight carried by our colleagues in Kerr County and surrounding areas, and that we support them as they continue to recover from the flood's lasting effects.

To that end, JPCA will host a cookout in November in Kerr County to honor these officials and their clerks. TMPA has generously funded the food, but we are asking members statewide to contribute door prizes and gift cards so that tokens of appreciation can be shared at the event. Please contact your District Director with donations. By giving back in this way, we send a clear message of solidarity—that when one of our offices carries an extraordinary burden, the rest of us stand shoulder to shoulder with them.



Donations Needed!

No amount is too small to give.

Contact your district director to contribute.

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR 2025-2026 DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

District 1—

Judge Robert Taylor

500 S. Fillmore, Suite 502

Amarillo, TX 79101

Off: 806-379-2390

District 2—

Judge Francisco Gutierrez

904 Broadway, Suite 111

Lubbock, Texas 79401

Off: 806-775-1328

District 3—

Constable Frank Almada

424 Executive Center, Suite 100

El Paso, Texas 79902

Off: 915-273-3058

District 4—

Judge Hilda Lopez

309 Mills ST

Del Rio, TX 78840

Off: 830-774-7581

District 5—

Judge Robert Gonzalez

710 E. Main

Robstown, Texas 78380

Off: 361-767-5205

District 6—

Constable H.D. "Dale" Clark III

100 Weatherford, Ste 460A

Fort Worth, Texas 76196

Off: 817-884-1385

District 7—

Judge Rhonda Redden

211 W. 6th Street

Taylor, Texas 76574

Off: 512-352-4155

District 8—

Judge Willie Leal

2240 N. State Hwy 6

Jourdanton, TX 78026

Off: 832-769-2074

District 9—

Constable Sammy Knapp

920 E. Park Blvd.

Plano, TX 75074

Plano: (972) 881-3070

Metro: (972) 424-1460 ext. 3070

District 10—

Constable Jevonne Pollard

1085 Pearl Street, Room 103

Beaumont, TX 77701

Office: 409-835-8450

