



New Report Shows Tarrant County’s Excessive Use of the Death Penalty Death Sentences Pursued Almost Exclusively Against People of Color

A new report by the Texas Defender Service (TDS) shows Tarrant County – compared to the rest of Texas – is an extreme outlier in how aggressively it pursues death sentences, especially against minorities.

The TDS report shows Tarrant County has accounted for 23-percent of death penalty trials in Texas since 2020, even though it has only 7-percent of the state’s population.

Conspicuously, 92-percent of the death sentences sought by Tarrant County prosecutors since 2012 have been against racial and ethnic minorities, even though 40-percent of Tarrant County’s population is white.

“The days of racial terror lynchings may be over, but racism continues to infect the Tarrant County DA’s Office, influencing who it decides should face the death penalty,” said Burke Butler, Co-Executive Director of the Texas Defender Service. “Racism has no place in our criminal-legal system - most of all when it comes to a matter of life or death.”

The report found that the Tarrant County DA’s office systematically presses capital murder charges against Black people and then lacks the evidence to win at trial or even get past the incredibly low hurdle of a capital indictment. In the meantime, all of these defendants languish in the Tarrant County jail. This at a time when Tarrant County faces intense scrutiny for over 70 jail deaths since 2017.

“Tarrant County wields an outsized influence on the Texas death penalty landscape—not because of its size, but because of its extraordinary willingness to pursue capital charges,” said Estelle Hebron-Jones, Director of Special Projects at Texas Defender Service. “We call on Tarrant County to confront these findings and fundamentally rethink its practices.”

The full report, along with an executive summary, can be found at this link: <https://www.texasdefender.org/an-extreme-outlier/>

Local and national reactions to the report include:

“These are horrible tactics that are not making us safer,” said Pamela Young, an organizer with United Fort Worth. “The Tarrant County District Attorney’s Office needs to be proactive about eliminating racial bias that upends Black and brown peoples’ lives, often unnecessarily, and

Tarrant County needs a public defender's office to help protect its most vulnerable people from these racist outcomes.”

“At a time when most jurisdictions around the country, including in Texas, have turned away from the death penalty, Tarrant County prosecutors are extreme outliers in both pursuing death and their near total focus on minorities,” said Laura Porter, Executive Director of the U.S. Campaign to End the Death Penalty. “The findings of this report should shock the consciousness of every Texan and people everywhere.”

“Our nation's criminal justice laws must be administered fairly, without regard to a person's race or ethnicity, and Tarrant County has a duty to take steps to reform its system and eliminate these disturbing practices that undermine the principles of justice, fairness, and equality that must guide our system,” said Chris Kemmitt, Director of Litigation at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.”

[Texas Defender Service](#) is dedicated to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in Texas through direct representation, policy reform, and public education. For over a quarter century, we have fought for justice for the most disadvantaged people impacted by Texas's criminal-legal system.