



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

August 2021



Texas Judicial Council

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Technology & Data	2
Court Services	2
Specialty Courts	8
Enterprise Planning and Regulatory Services	9
Guardianship Abuse, Fraud Exploitation Deterrence Program (GAFEDP)	11
Project Update-Enterprise Planning Office (EPO).....	13
Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC).....	14
The Texas Judiciary’s Response To COVID-19.....	14

TECHNOLOGY & DATA

TECHNOLOGY RESPONSE TO COVID (AND BEYOND)

In March 2021, OCA renewed the statewide judicial subscription to Zoom to provide continued support for virtual hearings. OCA also procured licenses for zConnect.io, a product that allows judges to manage a mass docket more easily. This tool allows participants in virtual hearings to pre-register, indicate their role, and indicate if an interpreter is needed. This saves court staff time by not having to identify participants that are either coming to the virtual hearing by phone or that use a default device name as the name of the participant.

OCA continues to make iPads available for counties interested in conducting virtual jury trials, grand jury selections, or other court operations requiring technology.

E-FILING

The e-Filing system supports more than 481,000 users and handles 38,000 filings each day across all district, county, justice, and appellate courts. More than half of the courts are integrated with the e-filing system which allows them to accept a document and automatically transmit to the local case management system.

eFiling is mandatory for attorneys in all criminal, civil, family, and probate cases at the district/county level and above. Currently there are 165 JPs across 42 counties that accept eFilings on a permissive basis. 10 additional JPs are actively working to accept eFilings.

OCA executed a contract on December 24th, 2020 with Tyler Technologies for the next generation eFiling system. Phase 1 of the system upgrades are on track to completion. Phase 2 requirement clarification is underway.

Upcoming eFile system enhancements include:

- Statewide rollout of the Automated Certificate of Service
- Statewide rollout of the updated state EFSP and clerk review tools that no longer use Microsoft Silverlight
- Implementation of fee structure and changes from SB41
- Implementation of eFiling Insights to provide near real-time eFiling data to clerks and court administrators

OCA's Information Services Division (ISD) is instructed by the Legislature to directly provide staff and information technology equipment and services to the two high courts, the 14 intermediate appellate courts and six judicial branch state agencies – more than 1000 users. The division also provides staff to coordinate and facilitate the work of the Judicial Committee on Information Technology (JCIT).

COURT SERVICES

The Court Services Section includes the agency's court security, children's courts, specialty courts oversight, consulting, language access, judicial information, and research programs.

COURT SECURITY

The purpose of the Court Security Division is to:

- Support the establishment of court security committees through training and technical assistance.
- Assist courts with conducting and reviewing security and emergency preparedness assessments and developing improvement plans.
- Support the implementation of privacy protections for judges by facilitating the restriction of public access to the residential address of a judge or judge's spouse; and
- Serve as a clearinghouse of information regarding judicial and court security best practices.

The Court Security Division continues to assist the Texas Courts in facilitating the acquisition of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to comply with suggested guidance to resume operations in courts across the state. In coordination with the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM), the courts can secure access to the PPE inventory to aid in eventual resumption of court activities.

The Court Security Division collaborated with our judicial training partners to facilitate virtual training in the quarter to judges, and court administrators in matters involving court security strategies, suggested improvements, and recommendations.

The division submitted the inaugural Annual Report to the Legislature providing a comprehensive overview the State of Court Security in Texas Courthouses, highlighting training endeavors and resources provided from OCA, systemic courthouse security weaknesses and concerns, and recommended improvements to the judicial security landscape.

The Court Security Division:

- Conducted 55 courthouse assessments to date (with approximately 27 pending scheduling) and 6 judicial residential assessments.
- To date, processed 1,478 judicial officers' requests to have personal information redacted from state public view.
- Administratively processed and reported several judicial threats to DPS for appropriate follow-up.
- Participated in virtual judicial training conferences.
- Conducted virtual presentations before county and municipal court security committees, law enforcement, judicial training entities; and
- Continued to report judicial threats and inappropriate communication to www.iwatchtx.com, a DPS managed, community reporting system designed to capture suspicious activities or behaviors that may indicate criminal, or terroristic related threats towards the judiciary or courthouses.
- Evaluated personal duress alarms for the judiciary.

JUDICIAL INFORMATION

OCA's Judicial Information program is the repository for a variety of information regarding courts in Texas. It collects and maintains information from courts at all levels, analyzes court data, and produces or assists in the production of reports regarding the state's courts and the officials who work in them. Staff provide data support to Office of Court Administration, the Texas Judicial Council, the Supreme Court for its courts of appeals [docket equalization program](#), the Council of Chief Justices, the Council of Presiding Judges, and other entities as necessary. A large amount of time is also devoted to providing support to the trial courts and clerks and their information technology staff or case management vendors on reporting issues to promote data quality and completeness.

In addition to the daily work of providing technical assistance, working on data quality, answering data requests, and providing data support to OCA and others, program staff were involved in the following activities during the last period:

Statutorily Required Reports

Annual Statistical Report for the Texas Judiciary

- Began initial end of year data quality checks and follow up on missing reports in preparation for the 2021 report.

Judicial Turnover in Appellate and District Courts

- Sent judicial turnover surveys to all judges who resigned before the end of their term.

Other Reports

- Made routine updates to the list of [Hate Crimes](#), [Jury Charges and Sentences in Capital Cases](#), and [Vexatious Litigants](#) as reports were received.

Data and Data Analysis

- Ran numerous monthly queries and compiled statistics for internal and external stakeholders/requestors on the effects of the COVID pandemic on filings, dispositions, clearance rates and backlogs by case type, case category, county, court, etc.
- Produced 15 data analyses for new district courts, county courts at law, and justice courts.
- Responded to a constant stream of data requests related to the legislative session.
- Drafted 2 quarterly proposals for transfer of cases among the courts of appeals and produced data and analyses for various related requests.
- Submitted Texas appellate court for 2020 to the National Center for State Courts' [Court Statistics Project](#).
- Updated information on the Texas Judiciary for the National Center for State Courts' [State Court Organization](#) project.

Judicial Directory

- Updated the judicial directory database with information as of spring/summer 2021.
- Sent judge demographic profile sheets to new judges.

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Training and Presentations

- Conducted a class on monthly court activity reports for new clerks through the Texas Municipal Courts' Education Center.
- Presented to Judicial Council and to the Criminal Justice Planners group on major trends in the FY 2020 data.

Other Projects

- Worked on identifying data elements to collect for criminal, civil, and juvenile case level data.
- Worked with the court services consultant, Information Services director, and project manager on developing requirements and conducting testing for the e-filing Insights program.

LANGUAGE ACCESS

OCA's licensed court interpreters provide interpreting services via telephone and videoconference through the Texas Court Remote Interpreter Service (TCRIS). These services are available to our Texas Courts in all case types, for short, non-contested hearings that involve limited or no evidence. The Language Access Department staff also provides translation services as directed by OCA's management.

In ensuring that justice continues to be served to all Texans in the current pandemic situation and with OCA's introduction of the remote proceedings capability through Zoom, the Language Access staff interpreters continued providing services through this platform as well as other videoconference systems that courts are using at this time such as Cisco, LifeSize, Skype, Teams and WebEx.

From March 1 through July 31, 2021, TCRIS staff provided interpreting services in 1,219 hearings of which 1,184 were via video (Zoom, Teams, WebEx, etc) in 79 counties. In the chart below, it is clear that the demand for OCA's Remote Interpreter Services has increased dramatically year-over-year since 2019.

Number of Interpreted Sessions by Month



OTHER COURT SERVICES

Since the last Judicial Council meeting, the Court Services Division and the Court Consultant has been assisting courts across the state through the following projects:

Court Process Reviews Performed:

- City of Alpine- Municipal Court Analysis and development of processes to assist in managing the court docket, personnel and managing files.
- McLennan County- Review and assessed the initial recommendations of OCA, aiding in determining the most efficient use of judges, staff, and facilities.
- Williamson County- Addressing Post Pandemic Backlog
 - ✓ Mental Health Reporting maintenance of guide and assistance with questions related to NICS
 - ✓ Participated as a panelist for a webinar/workshop on the Expedited Action Rules
 - ✓ Assisted with the Citation by Publication and Protective Order Database fielding questions and assisting clerks as requested.
 - ✓ eFileTexas RFP evaluation team and assisting with reviewing outstanding enhancements for the system with Tyler Tech and Sam Levario-project manager.
 - ✓ Uniform Case Management System RFP evaluation team. Assisting in analyzing and reviewing proposals and watching demonstrations.
 - ✓ Case Data Reporting evaluation team, assisting with reviewing the data elements captured at the court level and data wanted for reporting purposes.
 - ✓ Developed general recommendations and “Best Practices” to address court backlog due to the pandemic.
 - ✓ Assisted team in providing notice to counties for undisbursed funds from re:SearchTX
 - ✓ Assisted National Center of Courts in gathering data for court study related to virtual hearings that included courts from the following counties: Brewster, Collin, Dallas, Lubbock, Uvalde, Tom Green, Real, Travis, Webb, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis and Presidio

Public Engagement Pilot Project

Although the Public Engagement Pilot Project (PEPP) wrapped up in the beginning of 2020, there continues to be work finalizing the toolkit for the project. Texas has been providing materials used during its engagement such as meeting templates, social media postings, interview questions and general feedback on how other jurisdictions can replicate the project. The project should wrap up by the fall of 2021.

Trainings and Presentations

Even with a number of conferences occurring virtually in the last quarter, there were more occurring in-person. OCA was asked to present at several during the last period on topics including Pretrial Risk Assessment Tools, Court Administration Tips and Tricks and Virtual Child Welfare Hearings. Specific conferences included: College for New Court Professionals, National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies and Texas Association of Pretrial Services Joint Conference, JP and Constables Regional Training and the National Association for Court Management Annual Conference.

Civil Justice Initiative Expedited Actions Training

In March 2021, OCA worked with the National Center for State Courts and the Institute for the Advancement of American Legal System, to produce a three part webinar series covering the [Amendments](#) to the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, which became effective on January 1, 2021, including rules governing expedited actions. The Texas Office of Court Administration invited county and district court teams to participate in a special training opportunity on effective implementation strategies to improve civil case processing. The training offered strategies to help county and district courts manage existing backlogs and prepare for an expected increase in civil filings.

Child Welfare Courts Evaluation

Texas continues to participate in an evaluation of virtual child welfare hearings. Anecdotally, courts report both positive and negative experiences with virtual child welfare hearings. There is, however, limited research on the experience of youth and families in virtual hearings or the extent to which the virtual courtroom impacts the ability to conduct quality hearings.

Researchers have observed virtual hearings, and collection data through activities including electronic surveys and virtual focus groups. In the next quarter, we expect receive information on how virtual hearings in our state are going with regard to the experiences of youth and families and will be informing the national conversation about best practices in virtual hearings and helping to shape the research agenda around virtual child welfare hearings.

Remote Hearings Workload Evaluation

Texas continues to work on a project studying remote and virtual hearings and the impact on judicial time.

During this period on the project, a modified judicial time study focused on the time judges spent engaged in remote court activities was distributed to eight participating jurisdictions across the state. The time study collected data from each of the court locations using augmented weighted caseload project protocols. Knowledge of how the use of remote hearings affects judicial workload is a critical step in determining the efficiency of remote hearings and the extent to which they should be maintained post-pandemic. The NCSCs weighted caseload method represents the state of the art in judicial workload assessment, and, in the course of this project, the method will be extended to explicitly capture judicial time spent conducting remote hearings.

The findings will provide the basis for distinguishing and weighting different types of cases to account for variations in case complexity in combination with the manner in which hearings are held (remote v. in-person). The participating jurisdictions will serve as pilot courts to test the methodology and provide the data necessary to build an objective estimate of judicial workload in the environment of remote hearings. These results will shape the development and application of judicial workload methodology in Texas and throughout the country. More than 30 states currently employ weighted caseload models to analyze resource needs in their trial courts, and a weighted caseload model is used in Texas as a means of evaluating the need for judges, with the most recent model developed by the NCSC in 2007. We anticipate having a final report before the end of 2021.

Centers of Excellence

The Centers of Excellence program is still active and improving. Onsite evaluations are tentatively being considered, while keeping in mind the ongoing health considerations. New courts continue to show interest in becoming recognized and the Research and Court Services Division is working to meet the needs of courts looking to become recognized when appropriate.

PRAISTX

Court Services staff also continued work on the [Pretrial Risk Assessment Information System](#) (PRAISTX), with the plans to kick off work on an enhanced and modified system that is automated.

SPECIALTY COURTS

CHILDREN’S COURTS PROGRAM

Since the last report, the second biennial Child Protection Court Convening occurred virtually July 28-29, 2021. The training was specifically for child protection court associate judges and court coordinators. The training was well received. The OCA Administrative Director presented a legislative update and facilitated a panel discussion with three Presiding Judges of the Administrative Judicial Regions (AJR) – Hon. Susan Brown (11th AJR), Hon. Ana Estevez (9th AJR), and Hon. Ray Wheless (1st AJR). The OCA Research and Court Services Division (RCSD) Director and dedicated Court Improvement Project (CIP) technicians presented to an audience of child protection court judges and court coordinators on the importance of data collection. The Children’s Courts Program Manager took part in the “Welcome” portion of the program and facilitated a discussion group for the court coordinators. The CIP technicians conducted an overview of the Child Protection Court Case Management System (CPCMS) and held a question-and-answer session for the court coordinators.

The OCA-RCSD Director and Children’s Courts Program Manager continued to work with the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families (Children’s Commission) on several initiatives including the Dual Status Youth Pilot Project mentioned in the last report. Data fields specific to dual status youth have been incorporated into the CPCMS for future project evaluation.

SPECIALTY/PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS

The Specialty Courts Program Manager, also serving as the Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinator (SPCC), continued representing OCA by attending and participating in specialty court-related meetings sponsored by a diverse body of state and federal governmental and non-profit agencies and other stakeholders.

Effective September 2019, OCA obtained oversight authority of Texas Specialty Courts. Specialty Courts are required to register with the OCA prior to operating by submitting required documentation for official acknowledgement. The SPCC accepts, reviews and processes the registration documents. Since the last report, Specialty Courts in Hidalgo, McLennan, Nolan, Potter, Travis, and Victoria Counties were registered. The SPCC compiled and submitted an updated list of registered Specialty Courts to the National Drug Court Resource Center (NDCRC) for inclusion in its annual publication of treatment courts nationwide. NDCRC supports the design, implementation, expansion, and enhancement of treatment court programs through the dissemination of information, creation of resources, engagement in research, and collaboration with partner agencies. For more information visit the website - <https://ndcrc.org/>.

The SPCC continued to attend Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinators meetings hosted by the Center for Court Innovation, to discuss each state’s courts response to the pandemic and to share ideas on how to operate moving forward.

ENTERPRISE PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES

REGULATORY SERVICES-JUDICIAL BRANCH CERTIFICATION COMMISSION (JBCC)

The Judicial Branch Certification Commission (JBCC) was established by the Texas Legislature during the 83rd Regular Session to promote government efficiency and create consistency across the regulated judicial professions. The nine-member commission is appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas. The core responsibility of the JBCC is the oversight of the certification, registration, and licensing of approximately **7,032** court reporters and court reporting firms, guardians and guardianship programs, process servers, and licensed court interpreters. The JBCC also registers all guardianships throughout Texas and provides training and criminal histories to the courts for the proposed guardians.

Profession	Type	Number of Certifications, Registrations, Licenses
Court Reporters	Certification	2236
Apprentice Court Reporters	Certification	7
Provisional Court Reporters	Certification	4
Court Reporting Firms	Registration	249
(50%+) CSR Owned Firms	Registration	43
Guardians	Certification	374
Provisional Guardians	Certification	106
Guardianship Program	Registration	24
Process Servers	Certification	3496
Court Interpreters-Basic	License	65
Court Interpreters-Master	License	428
TOTAL		7032

REGISTRATION OF GUARDIANSHIPS

SB 1096 (Zaffirini/Smithee) created a safety net to ensure guardians are registered, properly trained, receive a criminal history background check, and guardian contact data is provided to DPS and its Law Enforcement Terminal System (TLETS) to identify persons under guardianship if law enforcement contact is made with them.

June 1, 2018, OCA implemented an online system to register every guardianship in the state prior to appointment. As a registration prerequisite, the OCA conducts a criminal history background check and provides online training to proposed guardians. To date **48,416** proposed guardians have submitted data for registration, **22,530** have completed the training in English and Spanish, and over **16,928** criminal histories have been provided to the courts.

RECENT MEETINGS OF THE JBCC AND ADVISORY BOARDS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

JBCC meetings are conducted quarterly throughout the year. The Commission met on November 6, 2020, February 5, 2021, and May 7, 2021. The next meeting of the Commission is August 6, 2021.

The Court Reporters Certification Advisory Board met on April 29, 2021.

The agendas for all JBCC meetings can be found at <http://www.txcourts.gov/jbcc/meetings-agendas/>.

JBCC COMPLIANCE SECTION COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION

In FY 2021, 88 complaints have been filed with the JBCC Compliance team and are in process or resolved:

- **18 court reporters**
- **1 court reporting firm**
- **35 process servers**
- **24 guardians**
- **10 guardianship programs**

The following JBCC Complaint Review Committees met:

- Court Reporters Complaint Review Committee, September 4, 2020, December 18, 2020, and May 14, 2021
- Process Server Complaint Review Committee, September 10, 2020, December 17, 2020, and May 13, 2021
- Guardians Complaint Review Committee, November 17, 2020, June 29, 2021, and July 13, 2021

COURT REPORTER ADVISORY BOARD TO ADDRESS COURT REPORTER SHORTAGE

SB 891, passed last session, requires that the JBCC establish a stakeholder work group committee to address development of apprenticeship and provisional certifications for court reporters. Other provisions of the bill require the JBCC to develop and maintain a list of states that have certification requirements substantially equivalent to Texas, and requirements relating to Reciprocity/Endorsement are also set out in the bill. The apprentice and provisional certifications have been established and fully functional

Another provision in SB 891 requires the JBCC to contact other states regarding establishing reciprocity agreements with Texas if states are interested. Approximately 30 states have been contacted. A report on the results of the inquiry was sent to the Supreme Court on April 1, 2020.

On May 21, 2020, JBCC staff members Jeff Rinard, Scott Gibson, Michele Henricks and Sheryl Jones attended a virtual meeting of the Court Reporters Board of California to discuss reciprocity between Texas and California court reporters. The California Board voted to form a task force with representatives from both states to work out the details of a reciprocity agreement.

On June 26, 2020, held the first joint meeting of the California/Texas task force on reciprocity for court reporters between the two states. The JBCC team along with the court reporter associations discussed issues relating to implementing reciprocity between Texas and California. We anticipate additional meetings soon. We continue to follow up with Iowa, New Jersey, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and New Jersey on court reporter reciprocity agreements with Texas.

EXAMINATIONS FOR THE JBCC

The JBCC certification staff administers the examinations for the Guardianship Certification written examination and the Licensed Court Interpreter written and oral examinations. A vendor administers the written and skills examination for the Court Reporters Certification.

We are currently administering the Court Reporter examinations online and working on developing and administering the Guardianship and LCI written examinations online.

- JBCC staff administered **41** guardianship certification written examinations between **January 26, 2021, and April 20, 2021.**
- JBCC staff administered **37** oral Licensed Court Interpreter examinations between **March 09, 2021, and May 25, 2021.**
- JBCC staff administered **43** written Licensed Court Interpreter examinations between **March 09, 2021, and May 25, 2021.**
- JBCC staff will administer **21** written Guardianship Certification examinations on **July 20-21, 2021.**
- JBCC staff will administer **22** oral Licensed Court Interpreter examinations on **August 16, 2021.**
- JBCC staff will administer **24** written Licensed Court Interpreter examinations on **August 24, 2021.**

GUARDIANSHIP ABUSE, FRAUD EXPLOITATION DETERRENCE PROGRAM (GAFEDP)

On September 1, 2019, the OCA implemented the GAFEDP to aid the courts relating to guardianship matters pursuant to SB31 & HB 1286 (Zaffirini/Smithee). Our team of guardianship compliance specialists assist in reviewing guardianship cases to identify reporting deficiencies by guardians, auditing annual accountings, reporting their findings back to the judge, and reporting to the courts any concerns of potential abuse, fraud, or financial exploitation being committed against a ward under guardianship.

The program is offered at no expense to counties throughout the state. Courts throughout the state are required to participate in the program if selected and may also request program participation. Additionally, the OCA director may notify the Judicial Conduct Commission of any concerns involving judges who fail to act upon concerns raised by compliance specialists.

On January 1, 2021, the GAFEDP issued the [2020 Annual Report](#) to the Texas Legislature.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUARDIANSHIP ABUSE FRAUD AND EXPLOITATION DETERRENCE PROGRAM (GAFEDP)

While the reforms implemented to date have improved the guardianship system in Texas, a key to the reforms' success is ensuring compliance with the laws and reviewing guardianship activities to spot potential abuse, fraud, and exploitation. To provide a safety net for all vulnerable persons under the care of guardians, the Judicial Council proposed expanding the GCP statewide as proposed in OCA's legislative appropriations request and **SB 31 (86th R.S., Zaffirini et al)**. OCA is in the process of implementing the program and hiring the personnel necessary to monitor cases throughout the state.

MONITORING AND AUDITS

The annual reports of the well-being and the financial annual accounts should be monitored, and a sample of the reports should be audited to ensure that the data submitted is complete and accurate. Monitoring and auditing would also create a deterrence against theft and fraud.

DEVELOPMENT OF A STATEWIDE ONLINE GUARDIANSHIP REPORTING PORTAL

The OCA has been developing an automated, electronic tool for filing required reports, annual accountings, and other documents in guardianship cases. This system will provide a method to notify courts when required reports are delinquent and to review annual accounting reports for potentially fraudulent activities.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES FOR COURT CLERKS

Only by pro-actively training court personnel and proposed guardians on the fiduciary duties of guardianship, as well as auditing reports and accountings to detect and deter fraud and exploitation, will Texas be adequately braced to ensure the safety and well-being of this vulnerable and growing population. In addition to our online training of guardians on fiduciary record-maintenance and reporting duties, ongoing training and professional development is recommended for court and clerk staff on the collection and reporting of required guardianship data, as well as training on the fiduciary duties of guardians to inform the direction and guidance of proposed guardians.

Our mission is to assist the courts in protecting our most vulnerable citizens and their assets.

Guardianship Compliance Project (GCP) Data Findings	as of July 16, 2021
Courts and Counties Involved in the GCP	179-132
Total Number of Guardianship Cases Reviewed GCP/GAFEDP	55,339
Total Number of Cases Recommended for Closure	25,294
Total Number of Active Guardianships Identified	30,045
<i>Percentage of Cases Missing Annual Reports</i>	32%
<i>Percentage of Cases Missing Annual Accountings</i>	45%
<i>Percentage of Cases Missing Inventories</i>	40%
<i>Percentage of Cases Out of Compliance</i>	40%
Total Number of Deceased Wards Identified	5,261

GAFEDP RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

- The GAFEDP team has implemented the pilot project for the guardianship online reporting system in Guadalupe County in addition to Travis, Cameron, Montgomery and Guadalupe counties. The team finalized the financial workbook procedures and will implement soon. The team continues refining team statewide scheduling, case review, and reporting procedures to ensure a more streamlined statewide system. We continue to develop quality assurance, initial and ongoing training and reporting requirements.
- The GAFEDP now has 16 team members of the total 23 personnel appropriated. Currently in the process of posting and interviewing for vacant team positions following the restoration of the 5% to the annual budget.
- Currently working in numerous counties in various stages.
- Developing GAFEDP procedures, process and training including the financial workbook and report of findings to the courts.
- Continuing to develop the GAFEDP guardianship online reporting system. We are currently piloting this project in Cameron, Montgomery, Travis, and Guadalupe counties.

PROJECT UPDATE-ENTERPRISE PLANNING OFFICE (EPO)

The Enterprise Planning Office (EPO) within Office of Court administration manages our diverse internal and external portfolio of projects. The goal of our EPO and our project management team is to assist the OCA in properly planning, executing, and delivering projects throughout the agency and the court system. The EPO team has implemented the following legislatively mandated projects and have assigned a project manager and project sponsor. The project managers work with the project teams consisting of user and subject matter experts to develop functional and non-functional requirements to implement the projects in a timely manner. We are currently implementing projects from the 87th Legislative Session. Below are projects currently managed by the EPO.

Uniform Case Management – HB 1 (Zerwas/Nelson)

The legislature allocated funding to OCA to procure a cloud-based uniform case management system. OCA intends the system to be of no-cost to counties and will be targeted at counties with less than 20,000 in population. The system would be standards-based and would automate the transmission of data to various state and national databases. The system would be opt-in (rather than mandatory). The project manager has been assigned and a user/SME group formed to work on this project. The project team worked with user groups and subject matter experts to develop user stories and system requirements. Update: The project negotiation team finalized negotiations with three vendors and is in the process of executing the contract following DIR review. Project implementation kickoff meeting expected on September 1, 2021.

Service of Citation by Publication On-line - SB 891 (Huffman/Leach)

Currently, service of citation by publication occurs in local newspapers. This method is becoming more expensive, and questions have arisen about the utility of such service. Under SB 891, OCA is required to establish a website that allows for service of citation by publication to occur via a website (in addition to service by publication in a newspaper or as an alternative to service by publication in certain circumstances where the cost is prohibitive, or a newspaper is not available). The site is intended to be no additional cost to individuals or to the counties. OCA has hired a project manager and is beginning work on this project as well. A project manager has been assigned and rules have been adopted by the Supreme Court necessary to implement this requirement that goes into effect in June. July 1, 2020, Go-live located at <https://www.txcourts.gov/judicial-data/citation-by-publication/>. Project Update: The project team is making edits and adjustments to the original system required from the 87th Legislative Session.

Protective Order Registry - SB 325 (Huffman/Landgraf)

OCA is required to create a family violence protective order registry to allow law enforcement and the public to have a single source of protective order applications (viewable only to law enforcement) and granted final family violence protective orders (viewable by law enforcement and public). The orders will be available to the public when the victim opts-in to providing the order to the public. The project manager held the kickoff meeting in October, and the first user/SME group meeting has been held. Staff are in the process of developing requirements and working with the internal programmer/developer. The project team is working with the project sponsor, user groups and subject matter experts to ensure IT development of this project. October 15, 2020, this project went live, located at <https://www.txcourts.gov/judicial-data/protective-order-registry/>. Project Update: The project team is currently making edits and adjustments to the current system required from the 87th Legislative Session.

TEXAS FORENSIC SCIENCE COMMISSION (TFSC)

The TFSC has nine members appointed by the Governor of Texas. Seven of the nine commissioners are scientists and two are attorneys (one prosecutor and one defense attorney).

The TFSC has four main areas of responsibility:

- accreditation of crime laboratories and other entities that perform forensic analysis;
- designation of forensic disciplines for accreditation or exemption;
- investigation of allegations regarding professional negligence and misconduct; and
- the licensing of forensic analysts.

The TFSC held its most recent quarterly meeting virtually on July 16, 2021. Commissioners considered a variety of matters including complaints against laboratories, laboratory self-disclosures of internal non-conformities, accreditation reports, and licenses issued pursuant to the forensic analyst licensing program. In the past year, the Commission closed investigations in 6 total matters, 4 in which the Commission found misconduct on part of a laboratory employee or forensic analyst.

The Commission currently has three pending investigations concerning analysts or laboratory management misconduct affecting forensic casework and one pending investigation in which the Commission will assist in evaluating a laboratory's root cause analysis with respect to issues identified in the laboratory's process for hemp/marihuana differentiation.

To date, the Commission has licensed over 1250 forensic analysts since the inception of its licensing program, January 1, 2019. Commission staff recently launched a Legal and Professional Responsibility Training developed for forensic analysts in the State. The Commission also began a collaboration with national subject matter experts, including faculty from the Center for Statistics and Applications in Forensic Evidence (CSAFE) on a Scientific Literacy Project that will incorporate various online forensic science training and education modules for lawyers and judges. The Commission continues to work with subject matter experts at the National Institute of Standards and Technology to assist Texas crime labs with implementing national forensic science standards published on the Organization of Scientific Area Committees Registry of Standards.

THE TEXAS JUDICIARY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Texas Supreme Court has two COVID-19 Emergency Orders still in effect. [Emergency Order 39](#) which renews the Texas Eviction Diversion Program and [Emergency Order 40](#) that permits courts to hold in person proceedings, including jury trials and encourages the adoption of minimum standard health protocols.

As of July 30, 2021, the number of remote hearings held since the start of the pandemic has increased to more than 1.6 million with 5.3 million participants and lasting over 4.4 million hours. Judges, clerks, and court staff have provided millions of court users with the ability to safely resolve their disputes.