



Vince Ryan
Harris County Attorney

February 27, 2020

Contact: Robert Soard
First Assistant County Attorney
713-274-5103
Robert.Soard@cao.hctx.net

County Attorney Ryan Continues Fight to Protect Communities

Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan will continue the fight to improve and protect neighborhoods.

Ryan this week won approval from the Harris County Commissioners Court to continue his Community Protection Program with six management districts: East Aldine Management District, International Management District, North Houston Management District, Southwest Management District, Harris County Improvement District Number 5 (Brays Oaks), and Spring Branch Management District of Harris County.

The Program, started in 2011, allows the districts to fund two lawyers and a paralegal in the County Attorney's Office who concentrate their practice on nuisance issues in these neighborhoods. The County Attorney can take legal action against owners who create situations that encourage crime on or around their property. The Office uses civil nuisance laws to target businesses and business owners who are a nuisance to the community. A lawsuit may be filed against the property owners and individuals maintaining the nuisance property.

We are sending a strong message to those who condone illicit activities in our communities that this will not be tolerated," said County Attorney Ryan.

The most common nuisances addressed in the Community Protection program are illegal game rooms, massage parlors, smoke shops, and motels that permit prostitution on their premises. The County Attorney has also obtained court orders to require residential property owners to employ security guards, repair fences, add surveillance cameras, fix broken lighting, and screen tenants for felony backgrounds. The program has closed a number of illicit spas, game rooms, and after-hours bars and has been successful in filing suit against apartment complexes where prostitution, narcotic offenses and aggravated crimes have taken place.

"Our nuisance abatement partnership with the Harris County Attorney's Office has been a great success," said Dave Hawes, Executive Director for the Spring Branch Management District. "By partnering with local law enforcement, the County Attorney has permanently removed scores of sexually oriented businesses and illicit game rooms from the midst of commercial and residential areas. The program has also been successful in assisting many multi-family landlords to significantly increase public safety for their residents through their public safety programs."

Among the Community Protection Program's many successes:

- Six after-hours clubs, four in the Southwest Management District and two in Spring Branch, that sold alcohol after 2 a.m. contrary to state law and had habitual criminal activity on their property, were shut down after nuisance abatement lawsuits were filed against them by the County Attorney's Office.
- A gang-infested Sharpstown condominium complex with 51 separate owners is under a court-ordered injunction and a receivership to manage the property. The receivership is the only one of its kind against a multi-family complex in the state.
- Two Brays Oaks convenience stores where members of the Bloods, Crips and Most Wanted criminal street gangs maintained a permanent base are under an Agreed Final Judgment and Injunction. Since the court order, the stores have security, drug dog sweeps, cameras, and have kept the gang members away from their property.
- A large apartment complex in the International District that is located across from two high schools had an inordinate number of calls for service, ranging from assaults to narcotics offenses. After filing suit and court-ordered mediation, the complex agreed to install a fence along the property, install cameras and hire licensed peace officers to patrol the property in order to reduce the crime.
- A convenience store in the International District with multiple narcotics and assault incidents has closed after the County Attorney's Office moved for a temporary injunction to enjoin them from causing a nuisance.
- Numerous lawsuits have been filed to close down illicit game rooms that are in violation of the Harris County game room regulations, including multiple locations in which patrons or employees of the illegal game rooms have been subjected to serious criminal activity such as aggravated robberies, kidnapping and even murder. Illicit game rooms have been shut down after being discovered in gas stations, strip malls, food marts, and in private warehouses, among other locations.

"We are all partners working together to keep our community safe," said County Attorney Ryan. "Our program has proven to be effective and we will continue to work together to keep illegal enterprises out of our neighborhoods."

Click [here](#) for a photo of County Attorney Ryan and former Managing Attorney Celena Vinson discussing community protection in September 2019.