



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
DISTRICT AND COUNTY COURTS AT LAW
STRATEGIC PLAN**

Mission Statement

It is the mission of the District Courts and County Courts at Law in Montgomery County to provide a fair, just, impartial, equitable and efficient adjudication of the rights of litigants within the bounds of the law, both substantive and procedural.

Purpose of a Strategic Plan

With the growth in Montgomery County over the past decade, and with future growth anticipated, this document is intended to function as a guide for the District and County Court at Law Judges in planning and creating policy for future courts, caseload allocations, specialty dockets, and other resources, including the Office of Court Administration and Office of Indigent Defense. This plan is adopted in order to formally lay out the values, priorities and goals held by the organization of the Courts. In so doing, the Courts wish to provide future judges with an organizational framework in which to adapt, as well as current judges with a viable structure for policy.

Values

The Courts in Montgomery County hold closely the following values in common:

- **Efficiency.** It is understood that as a third branch of government, the Courts must value efficiency as a meaningful standard. This extends from efficiency in how cases are handled on an individual basis to how Courts act as an organization of the whole, from efficiency in the cost of conducting court business to the use of grant funding to bring new innovations and initiatives.
- **Data driven management.** The Courts realize that judicial decision making is largely an evidence based process, and believe that administrative decision making should likewise be influenced by reliable quantitative information. The Courts rely on the Montgomery County Office of Court Administration to bring data to the attention of the OCA Committee and Board of Judges regarding clearance rate, time to disposition, and other measures that aid the Courts in making management decisions.
- **Access to Justice.** As public protector of the rights of a free citizenry, the Courts acknowledge that ensuring access to justice is an essential mission of the judiciary. This mission is certainly multi-faceted, dealing with Language Access, Indigent Defense, specialty dockets for self-represented litigants, and other policies and initiatives.
- **Fairness.** The Courts recognize that procedural justice (justice in the process) is often just as important for a litigant as actual distributive justice (justice in the resolution), and that the opinion of the public accessing the Courts for justice in Montgomery County is a valid qualitative measure to be weighed against the quantitative data mentioned above.
- **Transparency.** The Courts are committed to ensuring openness in the way the business of the Courts is run, whether it be in the posting and availability of rules, forms and dockets,

or in the public posting and availability of caseload statistics, including clearance rates, for the Courts, transparency is seen as a public good toward better government for the Courts in Montgomery County.

- Judicial expertise. In valuing judicial expertise, the Courts acknowledge that the public deserves the brightest and most competent judicial experts serving as judges in Montgomery County. This includes a commitment to continuing education that involves not only the points of law upon which a judge must base their decisions, but also the special qualities that are embodied in the best judges.

Priorities

In accordance with the above listed values, the Courts in Montgomery County have developed the following priorities:

- Following time standards. The Courts wish to follow the time standards to disposition adopted by the Texas Supreme Court in the Rules of Judicial Administration as well as the Courts in Montgomery County, including 18 months for civil jury trials, 12 months for civil non-jury trials, 6 months for contested family cases, 3 months for non-contested family cases, 6 month disposition for misdemeanors from date of arrest or filing of complaint, whichever is earlier, and the provision of Code of Criminal Procedure 32.01 for felony cases.
- Cost-effective programs. In all respects, the Courts wish to place priority on starting and implementing cost-effective programs to better the work of the courts. The Courts seek the assistance of other justice system actors in ensuring meaningful outcomes in terms of both cost and service to the public. The Court also affirms that while efficiency is valued, the need for additional resources must always be recognized, after all attempts at efficient programs have been made.
- 100% disposition rate. Acknowledging that the Courts' responsibility is to handle every case that comes before it in a timely fashion, a regular 100% disposition rate is a priority for the organization of the Courts in Montgomery County.
- Trial date certainty. It is recognized that every hearing conducted before a judge in Montgomery County should be for the purpose of moving a case toward disposition. Setting cases for trial and creating enforceable policies to help control unnecessary resets and continuances is seen as a viable and important priority for the Courts.

Goals

With the above listed values and priorities as a backdrop, the Courts in Montgomery County have devised the following goals:

- Adopting CourTools. Due to the information necessary for each of the Courts' priorities, the first goal is a court-wide adoption of CourTools. CourTools are a set of 10 performance measures developed by leading judicial experts at the National Center for State Courts, that helps provide a broad picture of the work of the courts. Specific measures include :
 - Access and Fairness survey
 - Clearance Rate
 - Time to Disposition
 - Age of Active Pending Caseload
 - Trial Date Certainty
 - Reliability and Integrity of Case Files
 - Collection of Monetary Penalties
 - Effective Use of Jurors
 - Court Employee Satisfaction survey
 - Cost Per Case
- Online publishing of Court Statistics. In order to effectively exhibit the Courts' value of transparency, this goal would provide broad-scale, court-wide information regarding the work of the Courts in Montgomery County. This goal functions closely in connection with the adoption of CourTools, which will consistently provide the information to be published.
- Quarterly and Annual Review of the Courts. As a way of maintaining consistent feedback and improvement, this goal has the Director of Court Administration providing caseload statistics and court program updates on a quarterly basis at Board of Judges, as well as an Annual Review that is provided at an annual judicial retreat arranged by OCA. This Annual Review will not only go over the above items, but will review policy and other judicial management matters, as well as future amendments to this strategic plan. Eventually, the retreat can be expanded to include continuing judicial education on topics of interest to the members of the Montgomery County judiciary.

Measuring Goals

While each of the goals listed above is qualitative in nature, how they are measured dictates their success or failure.

- Goal 1's success will be measured by the number of CourTools adopted by the Board of Judges for study.
- Goal 2 will be measured in two ways: First, by the availability of information from CourTools and/or the performance measures outlined by the Courts, and second, by the amount of judicial support for publishing the statistics.
- Goal 3 will be measured in two ways: First, by the confirmed attendance of the judges at such a planned retreat/annual review, and second, by the amount of judicial support for expanding the issues addressed at such an event.

Conclusion

The Courts in Montgomery County recognize the vital importance of an impartial tribunal in the public square. Taking steps to ensure the continual improvement of that resource is essential not only for the judiciary itself in Montgomery County, but for the confidence of the public that they serve. By outlining values, priorities and goals that keep these ends in mind, the Courts pledge their diligent work and best efforts to maintaining respect for the rule of law by prudently administering justice as well as their statutory and constitutional responsibilities.

SIGNED

Judge Kelly Case

Judge Lisa Michalk

Judge Cara Wood

Judge Kathleen Hamilton

Judge K. Michael Mayes

Judge Tracy Gilbert

Judge Michael Seiler

Signature page cont'd

Judge Dennis Watson

Judge Claudia Laird

Judge Patrice McDonald

Judge Mary Ann Turner

Judge Keith Mills Stewart