

**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY**  
*Southern District of Texas*

The President of the United States, with advice and consent of the Senate, appoints a United States Attorney for the 93 federal judicial districts in the nation and its territories. During the four-year term of office, the U.S. Attorney, under the direction of the Attorney General, serves as chief federal law enforcement officer in his or her district, and is responsible for representing the United States in courts of law in the district. The U. S. Attorney directs the activities of Assistant United States Attorneys who conduct litigation on behalf of the United States. Assistant U. S. Attorneys are commissioned for indefinite terms of office by the Attorney General.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE OFFICE**

Houston is headquarters for the district. Staffed branch offices are located at four strategic centers within the district: Corpus Christi, Brownsville, McAllen and Laredo. The United States Attorney, assisted by a First Assistant U.S. Attorney and supervisory Assistant U. S. Attorneys, provides overall direction of litigation, programs and administration. The majority of attorneys have criminal prosecution responsibilities. Within the Criminal, Narcotics and Special Prosecutions Divisions, attorneys are assigned to sections that address specific criminal offenses such as crimes of violence, economic crimes, financial institution fraud, narcotics and money laundering offenses, corruption by public officials, environmental criminal violations, civil rights offenses, and organized crime. Attorneys of the Civil Division are assigned defensive or affirmative litigation responsibilities.

The Programs Division is responsible for the district's Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC), community-based public safety initiatives, public information, and drug demand reduction programs. The LECC Coordinator, the Community Relations Specialist, the Public Information Specialist, and the Texas National Guard Drug Demand Reduction Coordinators work under the supervision of an Assistant United States Attorney.

The Houston office includes an administration staff under the direction of an Administrative Officer and an Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney. The administrative staff is responsible for more than 280 personnel, a \$21 million budget and advanced information systems.

Current information on the organization and activities of the U. S. Attorney's Office, including press releases, is available on the Internet at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/txs>.

**Branch Offices**

The four branch offices in the district maintain both criminal and civil dockets; and as the need arises, attorneys from the Houston office and elsewhere are assigned to participate in cases filed in any of the divisions of the district. Smuggling of narcotics and other

contraband, immigration offenses and customs violations make up the vast majority of the dockets of the branch offices due to the proximity of the international border. In addition, the offices handle a full compliment of civil matters. The branch offices are instrumental in providing effective law enforcement coordination and supporting crime prevention programs in their respective areas.

### Brownsville

The Brownsville office, located at the southernmost tip of Texas, is responsible for prosecuting federal criminal violations occurring within, affecting, or originating in Cameron and Willacy counties. The region is defined by the Rio Grande River as the southern border, and the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. Across the Rio Grande River from Brownsville is the city of Matamoros, Mexico. The Brownsville-Matamoros metropolitan area has historically served as a major gateway for alien smuggling and narcotics trafficking. Geography and the highway systems on both sides of the border make Brownsville one of the most favored areas by smugglers.

### Corpus Christi

The Corpus Christi office is situated in this major Texas city. The criminal caseload of the office is driven largely by illegal narcotics seizures from the permanent Border Patrol checkpoints at Falfurrias and Sarita. The Falfurrias checkpoint regularly reports the highest number of illegal drug seizures by any fixed checkpoint in the United States. The significant federal institutions in the area, the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi army Depot, Padre Island National Seashore, Aransas Wildlife refuge, and Three Rivers Federal Corrections Institution, provide a variety of criminal and civil litigation. Civil litigation consists primarily of injury cases filed under the Federal Tort Claims Act, complaints of employment discrimination, and condemnation actions.

### Laredo

Attorneys of the Laredo Office represent the United States in the Laredo judicial division, a five-county area. Laredo is situated directly on the border with Mexico, and shares this part of the Rio Grande River with Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. There are four international ports of entry in Laredo and one in nearby Zapata. The Laredo Customs District handles more land trade than the West Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California ports of entry combined. One consequence of the great expansion of legitimate commerce is that Laredo has become a favored port for smugglers.

### McAllen

McAllen, located sixty miles up the Rio Grande River from Brownsville, is another major land port linking the United States and Mexico. Assistant U.S. Attorneys of the McAllen Office are responsible for cases arising from Hidalgo and Starr counties. These two

counties encompass a 175-mile stretch of the Rio Grande with seven bridge ports of entry and an international airport. Directly across the border from McAllen is the City of Reynosa which has an estimated population of 700,000. Just 135 miles to the southwest of McAllen is Monterrey, Mexico, with a population of more than two and one-half million.

## **LITIGATION**

The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas has consistently managed one of the busiest federal litigation dockets in the nation. The majority of work in the district is prosecution of criminal cases. Criminal matters are referred by federal investigative agencies and state and local law enforcement. New cases are also developed in the course of investigating and prosecuting other cases.

Through criminal prosecutions, the office actively addresses the most pressing crime problems of the district and the nation. Major cases are often developed by task forces made up of federal, state and local law enforcement. More complex cases require litigation teams of attorneys, investigators and paralegal specialists, and sometimes translators. Prosecutors remain responsible for assigned cases from the investigative stage through the completion of trial.

Criminal prosecutions that are brought to trial are seldom fully resolved by the jury's verdict. Issues of procedure, evidence and sentence are regularly raised on appeal by criminal defendants who have been found guilty. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals is also called upon by the government as well as criminal defendants to resolve issues in the course of increasingly complex criminal trial litigation. Appellate litigation of criminal cases is the responsibility of Assistant United States Attorneys of the office's Appeals Section.

Attorneys with civil litigation responsibilities represent the United States in civil suits in state and federal courts throughout the Southern District of Texas. Attorneys are assigned civil cases in the earliest stage of investigation and litigation. The lead-attorney remains responsible for a civil case from the trial court procedures to appellate review at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and the Federal Circuit in Washington, D.C.

Representation can be for the United States as plaintiff or a creditor in bankruptcy proceedings, and for the United States as a defendant. Representing the United States as a defendant typically involves defending regulations, procedures and actions of federal agencies in administrative decisions and internal personnel actions, representing agencies and their employees in suits which challenge their work or claim negligence, and representing the government in maritime disputes. The defense side of the civil docket involves a wide range of cases involving issues of medical malpractice, vehicle torts, seaman personal injury, contract disputes, employment discrimination and *Bivens* actions.

Civil litigation also includes collection on debts, fines, penalties and assessments through enforcement of judgments. In affirmative civil litigation, Assistant U. S. Attorneys

and attorneys of other federal agencies designated as Special Assistant U. S. Attorneys seek judgments for the government on outstanding loan obligations, unpaid taxes, and fraud in connection with contract or benefits program. Through affirmative suits on behalf of the United States, Assistant U.S. Attorneys litigate acquisition of real property in order to carry out federal programs. These affirmative civil proceedings also enforce federal law involving environmental protection, civil rights and regulated industries. The district's Affirmative Civil Enforcement unit collects civil monetary penalties through enforcement of federal fraud statutes such as the False Claims Act. This civil enforcement effort is particularly effective in combating fraud and abuse in government procurement, health care, food stamps and other programs.

### **Drug Trafficking**

Assistant U. S. Attorneys work closely with federal investigative agencies and task forces of federal, state and local law enforcement in applying the most advanced investigative technology available against drug trafficking organizations. Well-coordinated investigations and multi-agency initiatives continue to result in complex and comprehensive prosecutions of drug trafficking organizations.

Two of the most successful initiatives in drug prosecutions are the Organized crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). OCDETF is one of the first multi-agency enforcement efforts in which federal prosecutors work in close coordination with investigators during early stages of major cases to achieve the overall goal of identifying, investigating and prosecuting high level drug trafficking organizations. The district also encompasses two of the nation's designated HIDTA's, one in metropolitan Houston and one along the Southwest border. HIDTA investigations also focus resources on dismantling targeted drug trafficking and money laundering organizations through combined federal, state and local enforcement efforts. In addition, U.S. Attorneys of the districts along the U.S.-Mexico border meet regularly to address needs unique to this region. This Southwest Border Initiative results in better coordination of investigative resources to identify and prosecute major drug trafficking organizations.

### **Economic Crime**

White collar crimes, especially telemarketing schemes, often exploit numerous victims who are willing to place their trust in bearers of good news. Telemarketing Fraud is a particularly invidious crime that typically preys upon elderly people who can least afford the cost of the deceit of promised good fortune. Prosecutors focus on fraud-related crimes with an emphasis placed on targeting white collar criminals who steal money from individuals, businesses and federal programs. Since most of these schemes are executed by using mail and wire communications, mail and wire fraud statutes are utilized.

The U. S. Attorney's Office hosts various working groups which focus on initiatives such as health care fraud, bankruptcy fraud, telemarketing fraud, and computer related fraud. Through these groups, Inter-agency members share information, provide training, and develop investigative and prosecutorial cases.

### Violent Crime

The district's anti-violent crime initiative is premised on the principle that cooperation between state and federal law enforcement is the most effective of combating violent crime.

The U. S. Attorney's Office works closely with state prosecutors in the district in a coordinated effort to bring the full measure of law to the fight against violent crime. The tough federal statutes and penalties for criminal possession and use of firearms have enabled prosecutors to send some of the district's most violent individuals to federal penitentiaries. Federal prosecutions have been brought against bank robbers, bombers, arsonists and others who use firearms and other violent means for criminal ends.

### Crime Victim Assistance

Victim/Witness services for the district are coordinated by specially trained employees. This service assures that victims of crime receive full benefit of services to which they are entitled, and that they are notified of significant stages in prosecutions. Victim/Witness coordination includes ensuring that litigation witnesses who must travel to court proceedings, are accommodated in their travel and lodging. The U. S. Attorney's office has implemented efficient, streamline procedures for arranging witness travel and lodging.

### Fugitive Apprehensions

The Gulf Coast Violent Offenders Task Force began in October 1993 as a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement initiative to exchange information and coordinate apprehension efforts with other law enforcement entities. Its primary mission is to locate and apprehend potentially violent suspects who are wanted on charged crimes of physical and sexual violence, felony narcotics, firearms violations, and gang-related crimes in the Gulf Coast region. The unit consists of specially trained, select volunteers from the U. S. Marshal's Service, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Texas National Guard, the Sheriff's Offices of Harris County, Montgomery County, and Galveston County, and the Houston Police Department, Baytown Police Department, and the Humble Police Department. Each member of the Task Force is deputized as a Special Deputy United States Marshal, thus reducing the jurisdictional limits of their specific agencies. The U. S. Attorney's Office assists the Task Force in receiving financial support from the U. S. Department of Justice.

### Child Exploitation and Pornography

The U. S. Attorney's Office works in a close cooperation with the FBI, U.S. Customs Service, and Postal Inspectors to disrupt distribution of child pornography, especially over the Internet. The objective of this initiative is to prosecute those who exploit children sexually, and to identify and provide assistance to the victimized children. Convicted offenders are directed to the federal prison dealing with sex offenders and which provides intensive psychiatric counseling for such deviant criminal behavior.

### Public Integrity & Organized Crime

Violations of any nature that involve abuse of office by public officials, or public employees, and matters involving public corruption receive special attention by prosecutors. Designated prosecutors work with agents specifically assigned to investigate charges of public integrity. In addition, the Southern District of Texas U.S. Attorney's Office has an Organized Crime Strike Force Unit. The formerly separate Strike Forces were reorganized in 1990 and placed under the supervision of selected U. S. Attorneys around the country. The Strike Force coordinates investigations of traditional organized crime elements, Asian and Russian organized crime, and illegal union activity. The Organized Crime and Racketeering Section of the Department of Justice continue to review all case initiations and assist in prosecutions. The Strike Force investigates and prosecutes priority cases as determined by the Attorney General's Organized Crime Council.

### Immigration Related Offenses

Immigration cases continue to rise and make up a big percentage of litigation caseloads of the U.S. Attorney's Office. The 300-mile land border with Mexico and the major ports of entry by air and sea marks the district as a primary gateway to the United States. Metropolitan Houston is home to a large immigrant population from all continents. More than 60 nations have consulates in Houston, and the U.S. Department of State maintains a Passport Office and a regional office of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in the City. The U. S. Attorney's Office prosecutes cases involving schemes to defraud the U.S. Government and individual states out of millions of dollars through the filing of fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance benefits by nonresidents. The cases involve the filing of fraudulent claims for social security benefits, state-sponsored entitlement benefits, such as food stamps, and other financial aid, such as Aid for Dependent Children. In addition, the Office actively prosecutes the offense of illegal reentry following deportation. These prosecutions involve alien defendants who have illegally returned to the U. S. after having been convicted for an aggravated felony and deported.

### Hate Crimes Task Force

The Civil Rights Unit of the district coordinates a Hate Crimes Task Force which includes a core working group of the U. S. Attorney's Civil Rights Unit, the district's Law

**Enforcement Coordinating Committee, the Department of Justice's Community Relations Service, FBI, ATF, City of Houston Mayor's Office, Houston Police Department, Harris County Sheriff's Office, and Harris County District Attorney's Office. The objectives of the Task Force are based on the Attorney General's Hate Crimes Initiative: (1) training of law enforcement, (2) coordination of local, state, and federal law enforcement, (3) community outreach to educate the community and assist the community in reporting and preventing hate crimes, and (4) improve data collection on hate crimes.**

### **Public Safety Programs**

**The Programs Division of the United States Attorney's Office is responsible for the district's Law enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC), community outreach initiatives such as Weed and Seed, and public information. The LECC Coordinator, the Community Relations Specialist, the Public Information Specialist, and the Texas National Guard Drug Demand Reduction Coordinators work under the supervision of an Assistant United States Attorney.**

**The Programs Division was formed in 1993 to provide a comprehensive approach to the public safety initiatives of the Department of Justice and the United States Attorney's Office. The district's Programs Division combines the law enforcement training and coordination programs of LECC, the public affairs mission of providing an accurate public awareness of the work of the United States Attorney's Office, and the community outreach responsibility that promotes community-based crime and drug prevention programs in the district. An experienced prosecutor was assigned to form a team to develop innovative education programs for local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, facilitate federal support of community-based juvenile delinquency and crime prevention programs, and publish annual reports that effectively highlight accomplishments of the office.**

### **Operation Weed & Seed**

**The U. S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas sponsors eight Officially Recognized Weed and Seed Sites in the district: Houston, Galveston, Corpus Christi North and Corpus Christi West, Brownsville, McAllen, Richmond's Shalome Zone in Ft. Bend County, and the Aldine community in Harris County.**

**The LECC Coordinator, Community Outreach Specialist and Texas National Guard soldiers assigned to the U.S. Attorney's Office work directly with the Weed and Seed Coordinators and Steering Committees. An Assistant U.S. Attorney, along with a designated Assistant District Attorney, is assigned to each site to coordinate the criminal cases that stem from the law enforcement initiative.**

**The Programs Division staff work to leverage initiatives such as Weed and Seed by incorporating related programs such as the Texas Community Youth Development, the OJJDP Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Chronic and Violent Juvenile offenders, and the**

**Youth Focused Community Policing programs of the Empowerment Zone and the Houston Enhanced Enterprise Community.**

### **Serious Juvenile Offenders Program**

**The Programs Division is a partner with the Criminal Justice Division of the Texas governor's Office in an OJJDP technical assistance grant for statewide implementation of the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Chronic and Violent Juvenile Offenders. Programs Division staff actively participate with community key leaders, boards and project managers in the design and implementation of strategic plans for controlling serious juvenile crime through prevention, early intervention and graduated sanctions.**

### **Partnerships: Texas National Guard and Rio Grande Valley Empowerment Zone**

**The U. S. Attorney's Office works closely with the Texas National Guard and the Rio Grande Valley rural Empowerment Zone to promote educational programs through regional conferences and national teleconferences on issues such as mentoring, child abuse, community access to federal resources, and drug abuse prevention among youth. The National Guard has assigned senior noncommissioned officers to the U. S. Attorney's Office to serve as Drug Demand Reduction coordinators for youth, and the Rio Grande Valley rural Empowerment Zone has provided staff support and office space for this community outreach effort.**

### **Community Oriented Policing**

**The Programs Division promotes innovative community-oriented policing training for local police and community representatives through the U. S. Attorney's LECC program. LECC COPS Education Project is a training blueprint for law enforcement agencies which are implementing community policing programs. Through an LECC advisory board the program designs and produces train-the-trainer courses which are, in turn, taught at regional sites in the district for officers and supervisors involved in community policing. A class of about 50 certified law enforcement instructors from departments throughout the district are gathered for week-long training classes. The participating departments use these instructors to teach these COPS classes in their own departments and to other departments in their local region. The program has brought community policing training to hundreds of local law enforcement officers throughout the district. The cadre of trainers serves as a resource network for the continuing innovation and long-term viability of community policing that will exist well beyond the funding phase of the grant.**

### **LECC Training**

**The regional meetings of the LECC program generated requests for assistance in specific areas of law enforcement. The district's LECC has responded by developing advanced law enforcement training in conjunction with the military (JTF6), federal law enforcement agencies and the U.S. Attorney's staff. Recent programs have included integrated planning**

for multi-agency investigations, financial investigations, environmental crime's investigations, and complex federal investigation procedures. The LECC training courses utilize national experts, prosecutors and military intelligence and planning specialists to advance the skill levels in strategic planning procedures for long-term, multi-agency investigations. Courses also include federal civil rights and hate crimes issues.

### RIONet

The Programs Division initiated RIONet, an ONDCP-funded research development project of the Counterdrug Technology Assessment Center to enable police agencies to share data through a secure Internet-based network, and to further community-oriented policing through participation in the distance learning network of Texas high schools. RIONet began as an LECC project in 1996, to link local law enforcement agencies along the Texas-Mexico border through a high-speed, secure, low-cost Internet-based network. The system will initially enable police agencies along the border to communicate through secure E-Mail, share current and historical information from their individual databases, and to analyze shared data through advanced data mining and link analysis programs. The education component of the project will provide an interactive, teleconferencing link for the training facilities of the participating law enforcement agencies. This network will enable the participating agencies to establish interactive telecommunications links with federal, state and local training resources.

### Young Marines

The U. S. Attorney's Office started the first nationally chartered Young Marines unit in Texas. Young Marines is a drug demand reduction program of the U.S. Marine Corps League. The Houston U.S. Attorney's Office sponsored and helped form a Young Marines Unit comprised of students of an inner city Houston elementary school and a middle school.