

Job descriptions for local elected officials
Harris County
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County Judge- The county judge is the presiding officer and a voting member of Commissioner's Court. By state statute, the County Judge is the county's director of emergency services.

County Commissioner- Commissioners participate in all decisions and work of Commissioners Court (the governing body of the County). The main functions of the court are: supervision and control of the county courthouses and jails; appointment and employment of county personnel; filling of vacancies in elective and appointive positions; determination of county tax rates; adoption of a county budget; establishment of voting precinct boundaries; calling of county bond elections; letting of contracts in the name of the county; building and maintaining county roads and bridges; and establishment of libraries and parks. Commissioners Court also appoints members to numerous boards and commissions, sometimes serving as liaison or members themselves. Some of the boards are: Port of Houston Authority, Metropolitan Transit Authority, Children's Protective Services, Joint City County Commission on Children, Mental Health and Mental Retardation Association, and the Harris County Hospital District.

Within individual precincts, each Commissioner is directly responsible for administration, parks, and road and bridge programs. There are four county commissioners in Harris County.

County Attorney-

- Uses civil enforcement to protect neighborhoods, clean up the environment, and shut down illegal enterprises;
- Protects children and the elderly through our representation of state and county agencies;
- Defends Harris County when lawsuits are filed against it;
- Pursues claims and collects revenue when the County is owed money;
- Advises elected officials and prepares contracts for Harris County.

County Clerk- In Harris County, the County Clerk wears three hats.

-As clerk, he/she maintains the records of Commissioners' Court, County Probate Courts, and County Civil Courts at Law.

-As a recorder, he/she is responsible for real property records including state and federal tax liens; vital statistics records such as marriage licenses; assumed names; and uniform commercial code records.

-As chief election official for the third largest county in the country, he/she administers county and state elections and also contracts for election services for political parties and smaller jurisdictions such as the City of Houston.

Sheriff-The chief of law enforcement for a county

District Attorney- A district attorney is an appointed or elected official who is responsible for prosecuting people accused of crimes in a particular district. The responsibilities of a district attorney are myriad and quite complex, and he or she is usually supported by a large staff, which includes other qualified attorneys, researchers, legal assistants, and so forth.

District Clerk- The Harris County District Clerk's Office is probably best known by the general public for its jurisdiction over the summoning of prospective jurors for 74 courts. The Harris County District Clerk's Office has other far-ranging duties and plays a key role in the day-to-day operation of county government. In one of its more monumental tasks, the District Clerk's Office is responsible for custodial care and safekeeping of all court records for 59 District Courts and 15 County Criminal Courts located in Harris County. In conjunction with its court duties, the office also accounts for all monies paid as deposits on civil cases (causes) awaiting disposition and all funds awarded minors in court action that are paid into the court registry.

In addition, the Harris County District Clerk has the important responsibility of providing customer service to all child support cases (causes) heard in Harris County.

Tax Assessor-Collector-

The Assessor has the following basic responsibilities:

- Locate all taxable property in the County and identify the ownership.
- Establish a value for all property subject to property taxation.
- List the value of all property on the assessment roll.
- Apply all legal exemptions.

The Assessor does NOT:

- Compute property tax bills.
- Collect property taxes.
- Establish property tax laws.
- Set rules by which property is appraised

County Treasurer- The Treasurer is chief custodian of county funds and receives all monies belonging to the county. The Treasurer keeps and accounts for the funds in designated depositories and disburses the funds as Commissioners Court may require or direct, not inconsistent with constituted law. The Treasurer also serves the Flood Control District and the Port of Houston Authority. The Treasurer is elected for a four-year term.

County Civil Courts at Law- in Harris County have jurisdiction over all causes and proceedings, civil and criminal, original and appellate prescribed by law for county courts,

except probate jurisdiction. Jurisdiction has been further specialized to civil jurisdiction concurrent with the constitutional jurisdiction of the county court and concurrent jurisdiction with the district courts in civil cases in which the matter in controversy exceeds \$500 but does not exceed \$100,000, excluding interest, statutory or punitive damages and penalties, and attorney's fees and costs, as alleged on the face of the petition (Section 25.0003, Government Code).

Jurisdiction of the Harris County Civil Courts at Law has been further specified (Section 25.1032 Government Code):

- appeals of civil cases from justice courts in Harris County;
- appeals of final rulings and decisions of the Texas Worker's Compensation Commission;
- exclusive jurisdiction in Harris County of eminent domain proceedings, both statutory and inverse, regardless of the amount in controversy;
- suits to decide the issue of title to real or personal property;
- suits to recover damages for slander or defamation of character;
- suits for the enforcement of a lien on real property;
- suits for forfeiture of a corporate charter;
- suits for the trial of the right to property valued at \$200 or more than has been levied on under a writ execution, sequestration, or attachment; and
- suits for the recovery of real property

County Criminal Courts at Law- There are fifteen (15) Harris County Criminal Courts at Law. Each judge is elected to a four-year term. A Presiding Judge is elected every 6 months to chair administrative meetings. A Co-Presiding Judge is also elected to perform these duties when the Presiding Judge is not available.

The Presiding Judge: 1) serves as chief administrator of the offices of county court manager and county court coordinators, and of pretrial release services and all other court-related ministerial services in misdemeanor cases as required by the judges, 2) presides at any session of the judges; and 3) holds ex officio membership on all committees created by the judges in session that pertain to the goal of achieving more equal and efficient justice and the orderly dispatch of business.

Justice of the Peace- The justice of the peace is the legal jurisdiction closest to the average citizen. Section 19 of Article 5 of the Texas Constitution provides that: Justice of the Peace courts have original jurisdiction in criminal matters of misdemeanor cases punishable by fine only and such other jurisdiction as may be provided by law. Original jurisdiction is the authority to accept a case at its inception, try it and pass judgment based upon the laws and facts.

District Criminal Courts- The Criminal District Courts handle felonies e.g. Murder, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Third Offense DWI, Burglary, Possession and delivery of controlled substances (drug offenses). First time DWI; assaults without major injuries and shoplifting are handled by County Criminal Courts. Both courts also handle Family Violence cases, depending

on the injuries.

District Civil Courts- Handle major civil lawsuits e.g. Personal Injury (Auto Accidents, Slip and Fall, Negligent Injuries, Medical Malpractice...), litigation between Texas Businesses; Breach of Contract Cases

District Juvenile Courts- Juvenile Courts handle criminal cases of persons under 17, including misdemeanors and felonies.

Family District Court Judges- We have 9 Family Law Courts that hear only Family Law Matters which include custody, child support, visitation, divorce, property division, spousal support, and enforcement of those orders. They are state district courts and the voting district is the entire county. In other words anyone living in Harris County may vote for one judge for each of the nine courts. The numbers associated with the Courts like the 309th Judicial District Court does not designate a specific voting district. Every voter in Harris County will have the chance to vote for a judge in all nine courts.

Railroad Commissioner- Surprise! This position actually has NOTHING to do with the railroad! This person regulates the oil and gas industry, gas utilities, pipeline safety and surface coal and uranium. The railroad commissioner is elected to serve six-year terms.

Supreme Court Justice- Controls the state bar of Texas and has the sole authority to license attorneys in Texas and appoints the members of the Board of Law examiners.

Emergency Service District Commissioner- An Emergency Services District (ESD) is a local government agency created by a vote of the public to provide fire protection and/or emergency medical services (EMS) in specific areas in unincorporated Harris County. The governing statute for an ESD is Chapter 775 of the Texas Health and Safety Code. An ESD collects taxes based on appraisals of real and personal property, and usually contracts with a service provider, e.g. Klein Volunteer Fire Department. There are two types of ESDs: one is for fire protection and the other is for emergency medical services (EMS).

An ESD is governed by a board of commissioners who are elected to four-year staggered terms by the residents in the district. All candidates must file an application with an ESD board secretary or other officer appointed to carry out election duties. All members must be 18 years old and a resident of the district

Precinct Chairmen- The primary objective of every Precinct Chairman is to encourage every voter to vote so that as many voters as possible turn out.

State Party Chairman- Oversees day to day operations of the state party. Also, he/she solicits financial contributions for party operations and in kind donations for candidates. He or she presides over the State Republican/Democrat Executive Committee Meetings as well as the State Conventions. Implementing strategy for elections and working with candidates and

growing the party. Working with local and regional parties and elected officials. He/she is also the face of the state party.

State Republican or Democrat Executive Committee Member- They are the Board of Directors for the State Party. They vote on the party budget and carry on the activities of the Party between State Conventions in compliance with the law and with the directives of the Convention.

Senate District Chairman- Attend the advisory board meeting, executive meeting and conduct the caucuses at the executive meetings. Organize the precinct chairs in aiding them to work their precinct to turn out the vote. A good SD chair is also very active in making sure the committees are filled with like minded representatives. It is also very important to actively recruit precinct chairs in order to fill vacant precincts.

Harris County Party Chairman-presides over the quarterly meetings of the executive committee as well as sets the tone and direction for the party. Appears in front of the press, TV, newspapers, etc.