



## **Rosemary Lehmborg ☆ Travis County District Attorney**

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### **Travis County Awarded Grant to Create Intimate Partner Sexual Assault Prosecution Unit**

October 4, 2016

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Press Contact:**

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The Travis County District Attorney's Office, with our community partners: Travis County Justice Planning, SafePlace, and Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, today announce that Travis County received a \$650,000 grant from the United States Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) under the Improving Criminal Justice Responses Program (ICJR).

The funding will finalize the creation of the Intimate Partner Sexual Assault Prosecution Unit in the District Attorney's Office. The unit will add a prosecutor and office specialist to complement the newly created victim/witness counselor position (funded last year through another community collaborative grant from OVW). This unit will handle intimate partner/acquaintance sexual assaults committed against adult victims, as well as other offenses occurring contemporaneously with the sexual assault, such as assault, strangulation, stalking, violation of a protective order, and/or burglary of habitation. This unit will be well situated to handle the legal and factual complexities of these cases.

The grant program will be managed by Travis County Justice Planning and their Family Violence Director. Our collaborative partners: SafePlace, will coordinate training for grant and community partners, and Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid will provide civil legal services for survivors of these offenses.

Since 2014, the District Attorney's Office and many community partners worked to develop a collaborative approach to intimate partner/acquaintance sexual assault and domestic violence investigation, prosecution and victim support services. Travis County's coordinated community response through the Sexual Assault Response and Resource Team (SARRT) includes additional partners such as the Austin Police Department, Travis County Sheriff's Office and other law enforcement agencies as well as service providers. The mission of the SARRT is to enhance the local response to post-pubescent adolescent and adult sexual abuse and assault by ongoing collaboration, training and coordination among the agencies charged with responding to these crimes.

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We are grateful for OVW's continued investment in our community through its funding of a specialized prosecution unit that will enhance the investigation and prosecution of sexual assaults and provide additional support and services for victims. Only through such collaborative efforts can we truly ensure justice for these survivors and our community.

*"Today's announcement is a needed step in orienting our public structures to deal with an uncomfortable fact: most sexual assaults are perpetrated by people known to the survivors. We are pleased that additional resources will be used to prosecute the perpetrators of intimate partner assault, and we look forward to working with our local leaders and partners in the community to ensure these crimes receive the priority attention they deserve."*

**Emily LeBlanc, Sr. Director of Community Advocacy, The SAFE Alliance**

*"This new grant works hand in hand with Justice Planning's goals to leverage local, state, federal and nongovernmental resources to strengthen and sustain justice planning and programming in Travis County. We look forward to working with our partners and enhancing the criminal justice response to survivors of these crimes, thereby creating a healthier and safer community for all."*

**Roger Jefferies, County Executive, Justice and Public Safety**

*"Not only are we grateful for the Justice Department's support, but Texas RioGrande Legal Aid is especially grateful for the partnerships we have developed with Travis County, SafePlace and other local agencies to protect the rights and safety of survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. This grant will enable this partnership to serve more survivors and to build a strong model that we hope is replicated across the country."*

**Maricarmen Garza, J.D. Victim Rights Group Coordinator, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid**

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**For additional information:**

Link to Travis County Commissioners Court October 4th, 2016 Agenda Item #8b, for back-up documents:  
<http://www.traviscountyclerk.org/eclerk/Content.do?code=Commissioners>  
[Office on Women's Against Violence FY 2016 Improving Criminal Justice Responses Program solicitation](#)