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### **DA's Hot Check Amnesty Program Nets \$186,000 in Restitution**

Houston, Tx – Almost 400 people paid \$186,000 total in restitution to make good on bad checks and avoid criminal charges during the Harris County District Attorney's Hot Check Amnesty Program last month, District Attorney Patricia Lykos announced Wednesday.

The DA's Check Fraud Division targeted about 500 offenders with notices of the Amnesty Program for the last half of October. Division Chief John Boone said that since the end of the program on Oct. 30, 17 arrests were made on people who failed to take advantage of the offer to pay up and avoid charges.

More arrests are expected in the continuing county-wide arrest warrant roundups at offenders' residences and workplaces. "Our Amnesty Program has successfully accomplished its goals," Boone said. "Those who made an honest mistake have paid, and now have the opportunity to make a fresh start. Those who didn't are charged with criminal theft – warrants for their arrests have been issued, and they will be fully prosecuted under the law."

Victims also benefit through the Hot Check Amnesty Program, which was instituted for the first time this year under the administration of District Attorney Lykos. Individuals, merchants and other business operators can receive quicker repayment for losses suffered through bad checks. Such expedited restitution can be very important during this era of economic uncertainty, Boone explained.

Boone cautioned consumers to avoid resorting to bad checks during the particularly tempting holiday shopping season. Committing the crime of theft by check can result in arrest, jail, hefty court costs and fees, possible fines and a criminal record.

"These are consequences that can last an entire lifetime," Boone said. "Using a checkbook to steal is no different than any other kind of criminal theft -- it just isn't worth it."

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