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## **New District Attorney Restitution System Delivers \$3.6 million; Adds Online Search Feature for Victims to Claim Funds**

Houston, Tx – Victims of crime can now search directly online to check for unclaimed restitution, as part of a significantly revamped system that has already paid out \$3.6 million in 2009, Harris County District Attorney Patricia Lykos announced Monday.

The computerized system expedites payments for crime victims and adds accountability and efficiency to a restitution process that had been largely unchanged since it began in 1985. When Lykos became District Attorney a year ago, there was an antiquated, ledger-based system where more than \$1.5 million lingered in unpaid restitution amassed over more than two decades.

Lykos assembled a special investigative team that actively searches for victims who are due past restitution.

“This has been a top priority for the District Attorney, even before she formally took office in January,” said Michelle Permenter, Director of the DA’s Victims’ Rights Division. “Thanks to that commitment, we’ve now established a streamlined process. The investigative efforts and unique teamwork have resulted in unprecedented funds being distributed to these crime victims.”

The new system enables real-time computerized tracking of restitution amounts and payments, along with contact updates on victims. It provides prompt notice when the funds are available, and offers victims the option of receiving payment in person or through the mail.

Victims can determine if they have unclaimed restitution by accessing the searchable online database. It is available through the “Helping Victims” section of the Harris County District Attorney’s Internet site at <http://app.dao.hctx.net/> . Recipients of the restitution include businesses, public entities and individuals.

Equally important, the system has built-in safeguards to insure security and accountability for that money. More than 92 percent of the 2009 restitution has already been paid out to victims.

Permenter emphasized that the success of any system depends on the participation and cooperation of the victims: “The ultimate responsibility is still on the recipient to make this work effectively.”

Restitution amounts range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, which help victims recover from the impacts of crime. These are the result of judicial orders for criminal defendants to repay victims through the DA’s Office. Funds are separate from any payments made to victims as a condition of probation, or through the state’s Crime Victims Compensation Fund.

Victims who are due restitution can get more information or assistance by contacting the District Attorney’s Victims’ Rights Division at 713-755-6655, or going to the “Helping Victims” section of the DA’s homepage at <http://app.dao.hctx.net/> . (end)