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DA Commends Coordinated HCSO-HPD Sex Offender Registry

Houston, Tx -- Harris County District Attorney Patricia Lykos joined Houston Police Chief Charles McClelland and Sheriff's Office Major Michael Wong Monday to announce the consolidation of their sex offender registries and plans for a state-of-the-art online system to enhance public safety and improve tracking of convicted predators in Harris County. This will merge the registration of sex offenders and enforcement compliance handled by the two largest law enforcement agencies in the county.

The combined efforts will increase coordination among police and deputies tracking these offenders, and also equip the agencies with the most advanced technical support database systems. Together, the new system will monitor more than 5,000 registered sex offenders in the City of Houston and unincorporated area of Harris County.

"That number represents the majority of monitored sex offenders within our community," Lykos said. "We commend the Police Chief and Sheriff for their foresight in combining forces to further protect our citizens. This will go a long way in reducing the inherent problems of having several dozen different agencies responsible for registering and monitoring sexual offenders in their separate jurisdictions."

The Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) is moving registration and monitoring operations for those offenders to offices shared with the Houston Police Department's sex offender registry at HPD's Stringfellow Command Station at 8300 Mykawa Rd. The upgrades were announced at a joint news conference Monday afternoon.

Both agencies will coordinate registrations through the latest technology of the OffenderWatch computer system, which has proven to be an especially useful tool for tracking registered offenders in several states and metro jurisdictions.

District Attorney Lykos summarized the significant advantages of the new consolidated system:

**** Public safety:** Failure of sex offenders to register is a major problem. This initiative will coordinate with the prison system so that police will know when offenders are released, and their residence address and when they are to report to the registry in person. Failure to report will be noted in real time and investigations will commence immediately. Law enforcement will

also have virtual instant access to the most detailed information on registered offenders living in the area where a sexual-related assault occurs, as soon as it is reported. The system also will have the capability of promptly notifying authorities -- and residents -- when registered offenders move into their communities. It has several advantages over the current tracking data contained in the basic Texas Department of Public Safety database.

Safety is also improved with having the registrations done at the Mykawa Road site in southern Houston. Sex offenders will register in person at this location, which is apart from residential areas and establishments or amenities frequented by children or the general public.

**** Crime prevention through enforcement of reporting and residency restrictions.** The system can reduce the individual agency-by-agency patchwork approach to confirming registration information, and how restrictions may apply to residential locations of offenders. This serves to prevent sexual assault crimes – registered offenders can be more effectively prosecuted and incarcerated for not complying with registration requirements, even if they have not committed further sexual offenses.

**** Coordinated approach:** Having one central office for HPD and the HCSO puts officers and investigators side-by-side to share the latest details and data on registered sexual offenders.

**** Streamlined, consistent procedures** for registration. The different reporting locations and processes were sometimes confusing for offenders moving between city and county residences. The combined approach and consolidation to one central registry location is expected to improve registration compliance.

**** Registration security.** Sheriff's deputies reported previous concerns with having registered sex offenders report to the HCSO facility at 601 Lockwood, which also served as offices to assist sexual assault victims and those investigations. The HPD's Mykawa Road site has security screening, appointment requirements for offender registry, and is physically removed from other services and offices there.

**** Compatibility:** This is an online-based information system, which enables access by any participating law enforcement agency with Internet capabilities, regardless of the type of computer programming used by that agency.

The District Attorney has campaigned to modernize services and improve coordination among law enforcement agencies and prosecutors in several public safety arenas. At the request of Lykos, a bill was introduced in the last Texas Legislature and passed unanimously to give large Texas counties the option of creating a centralized sex offender registry. Lykos credited the author, State Sen. Tommy Williams of The Woodlands, and sponsor, State Rep. Debbie Riddle of Houston, for their work in the enactment of S.B. 2048.

Officials of the Louisiana-based OffenderWatch computer system estimate that the service now manages registrations for about 70,000 of the registered sex offenders being monitored by agencies in the U.S. Among the jurisdictions using the coordinated service are all 92 counties in Indiana, all 88 Ohio Sheriffs and the state Attorney General there, and 30 law enforcement agencies in Florida.

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