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DA Lykos to Prioritize, Expand Crime Victims' Services

Houston, TX – Harris County District Attorney Patricia Lykos on Thursday announced detailed plans to significantly expand the DA's staffing, services and assistance for citizens who have been victimized by crime.

That will nearly double the office's current resources for victims, and elevate the visibility and awareness about victims' rights in the community. To reflect an emphasis on serving all victims, the Victim Witness Division has been renamed the Victims' Rights Division.

New staffing will include four additional Victim Assistance Coordinators, two support personnel and the use of a DA's Investigator to improve services and response to victim needs.

Technological advances such as upgraded databases will deliver more efficiencies and help coordinate assistance with other agencies. They will also improve the process of obtaining restitution from convicted criminals, or compensation from the state in applicable cases.

Victims' rights have been a priority for Lykos. In her campaign for District Attorney last year, Lykos pledged that the Office "will be champions for the victims."

"We will work directly to address victims' concerns, keep them better informed and provide them with better assistance and support," she said.

Heading the division is Director Michelle Permenter, who has more than 11 years service as a Victim Assistance Coordinator with the DA's Office.

She said the improvements will enable the division to assist victims more effectively and enhance their understanding of the legal process. That will benefit prosecutors and the justice system, as well as the families who suffer from crime, Permenter said.

The District Attorney's Office began offering victim services in 1977. Last year, the office offered services for about 26,500 crime victims and handled \$430,000 in restitution payments. That work included more than 24,000 letters and 14,000 phone calls.

Assistance by division workers can be comprehensive. They guide victims through the legal process, arrange interviews with prosecutors, translate when needed, help with transportation and family needs, make referrals for medical or mental health care, and more.

The assistance extends through the process and may include court proceedings, Victim Impact Statements, appeals and parole protest letters.

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