



KENNETH MAGIDSON

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HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

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News Release

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Approval for DA's Major High-tech Courts Upgrade

(Houston, TX) -- A major \$2-million project will provide criminal courts in Harris County with wireless Internet access and state-of-the-art, high-definition evidence displays for jurors, District Attorney Kenneth Magidson announced Tuesday.

All 43 Criminal Justice Center courtrooms will be outfitted in the project, which does not require taxpayer funds or affect county budget allocations.

Commissioners Court on Tuesday approved Magidson's request to pay for the project through the District Attorney's Asset Forfeiture Fund from seizures of proceeds from criminal enterprises.

Outmoded television sets will be replaced with large-screen LCD monitors. More monitors are to be added and positioned for viewing in spectator sections. That will enable audio/visual presentations to prospective jurors during the jury selection process.

Courtroom modifications will also improve viewing angles. Upgraded evidence cameras and DVD/VCR players will bring digital sharpness to trial exhibits and computerized trial displays.

"This will significantly improve the quality of the presentation of evidence as well as our *voir dire* jury selection process," Magidson said. "Coupled with wireless Internet access capabilities, these innovations will prepare our courts for the future."

Magidson noted that the upgrades will benefit everyone associated with the courts – defense attorneys, judges, jurors, witnesses and the public, as well as prosecutors.

"The goal is to make our Harris County criminal court system a model for the nation," Magidson said. "Citizens should have pride in their Criminal Justice Center."

About \$1.6 million will go for enhancing the audio/visual presentation systems, which will average about \$38,000 for each of the 27 district courts and 16 county courts.

Requests reflect technological advances since the opening of the Criminal Justice Center more than eight years ago, and the degraded conditions of the existing equipment.

The project will be managed by the District Courts' Administrative Office and is expected to be completed within a year.

(End)