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DA's New Section Arrests First Cold Case Murder Fugitive

Houston, TX—The unique Cold Case/Fugitive Apprehension Section (CCFAS) created by Harris County District Attorney Patricia Lykos has made its first arrest, capturing a murder defendant who had evaded police for over a year. Hilario Martinez-Zuniga, 41, remains in custody in lieu of a $50,000 bond. He is set to appear in the 339th District Court on Friday.

The section began operations in January. Its first activity was to make an inventory of murder and capital murder cases in which the defendants had forfeited their bonds or had never been arrested. Section Chief Russel Turbeville and his staff found more than 600 cases with missing defendants, one of which dates back to 1970. They created a data base and are painstakingly analyzing each case. They are coordinating and enhancing law enforcement efforts to locate fugitives, applying state-of-the-art technology to tackle the traditional challenge of defendants who have evaded justice.

More work will focus on making sure that national databases receive timely DNA samples from offenders and crime scenes to check for possible matches. By verifying and updating information in these and other ways, Turbeville is confident that additional arrests will be made.

The break in the search for Martinez-Zuniga came when Turbeville, a career prosecutor of 34 years, and veteran DA Investigator Chuck Lowery discovered that an information system for fugitives contained the wrong birth date for him. Once the correction was made, officers with the Gulf Coast Violent Offenders Task Force tracked him to his construction job and made the arrest.

The Cold Case/Fugitive Apprehension Section is among several new initiatives by Lykos to upgrade and modernize services in the District Attorney's Office. (End)