



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Updated Deferred Prosecution Program Offers a Second Chance to First-Time Offenders

The Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Deferred Prosecution Program (DPP) is a limited supervision program designed to give young first-time offenders the chance to rehabilitate without the stigma of a criminal record. DPP is available to non-violent offenders who are age 17 to 24 at the time of the incident, who have not been previously convicted of an offense, and are willing and able to rehabilitate themselves.

Originally created in the early 1970s by then-DA Tim Curry, DA Sharen Wilson reviewed the program in 2015 and determined that it wasn't being widely utilized by the first-time offenders for whom it could be the most beneficial – minorities and low income residents. With the mission in mind to better reach these young adults, Wilson met with those involved with the program, law enforcement and with defense attorneys who often represent these defendants and made three important updates to the program's parameters:

- Increasing the upper age range to coincide with the age juveniles become adults under the law;
- Extending the application period to allow more flexibility for defendants without immediate access to attorneys;
- Eliminating the prior ban if a person had been previously arrested.

"A criminal record can follow you the rest of your life," said Criminal District Attorney Sharen Wilson. "It affects the jobs you can get, where you can qualify to live, and where you can go to school. This program gives young adults who are willing to rehabilitate the chance at a clean slate, no matter their background, neighborhood or economic means."

To raise awareness of the program's availability, the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's Office has promoted DPP actively, not only among the courts and defense attorneys, but to its prosecutors as a worthwhile option and alternative to probation or incarceration for those who qualify for that second chance for a fresh start. Wilson has also raised awareness of the program's availability in the community, including in meetings with local church leaders and youth program leaders.

Between January 2014 and June 2015 (the immediate 18 months before DA Wilson implemented these changes), DPP participants were 74.7% white. Since the program updates and its active promotion, minority participation has increased exponentially, and by the end of 2017, 68% of DPP applicants were minority residents. There have been 1,186 successful program completions

since the changes were made, 268 young adults are currently enrolled, and 57 more are scheduled for the next orientation.

The staff coordinator and investigators who volunteer their time to manage DPP are contacted regularly by successful participants who have gone on to make great changes in their lives – have found new jobs, enrolled in college, left behind drug or drinking habits – and they credit being given that second chance as making all the difference for them, and for a more successful future.

A DPP graduate who went on to have his record expunged recently shared this letter with DPP Coordinator, Lori Leeth. The youth is now enrolled in college courses toward a career in software engineering, and his name is not being given to protect his now record-free identity.

*"A lot of the people that go through the program may not fully realize it, but an un-clean background check permanently closes doors of opportunity for the rest of your life and if you had ambitions to do great things in life, they all go down the drain the minute you mess up your background. A stupid mistake you made when you were 17 will hunt you down and ruin your life when you are 35 and have outgrown your teenage stupidity and ignorance.*

*"This program truly is a second chance at life in America and if this was not offered to me my future would have been sealed there and then despite all my ambitions for what I want to do out of my life ... I am sure some people thought "screw this" and refused to see the chance that was being given to them and see what this program for what it really is, but I want to let you know (and the people you work with) that you saved my life in ways that no one but God can calculate and I will NOT miss to use this new chance!"*

If you know someone who would benefit from DPP consideration, please visit the Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney's website at [cda.tarrantcounty.com](http://cda.tarrantcounty.com), or call 817.884.1633 for more information.

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