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Harris County Law Library

Pro Se Litigant Handbook

A Guide to Self Representation in Harris County, Texas



The Harris County Law Library is
part of the Office of Vince Ryan,
Harris County Attorney.



Promoting open and equal access to justice for all.

Harris County Law Library

A free, public law library.

Reference librarians at the ready, 8 am to 7 pm, Monday through Friday.

25 public computers, reserved for legal work and research and loaded with free legal databases, Internet access, MS Word, and more.

30,000 law books, including a self-help collection and forms.

Printing, copying, and scanning, 10¢ per page, cash only.

Faxing, sending and receiving, \$1 local or \$2 long distance per page.

Free WiFi · Free Notary · Free Training in Research and Legal Tech.

Houston Volunteer Lawyers on site every weekday.

1019 Congress, Houston Texas · [713-755-5183](tel:713-755-5183) · www.harriscountylawlibrary.org

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A Publication of the Harris County Law Library

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The Harris County Law Library is
part of the Office of Vince Ryan,
Harris County Attorney.

Please contact us with questions, comments, and concerns at lawlibrary@cao.hctx.net

*The content of this handbook is for informational purposes only.
It is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney.*

Representing Yourself

*The following is adapted and reprinted here with permission from the
333rd Civil District Court, Harris County, Texas.*

In 2017, over 28,800 cases were filed in Harris County by pro se litigants. As a pro se litigant, you are acting as your own attorney. Like any attorney, you will be expected to know and follow the law and court rules, including the [Texas Rules of Evidence](#), [Texas Rules of Civil Procedure](#), [Harris County Local Rules](#), and the [Lawyer's Creed](#). If you fail to follow the rules, you may lose important rights.

The judge, court staff (including the court coordinator, court clerk, court reporter, bailiff), and opposing counsel cannot give you legal advice.

Do not attempt to communicate privately with the judge. The term “communication” includes contact by means of phone calls, letters, voice mail messages, faxes, e-mail messages, and direct conversations. You may only communicate with the judge if **all** parties and their attorneys (if they are represented) are present. Any unilateral contact is called “*ex parte*” communication and the district judge will not consider it for any information or argument offered. The court will return an *ex parte* communication to you unread and notify the other side of the communication. **Prohibited communications do not include** formal pleadings, motions, and requests for relief filed with the clerk.

It is your responsibility to provide the Court with a current and reliable mailing address and telephone number. Once you file your pleadings in the case, the clerk will notify you by mail of hearings and filings. If you move, you must provide your new address and telephone number to the clerk and the court. If you move and you do not get your mail, you may permanently lose important rights.

Your requests to the court should be made in a written motion.

You must send a copy of every pleading you file with the court to the opposing attorney or party (if they do not have an attorney).

If you have received notice that a hearing has been scheduled, you must be prepared to present your evidence and witnesses.

How to Get Ready for Court – You can go to court yourself and watch other cases before yours is scheduled. If you do this, you will see how the court works, where

everyone sits and what they do and say. Plan to do this a few days or weeks before you go to court on your case.

The Hearing - At the hearing, a judge will hear your case. Each party will have a chance to tell his or her side of the story. It is important to bring your paperwork and your evidence such as photos, witnesses, bills, receipts, contracts, or anything else that will prove your case.

How to Dress - Dress as though you were going to an important job interview. Be neat and clean. Do not wear shorts, flip-flops, tank tops, halter tops, sandals, hats, or other casual clothing. The court will order you removed from the courtroom if you are dressed inappropriately. This may result in a default of your case.

Timeliness - Always get to court on time. A good rule of thumb is to arrive at least thirty minutes early in order to allow for time to find parking, clear the security check, and locate the proper courtroom.

Courtroom Demeanor

- ◆ You and your witnesses should be quiet in court.
- ◆ Do not smoke or chew gum.
- ◆ Turn off your cell phone, pagers, or other audible nuisances when you are in the courtroom.
- ◆ Do not go in and out of the courtroom while waiting for your case to be called.
- ◆ Do not bring children to court unless they have been subpoenaed.
- ◆ During your case, speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard, and stay calm.
- ◆ Stand when speaking to the judge.
- ◆ Call the judge, "*Your Honor*."
- ◆ Do not interrupt the judge, the attorneys, or any other party in the courtroom.
- ◆ At all times, you should retain a composed and attentive posture, whether you are in the audience, appearing as a witness, or appearing as a party.
- ◆ It is never proper to speak, even in a whisper, with friends or other audience members while court is in session.
- ◆ Violations of any of the above guidelines may result in sanctions against you.

Forms and Information

Find forms and instructions designed for pro se litigants.

Texas Law Help

texaslawhelp.org · English and Spanish

Forms, instructions, and information for pro se litigants.

eFile Texas Self Help

selfhelp.efiletexas.gov/srl · English

Guided form assembly and interactive efile assistance for pro se litigants.

Houston Bar Association Handbooks

www.hba.org/legal-handbooks · English and Vietnamese

Information on family, elder, and consumer legal issues from local attorneys.

Harris County Government

Harris County District Courts

www.justex.net · English

Links to court websites that contain forms, drafting guides, and other useful information for pro se litigants.

Harris County Justice Courts - Forms

www.jp.hctx.net/forms · English

Forms and information for pro se litigants for use in small claims, eviction, and other justice court proceedings.

Harris County District Clerk - Forms

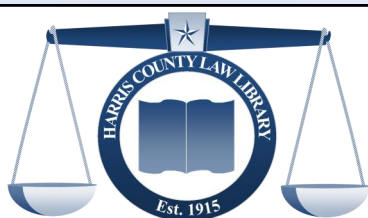
www.hcdistrictclerk.com/Common/Forms/forms.aspx · English

Forms and instructions for pro se litigants for use when filing documents with the district clerk.

Harris County Clerk - Forms

www.cclerk.hctx.net/#Forms · English

Forms and instructions for pro se litigants for use when filing documents with the county clerk.



Promoting open and equal access to justice for all.

Access Forms at the Harris County Law Library

The Law Library provides free access to online content and subscription legal databases, such as Westlaw and Lexis Advance, via 25 research computers at our downtown location.

Legal Aid & Low-Cost Assistance

A directory of organizations that can provide or connect people with legal advice.

Access Justice Houston

Low to Medium Cost

Family Law, Consumer Protection, Immigration, Criminal Defense

[832-772-6743](tel:832-772-6743) · accessjusticehouston.org · English · 712 Main Street, Suite 800, Houston, TX 77002

Legal services for individuals of modest means with reduced fees calculated on a sliding scale.

Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse

Free

Domestic Violence

[713-224-9911](tel:713-224-9911) · avda-tx.org · All Languages · 1001 Texas Avenue, Suite 600, Houston TX 77002

Services include legal assistance and counseling for domestic abuse survivors.

American Civil Liberties Union of Texas

Free

Civil Rights, Constitutional Rights

[713-942-8146](tel:713-942-8146) · www.aclutx.org · Languages Unknown · P.O. Box 8306, Houston TX 77288-8306

Legal services designed to secure and protect civil rights for all Texans.

Beacon Law

Free

Civil Rights, Disability Rights, Employment Law, Landlord/Tenant, Taxes, Veterans, Wills

[713-220-9737](tel:713-220-9737) · beaconlaw.org · English · 1212 Prairie Street, Houston TX 77002

Serving Houston's homeless population and Houstonians at risk of homelessness.

Boat People SOS

Low Cost

Family, General Civil Litigation, Immigration

[281-530-6888](tel:281-530-6888) · www.bpsos.org/bpsos-houston · English, Spanish, and Vietnamese · 11360 Bellaire

Boulevard, Suite 910, Houston TX 77072

Primarily serving Houston's Vietnamese and Asian immigrant and refugee communities.

Consejos Legales (solo teléfono)

Free

Any legal topic

[713-755-1133](tel:713-755-1133) · www.hba.org/legalline/#consejoslegales · Spanish

First Thursday of every month. Spanish language legal advice and referrals over the phone from licensed attorneys. This is a joint effort of the Houston Bar Association, the Hispanic Bar Association of Houston, and the Mexican American Bar Association of Houston.



Legal Aid, continued

Disability Rights Texas

Free

Civil Rights, Disability Rights, Employment, Fair Housing, Healthcare Law

[800-252-9108](tel:800-252-9108) · www.disabilityrightstx.org · English and Spanish

Members of the disabled community seeking legal assistance can complete the initial intake online or over the phone. Income requirements may apply.

Family Violence Legal Hotline (telephone only)

Free

Domestic Abuse, Sexual Assault, Stalking

[800-374-4673](tel:800-374-4673) · www.texasadvocacyproject.org · English and Spanish

Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. Receive legal advice and referrals. Three to five days after conducting an intake, an attorney will return your call.

Fathers 4 Equal Rights

Low to Medium Cost

Family Law matters involving children

[713-588-5870](tel:713-588-5870) · fathers4equalrights.org · English and Spanish

Assistance for fathers with legal issues regarding their children, for significantly less than the cost of an attorney.

Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)

Free

Domestic Violence, Abuse, Sexual Assault

English, Spanish, TDD · DV Hotline [713-528-2121](tel:713-528-2121) · Sexual Assault Hotline [713-528-7273](tel:713-528-7273) · hawc.org · 1010 Waugh Drive, Houston TX 77019

24/7 hotlines. Shelter, legal assistance, counseling, and other support services for women and children survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Houston Bar Association LegalLine (telephone only)

Free

All Legal Matters

[713-759-1133](tel:713-759-1133) · www.hba.org/legalline · English

Free legal advice from licensed attorneys the first and third Wednesday of every month, 5 to 9 pm.

Houston Lawyer Referral Service

Low Cost

All matters

[713-237-9429](tel:713-237-9429) · hlrs.org · English and Spanish

Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Referrals to attorneys, some on sliding scale. Initial 30 minute consultation costs \$20. Serving Harris, Montgomery, Fort Bend, Brazoria, and Galveston counties.

Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program

Free

Consumer, Family, Guardianship, IRS Disputes, Landlord/Tenant, Probate

[713-228-0732](tel:713-228-0732) · www.makejusticehappen.org · English and Spanish · 1111 Bagby Street, Suite FB300, Houston TX 77002

Offers a variety of free civil legal services. Income requirements may apply.

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) – Houston

Free

Asylum, Immigration

supportkind.org · infohouston@supportkind.org · Multiple Languages

Representation for unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children in deportation proceedings.

Lambda Legal - South Central Regional Office

Free

LGBT and HIV+ Civil Rights

[214-219-8585](tel:214-219-8585) · www.lambdalegal.org/helpdesk · English and Spanish

Provides referrals and information, and accepts a limited number cases for direct representation.

Legal Hotline for Texans (for seniors)

Free

Civil Legal Matters

[800-622-2520](tel:800-622-2520) · www.tlsc.org/legalhotline · English and Spanish

Free legal advice and referrals over the phone for Texans over the age of 60; no criminal matters; leave a message or fill out internet form to connect with an attorney.

Lone Star Legal Aid

Free

Civil Rights, Consumer, Disaster Relief, Elder Law, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Fair Housing, Family, Healthcare, IRS Disputes, Immigration, Juvenile/Youth, Public Education, Sexual Assault, Veterans, Government Assistance, Wills

[713-652-0077](tel:713-652-0077) · lonestarlegal.org · All Languages · 500 Jefferson Street, 17th Floor, Houston TX 77002

Income requirements may apply. Pro bono representation, legal services, and community outreach.

Memorial Assistance Ministries Immigration Legal Service

Low Cost

Immigration

[713-468-4516 ext. 187](tel:713-468-4516) · www.maministries.org/legal · English, Spanish · 1625 Blalock Rd, Houston 77080

Immigration attorneys generally offer consultations every Friday. Registration starts at 8:30 am. Check website for updates. First come, first serve basis. Only first 8 people will be seen. There is a \$30 consultation fee, exact change or credit card.

NAACP Legal Redress Program

Free

All Legal Matters

[713-526-3389](tel:713-526-3389) · English · 2002 Wheeler Avenue, Houston TX 77004

The NAACP Legal Redress Committee Hosts legal clinics on the 3rd Saturday of every month from 9 am until 2 pm. Income requirements may apply.

Legal Aid, continued

South Texas College of Law Legal Clinics

Free

Animal Law, Asylum, Domestic Abuse, Family, Guardianship, IRS Disputes, Immigration, Intellectual Property, Juvenile/Youth, Mediation, Probate, Veterans, Wills

[713-313-1139 · http://www.stcl.edu/academics/legal-clinics/](http://www.stcl.edu/academics/legal-clinics/) · 1303 San Jacinto Street, Houston TX 77002

Apply to have supervised student attorneys handle your case; cases will be chosen based on educational value to students; income requirements may apply; client may be responsible for court fees; intake form on website.

St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigration Legal Assistance

Low Cost

Asylum, Immigration

English and Spanish · Harris County [713-526-4611](tel:713-526-4611) · Fort Bend County [281-202-6200](tel:281-202-6200) · catholiccharities.org/supporting-refugees-immigrants/st-frances-cabrini-center-for-immigration-legal-assistance/ · 2900 Louisiana Street, Houston TX 77006

Serving victims of human trafficking, those separated from their families and eager to be reunited, and those who fear persecution in their country of origin. A service of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

Tahirih Justice Center

Free

Asylum, Domestic Abuse, Immigration

All Languages · [713-496-0100](tel:713-496-0100) · www.tahirih.org/locations/houston/ · 1717 St. James Place, Suite 450, Houston TX 77056

Providing free legal and social services to immigrant women and girls fleeing violence in the Greater Houston and Galveston area.

Texas Civil Rights Project

Free

Civil Rights

[512-474-5073](tel:512-474-5073) · texascivilrightsproject.org/resources/civil-rights-intake · English and Spanish · 1405 Montopolis Drive, Austin TX 78741

“Texas Civil Rights Project brings strategic lawsuits to protect and expand voting rights, challenge injustices in the criminal justice system, and advance racial and economic justice.”

Texas Immigrant Rights Hotline

Free

Immigration

[833-468-4664](tel:833-468-4664) · www.houstonimmigration.org/hotline · All Languages

The Texas Immigrant Rights Hotline is a source of timely and accurate information about immigration laws, and referrals to legal services providers and attorneys. The hotline is staffed by volunteer attorneys, law students, and BIA accredited representatives every Monday through Friday, 2 pm to 6 pm (except holidays).

Texas Legal Answers - Pro Bono Texas

Free

www.texaslegalanswers.org · English

Free online assistance for qualified Texas with limited means. Log on to create an account and submit a question concerning a civil legal matter to be answered by a volunteer Texas attorney.



Texas Southern University Legal Clinics

Free

Criminal, Family, Guardianship, Immigration, Probate, Wills

[713-313-7275](tel:713-313-7275) · www.tsulaw.edu/legal_clinic/index.html · English · 3100 Cleburne Street, Suite 100, Houston TX 77004

Apply to have supervised student attorneys handle your case; cases will be chosen based on educational value to students; income requirements may apply; client may be responsible for court fees.

The Arc of Texas

Free

Disability Law (offers referrals)

[800-252-9729](tel:800-252-9729) · arctx.convio.net · English and Spanish

The Arc of Texas promotes, protects, and advocates for the human rights and self-determination of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Does not provide legal services but can help people connect with appropriate legal services.

University of Houston Law Center Legal Aid Clinics

Free

Consumer, Criminal, Entrepreneurship, Family, General Civil, Mediation, Immigration

[713-743-2094](tel:713-743-2094) · www.law.uh.edu/clinic · 100 Law Center Drive, Houston TX 77204

Student attorneys can handle your case; cases will be chosen based on educational value to students; income requirements may apply; client may be responsible for court fees. Must be referred in by partner organization.

Veterans Legal Initiative - Houston Bar Association

Free

All Legal Matters

[713-333-VETS](tel:713-333-VETS) · www.hba.org/veterans-legal-initiative · English and Spanish

Free legal advice and legal representation to veteran, or spouse of a deceased veteran. No appointment necessary. Friday and Saturday Clinics. Friday: Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, 1 pm until 5 pm, 2002 Holcombe Boulevard, Houston, TX 77030, first floor near the Emergency Room Entrance. Saturday: Check website for rotating clinic locations.

YMCA International Services

Free or Low Cost

Asylum, Immigration · English, Spanish, and others

[713-339-9015](tel:713-339-9015) · www.ymcahouston.org/locations/ymca-international · 6300 Westpark Drive, Suite 600, Houston TX 77057

Immigration assistance with an emphasis on refugees and human trafficking victims. Some cases require \$40 consultation fee.

Public Services

Government resources to help resolve, build, or argue your case.

Attorney General's Office

State

English and Spanish · Main Agency Switchboard [512-463-2100](tel:512-463-2100) · Consumer Protection Hotline [800-621-0508](tel:800-621-0508) · Child Support State Office [512-460-6000](tel:512-460-6000) · Acknowledgment of Paternity Questions [866-255-2006](tel:866-255-2006) · 24-hour hotline for custodial parents to receive automated information [800-252-8014](tel:800-252-8014) · www.texasattorneygeneral.gov
Child support and paternity establishment, consumer protection, reimbursement for crime victims.

Dispute Resolution Center

County

[713-755-8274](tel:713-755-8274) · drc.harriscountytexas.gov · English, Spanish · Annex 21, 49 San Jacinto St, #220, Houston 77002
Free mediation services for general disputes, divorces, active civil cases, and matters involving children.
Requests for mediation can be made online.

Domestic Relations Office

County

[713-274-7300](tel:713-274-7300) · dro.harriscountytexas.gov · English, Spanish · 1310 Prairie Street, Suite 700, Houston TX 77002
Enforcement of child support, visitation, and mediation to resolve parental conflict (free mediation requires minor child and combined income of the parties below \$125,000).

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Federal

[800-669-4000](tel:800-669-4000) · www.eeoc.gov/field/houston/index.cfm · English and Spanish; limited support in Arabic, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Vietnamese, and others.
The EEOC has the authority to investigate charges of discrimination against employers who are covered by federal law. If discrimination has occurred, EEOC will try to settle the charge. EEOC chooses to litigate a small percentage of cases.

Family Violence Unit of Harris County District Attorney's Office

County

[713-274-0212](tel:713-274-0212) · app.dao.hctx.net/family-criminal-law · English, Spanish · 1310 Prairie, Houston TX 77002
Helps obtain protective orders; investigates domestic violence, bigamy, and interference with child custody.

Fraud Examiner of Harris County District Attorney's Office

County

[713-755-5836](tel:713-755-5836) · app.dao.hctx.net/fraud-examiner · English · 1201 Franklin Street, No. 600, Houston TX 77002
Investigates consumer fraud, white collar fraud, and fraud by public servants.



Harris County Law Library

County

[713-755-5183](tel:713-755-5183) · www.harriscountylawlibrary.org · English and Spanish · 1019 Congress

Street, 1st Floor, Houston TX 77002

Free access to reference librarians, law books, sample documents, and legal forms. Public computers, free notary services, and research training. Houston Volunteer Lawyers on site every weekday.

Harris County Protective Services

County

English and Spanish · Main [713-394-4000](tel:713-394-4000) · Report suspected abuse or neglect [800-252-5400](tel:800-252-5400) ·

hcps.harriscountytexas.gov · 2525 Murworth Drive, Houston TX 77054

Protective services for children, seniors, and the disabled.

Harris County Public Defender's Office

County

English and Spanish · [713-368-0016](tel:713-368-0016) · harriscountypublicdefender.org · 1301 Franklin St, #100, Houston 77002

Judges will sometimes appoint a Public Defender to represent an indigent defendant.

Harris County Sheriff - NONEMERGENCY

County

[713-221-6000](tel:713-221-6000) · www.harriscountysos.org · English and Spanish

Harris County Sheriff Family Violence Unit

County

To file charges for a criminal act of family violence [713-967-5743](tel:713-967-5743) · Languages Unknown

Harris County Social Services

County

[713-696-7900](tel:713-696-7900) · csd.harriscountytexas.gov · English and Spanish

Assistance with rent, utility, public transportation, phone payments, pauper's burial, and more.

Houston Police Dispatch - NONEMERGENCY

City

[713-884-3131](tel:713-884-3131) · www.houstontx.gov/police/online_report.htm · English and Spanish

Contact for any nonemergency situation that requires the response of a police officer, for example, if your car has been stolen. Use the online form at the link provided to file police reports under certain circumstances.

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans

Federal

877-424-3838 · www.va.gov/homeless/nationalcallcenter.asp · English

Assistance for veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with housing, employment, and more.

Texas Abuse Hotline

State

[800-252-5400](tel:800-252-5400) · www.txabusehotline.org · English and Spanish

24 hour hotline for issues regarding abuse and neglect of children, seniors, and disabled individuals; use phone number for urgent situations, or web form for situations that can wait at least 24 hours to be investigated.

Public Services, continued

Texas Department of Human Services

State

[713-767-2000](tel:713-767-2000) · hhs.texas.gov · English and Spanish

Resources for medical care, food, and cash assistance.

Texas Health and Human Services United Way Helpline

State

[211](tel:211) · [877-541-7905](tel:877-541-7905) · www.211texas.org · English

Referrals to agencies and social services including emergency aid, medical resources, and shelters.

Texas Workforce Commission

State

[800-832-2829](tel:800-832-2829) · www.twc.state.tx.us · English, Spanish · See website for statewide service locations.

For employers, TWC offers recruiting, training and retraining, outplacement services and valuable information on employment law and labor market trends and statistics. For job seekers and employees, TWC offers career development information, job-search resources, training programs, and, as appropriate, unemployment benefits. While targeted populations receive intensive assistance to overcome barriers to employment, all Texans can benefit from the services offered by the partners of Texas Workforce Solutions.

Texas Workforce Commission Labor Law Section

State

[800-832-9243](tel:800-832-9243) · www.twc.state.tx.us/programs/labor-law-program-overview · English, Spanish

Responsible for enforcing wage payment, child work restrictions, and the Texas minimum wage laws.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

Federal

Multiple languages depending on service. Assistance by Phone [800-829-1040](tel:800-829-1040) · To make an appointment at nearest location [844-545-5640](tel:844-545-5640) · www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-you-by-volunteers

Free assistance preparing federal income tax return.

Find more
resources
from these
organizations.



hba.org



texasbar.com

Helpful Nonprofits

Organizations that can provide additional services to people with legal issues.

Better Business Bureau of Metropolitan Houston

[713-868-9500](tel:713-868-9500) · www.bbb.org/houston · English and Spanish

Resolves disputes between consumers and businesses; works with law enforcement to identify potential incidents of fraud; and helps people find and recommend businesses, brands, and charities they can trust.

Crisis Intervention of Houston

[832-416-1177](tel:832-416-1177) · www.crisishotline.org · English

24-hour telephone counseling and referral service provides crisis intervention, information, and referrals as needed from non-judgmental, trained phone counselors. Calls are anonymous and confidential.

Crisis Intervention of Houston - Teen Talk

Call [832-416-1199](tel:832-416-1199) · Text 281-201-4430 · www.crisishotline.org · English

24-hour peer-to-peer hotline and one-on-one phone texting for teens to discuss problems anonymously.

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston

[713-533-4900](tel:713-533-4900) · www.imgh.org · Multiple Languages

Refugee services, Meals on Wheels, and Meals on Wheels for pets.



txcourts.gov



Texas
LawHelp.org

TexasCourtHelp.org

Connect with Us

In Person



Location

Harris County Law Library
Congress Plaza, 1st Floor
1019 Congress Street
Houston, Texas 77002

Hours

Monday - Friday
8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Phone

713-755-5183

Online

www.harriscountylawlibrary.org

Social



@HCLawLibrary



[Facebook.com/harriscountylawlibrary](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountylawlibrary)



[Linkedin.com/company/harris-county-law-library](https://www.linkedin.com/company/harris-county-law-library)



[YouTube.com/c/HarrisCountyLawLibrary](https://www.youtube.com/c/HarrisCountyLawLibrary)



[Instagram.com/harriscountylawlibrary](https://www.instagram.com/harriscountylawlibrary)