

THE BRIEF



Information for Texas Municipalities about Texas Municipal Courts (November 2018)

TML Annual Conference Recap

Between City Hall and Municipal Court: How City Officials Can Promote Public Safety and Confidence in the Legal System & The Official Launch of C3 (Councils, Courts, and Cities)

On October 11, 2018, Ryan Kellus Turner, TMCEC General Counsel and Director of Education, addressed mayors, city council members, and other local officials from cities of all sizes at the Texas Municipal League Annual Conference. Here is a synopsis of his presentation.

City Hall: Promoting Public Safety and Confidence in the Legal System

Continuing the conversation he began in Houston at the 2017 TML Annual Conference, Turner explained how, in Texas, mayors, city council members, and other local officials play an important role in helping municipal courts balance different interests. Procedural fairness must be balanced with upholding the rule of law. Compassion must be balanced with compliance. Judicial independence must be balanced with judicial accountability.

Gallup data suggests that although Americans are divided on priorities for the criminal justice system, across the ideological spectrum there are shifting views when it comes to punishment. The number of people who believe that the system is not “tough enough” is at a 13-year low. National confidence in law enforcement has returned to where it was prior to 2013 when it began to decline.

The national focus seems to be shifting from retributive justice (the perceived fairness of punishment) to procedural justice (the perceived fairness of court procedures and interpersonal treatment). Procedural fairness (the opportunity to be heard by an unbiased decision maker who treats people with dignity and who explains and honors defendants’ rights) has been shown to be the primary factor in a person’s willingness to accept a court decision. Other benefits include increased compliance with court orders, fewer violations, and increased governmental cost savings.

When it comes to feelings of safety, Gallup reports Americans of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds generally do not share the same sense of safety. Americans living in lower-income households feel as safe as people in some developing countries, such as a Nicaragua. An international measure of public safety used by Gallup involves asking respondents whether they feel safe walking in their community.

Texas has the 13th highest number of pedestrian deaths in the United States. Road infrastructure problems (e.g., lack of sidewalks, traffic signals, street lights, and crosswalks) combined with dangerous driver behaviors increase the

hazard posed to pedestrians. Most pedestrians are killed by automobiles. In Texas in 2017, a person was killed in a traffic related fatality every 2 hours and 21 minutes and a person was injured every 2 minutes and 4 seconds. The economic loss related to these fatalities and injuries is nearly \$38.5 million. There have been 52,231 traffic-related fatalities in Texas since 2003. In the the last decade there has also been a 37 percent statewide decline in the number of traffic citations.

The public depends on city hall to promote public safety and confidence in the legal system. This not only entails promoting the enforcement of laws by police but also necessitates having fair and neutral municipal courts.

To view the presentation outline including links to all works cited, please visit <http://www.tmcec.com/c3/tml2018/>.

C3 (Councils, Courts, and Cities)

The presentation in Fort Worth was the official launch of C3 (Councils, Courts, and Cities), a public information and education campaign created by the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center that aims to help fill the information gap between city halls and municipal courts in Texas.

The purpose of C3 is to highlight issues and increase awareness and understanding of municipal courts in Texas for mayors, city council members, city attorneys, and other local officials. Public safety and quality of life are enhanced through the enforcement of traffic laws, local ordinances, and other state laws. The public increasingly depends on city officials and employees to understand key issues pertaining to these laws and their adjudication in court.

Part of C3 is *The Brief* (which you are reading right now). *The Brief* is a periodic briefing for Texas mayors, city council members, and other local officials.

This is the eighth issue of *The Brief*. Check out past issues online. Visit www.tmcec.com/c3.

Want to know about C3 related happenings and receive the most recent issue of *The Brief* in your email inbox? Just send an email to tmcec@tmcec.com. In the subject line, type: "Add me to C3."

Also, follow @C3ofTexas on Twitter.

The Brief is a periodic briefing for Texas mayors, city council members, and other local officials highlighting issues and increasing awareness and understanding of municipal courts in the Lone Star State. For more information visit: www.tmcec.com/c3

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