

District Attorney Kim Ogg
Harris County District Attorney's Office
1201 Franklin Street, Ste. 600
Houston, TX 77002-1923

RE: Harris County Data Transparency Dashboard

Dear District Attorney Ogg,

We thank you and your office for taking the important step of making information about the Harris County justice system available to the public through the office's new Data Transparency Dashboard. For too long, prosecutorial offices across the country have failed to adequately collect and report data on their practices. By creating this platform, you are one of few prosecutors who have taken steps to ensure that the public has insight into the practices and case outcomes of their office.

In any effort for greater transparency, it is crucial to prioritize accuracy and clarity. To that end, the undersigned organizations believe that the Dashboard can be improved through several simple yet impactful changes to the "Bond" page:

1. *Indicate a time frame for the data presented in the chart labeled "Violent Crime Committed on Multiple Felony Bonds."* Absent this update, viewers may believe this data is from the last year, or even the most recent month, rather than between 2015 and 2024. To address this issue, we recommend adding a visible date range to ensure consistency and clarity across the page. Alternatively, to create greater clarity on the "Bond page," we recommend restructuring the chart to depict the number of certain crimes committed on multiple felony bonds by *year*, rather than by court. This information will likely be more meaningful to Harris County residents, who may be unaware of the breakdown of court jurisdictions.
2. *Identify in the title or description of the "Violent Crime Committed on Multiple Felony Bonds" chart how "violent crime" is defined.* This chart does not include enough information on how your office defines and measures the number of violent crimes committed. To ensure this data paints a clear picture of public safety, we recommend identifying whether these numbers represent new arrests, charges, or convictions for violent crimes.
3. *Define in the titles of the three additional charts on the "Bond" page what kinds of cases are being represented.* For the three charts labeled "Cases Filed on Defendants with 1+ Bonds," "Cases Filed on Defendants with 5+ Misdemeanor Bonds," and "Cases Filed on

Defendants with 3+ felony Bonds,” the type of cases filed for defendants with one or more bonds isn’t clear. Given that the chart at the top of the page is currently labeled “violent crimes,” viewers may assume that these new cases solely represent violent or serious offenses. To help dashboard viewers better understand this information, we recommend either clearly distinguishing how many of these additional charges are for violent offenses or making the titles clear as to what types of cases are included.

4. *Clarify that the data in the three additional charts on the “Bond” page only represent new charges for offenses committed after release on bond.* There may be some instances where your office files a case on an individual on bond that predates the charges for which they are currently released if the case had not been previously filed. We recommend clarifying that the data in these three charts only represent new charges for alleged offenses committed *after* the person was released on bond.
5. *Add another chart to the “Bond” page showing changes in the number of cases filed per year.* While it is important to demonstrate the changes in the number of cases filed on people with one or more bonds, this information alone does not paint an accurate picture of public safety unless it is easy to compare with changes in the total number of cases filed in the same years. For example, if the number of cases filed against people with bonds rose 50% while the overall case filings remained the same, that would be of much more significance than if the overall case filings also rose 50%. While the “Filed” tab in the dashboard highlights case filings by year, viewers may have difficulty comparing these numbers. We recommend adding a chart to the “Bond” page that displays changes in the number of cases filed per year or adding a chart that shows the percentage of charges filed on defendants with bonds out of the total number of cases filed. This way, viewers can more easily understand the significance of this data within its full context.

Implementing these simple changes will strengthen the dashboards’ reliability and readability, and better demonstrate your office’s full commitment to transparency.

Thank you again for taking steps to help the public better understand the criminal legal system. We appreciate you taking the time to review and consider our recommendations. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these recommendations further, please contact Emma Stammen, Policy Strategist at The Bail Project, at emmas@bailproject.org.

Sincerely,

The Bail Project
Texas Jail Project
American Civil Liberties Union of Texas