



For Immediate Release

Harris County misdemeanor courts to hold Fresh Start program and community resource fair on May 14 in Fifth Ward near East End

May 4, 2022 — One bad decision can steer you off course — but it doesn't have to.

That's the message from Harris County misdemeanor court judges who've launched a second-chance program designed to help non-violent, low-level offenders change course and get back on track after experiences with the criminal justice system.

The aptly named Fresh Start program places a strong focus on rehabilitation, restorative justice, and community safety and empowerment. It includes two key parts — community court proceedings for sealing the criminal records of eligible individuals and a community resource fair to connect attendees with key support services.

"One bad decision can have long-lasting ripple effects — on the offender and the community," Harris County Criminal Courts at Law Presiding Judge Toria Finch said, noting the connection between rehabilitation and community safety. "If we can get people connected with the tools and resources they need to get back on track, that's a win-win."

Fresh Start is the inaugural program offered by BAYOU City Community Court, an initiative developed by the judges to encompass their efforts related to compassionate, restorative justice and community empowerment.

Community court proceedings held during Fresh Start allow judges to grant orders of non-disclosure to individuals who are eligible under state law. The order seals the charge, meaning it doesn't have to be disclosed publicly — on job or rental applications, for example — but can still be viewed by criminal justice agencies.

Free and open to the public, the accompanying resource fair provides a one-stop-shop for community members in need of support. Attendees can get help with job training, GED and trade school options, COVID-19 vaccines, and applications for state benefits, as well as specific support for those who were formerly incarcerated and students with disabilities who are transitioning to adulthood.

Attendees also can register for pre-screening to determine if they're eligible to have their criminal records sealed.

The next Fresh Start is Saturday, May 14, 2022, from 10 a.m. to noon. at the YET Center, 4900 Providence St. in Fifth Ward near the East End. For more information about Fresh Start and upcoming events, visit www.ccl.hctx.net/comcourt.htm.



FRESH START RESOURCE FAIR

May 14, 2022, 10 a.m. to Noon
Yet Center, 4900 Providence St.

- **Criminal Record Sealing:** Sign up for pre-screening & find out if you're eligible
- **COVID-19 vaccines & boosters**
- **Job training, coaching & search tips**
- **Help applying for state benefits** (SNAP, Medicaid, CHIP, etc.)
- **GED & trade school options**
- School enrollment for students
- **Support for students with disabilities** transitioning to independent adulthood
- **Re-entry support for previously incarcerated** adults & juveniles
- Link to **food pantries & classes** for parenting & money management

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