



For Immediate Release

Fresh Start secures second chances for nearly 4,000 people, readies for more as program marks the start of its fifth year

Registration for upcoming record screening and sealing event opens at noon on Monday, April 27

April 23, 2026 — Four years ago, Fresh Start was little more than an idea jotted down in a notebook during a judicial brainstorm.

The first event was held in a community center gymnasium with a handful of community partners and more volunteers than attendees.

Today, that modest idea has helped nearly 4,000 people do something that once felt out of reach — find their footing and start over.

“Jobs, housing, college, loans, professional licenses — all of that is harder to access when you have a record,” Harris County Criminal Courts at Law Presiding Judge Ashley Guice said. “Fresh Start helps clear the initial hurdle, allowing people to begin taking the steps needed to improve their lives.”

Launched in April 2022, the second-chance program helps people get back on track after encounters with the criminal justice system by sealing their eligible criminal records and connecting them to vital community resources.

The goal is to help people meet their basic needs and become more productive members of their community — reducing recidivism and making neighborhoods safer in the process.

Fresh Start is hosted by the Harris County Criminal Courts at Law community outreach arm, BAYOU City Community Court, which is also celebrating its fifth year.

The program’s growth has been remarkable and its impact measurable. In its first year, roughly 150 people went through the program. Participation surged to more than 800 in year two, topped 1,000 in year three, and exceeded 1,600 last year.

More than 300 people have participated so far this year. With three more events scheduled in 2026, that number is expected to climb considerably.

The numbers reflect the work of a broad coalition — founding criminal misdemeanor court judges alongside numerous additional jurists, court staff, volunteers, justice partners, and community organizations that have supported Fresh Start over the past four years.

The next Fresh Start is scheduled for Saturday, May 16, 2026, from 10 a.m. to noon. Online registration for free criminal record screening opens at noon on Monday, April 27, 2026. Only Harris County criminal histories qualify for this program. Eligibility for record sealing is determined by state law.



Other resources available in May include:

- **Harris County Public Health ACCESS Harris County:** Register for assistance related to education, food security, job placement, counseling, peer support, healthcare and insurance, housing, and transportation.
- **South Texas College of Law Legal Clinics:** Apply to determine your eligibility for assistance with civil legal matters.
- **Consulate General of Mexico in Houston:** Access support for Mexican citizens in need of legal documents or services.
- **Harris County Office of Managed Assigned Counsel (MAC):** Learn about your legal rights and connect with resources.

For more information about the program or to register, go to www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm.

Fresh Start is offered in partnership with the Harris County Public Defender's Office, the Harris County Community Supervision and Corrections Department, the Harris County State District Criminal Courts, and Harris County Constable Precinct One.

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