

SETRPC

SOUTH EAST TEXAS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION



**South East Texas Regional Planning Commission
Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan
2026-2031**

Foreword

Texas is vast and diverse, with each region facing unique challenges and opportunities in public safety and criminal justice. From urban centers to rural communities, we share a collective responsibility to ensure our justice systems are fair, effective, and responsive to local needs. This Criminal Justice Strategic Plan represents a coordinated effort across our region to strengthen public safety, support victims, reduce recidivism, and address the root causes of crime.

Guided by community input, regional data, and the expertise of our criminal justice partners, this plan identifies priority areas for investment and collaboration. It reflects our commitment to a balanced approach—one that values prevention and intervention alongside enforcement and accountability. We have engaged law enforcement agencies, courts, corrections, juvenile justice professionals, victim advocates, behavioral health providers, and community stakeholders to build a strategy that is both inclusive and actionable.

As our region continues to grow and evolve, so must our strategies. This plan is not a static document, but a roadmap for progress—anchored in data, informed by those on the front lines, and adaptable to emerging needs. Whether responding to mental health crises, supporting at-risk youth, or enhancing reentry efforts, our goal remains the same: to build safer, stronger communities across Texas.

We thank everyone who contributed their time, insight, and dedication to this important work. Together, we are advancing a vision of justice that is equitable, collaborative, and locally driven.

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Shanna Burke
Executive Director,
South East Texas Regional Planning Commission
05.20.2026

South East Texas Regional Planning Commission Criminal Justice Strategic Plan

Strategic Planning Period (Interlocal Agreement allows for 5-year plan): [May 2026–May 2031]

Executive Summary

Purpose:

The Southeast Texas Criminal Justice Strategic Plan (SETCJSP) 2025 identifies criminal justice priority gaps in services and possible solutions in the area of law enforcement, juvenile justice, victim services, and mental health/substance abuse for Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange counties. This regional plan was written at the directive of the Texas Office of the Governor, Public Safety Office, Criminal Justice Division and elicited participation and information from more than 22 South East Texas stakeholders representing 19 agencies including elected officials, service providers, law enforcement professionals, school districts, courts, correction officers, faith organizations, and the community at large.

Overview of the Plan:

The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission Criminal Justice Strategic Plan, addresses priorities in criminal justice, juvenile justice, victim services, and mental health/substance use within the **South East Texas** region.

Planning Process:

The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission’s Criminal Justice and Homeland Security Division hosted four regional stakeholder focus group meetings covering each discipline: law enforcement, juvenile justice, victim services, and mental health/substance abuse. Additionally, every year, online surveys are completed by stakeholders where emerging needs and priorities can be identified. All information collected during the planning process is important, useful, and worthy of noting in the plan. Priorities not currently meeting the threshold for including during this planning process may become a priority in subsequent years.

Top Five Critical Needs:

Clearly list the five most pressing needs identified across all criminal justice areas:

Criminal Justice:

- Timely, expedient access to and sharing of data between public safety agencies in the region and state;
- Access to funding and equipment to emerging law enforcement technologies including fingerprint readers, license plate readers, and driver license readers provided to officers in the field to identify individuals encountered;
- Provide public safety radio coverage for 100% of the region;
- Ensure safe and efficient mental health commitment warrant services; mental health intake processes; and mental health training for officers and consumers;
- Forensic analysis capability for computer and cell phone evidence/ availability to aid investigations and prosecution

Juvenile Justice:

- Secure residential facilities for substance abuse and/or mental health for youth;

- Affordable specialized counseling for juveniles and families including ongoing after care professional counseling, services, and resources for individuals, families, and group psychotherapy;
- Resources for youth with conduct/behavioral problems and their families;
- Alcohol/substance abuse and/or mental health prevention programs; life skills classes and training for job skills;
- Transportation of youth for treatment (medical, psychological, substance abuse) and classes (life skills, diversion)

Victim Services:

- Enhance/expand existing victim services agencies that demonstrate a proven record or quality services;
- Ensure shelters/appropriate, alternate housing available for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking victims including for victims with substance abuse issues, there is a high need for transitional housing;
- Enhance regional interagency coordination related to victim services including multi-disciplinary teams;
- Provide resources and education on how to access resources to crime victims and specialized training to crime victim providers that will render more effective navigation of the criminal justice system;
- Deliver emergency and long-term services to meet the immediate and restorative needs of victims

Mental Health/Substance Abuse:

- Need for additional mental health and substance abuse resources particularly within the community including additional services, transportation to/from services, jobs, social/emotional learning in schools, and education;
- Enhance mental health resources in every facet of mental health including a psychiatric crisis care center, access to psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors both inpatient and outpatient, particularly for those not involved in a criminal proceeding;
- Form a robust and comprehensive community collaboration (one body working together) to address mental health and substance abuse disorders and collaboratively seek out funding to address identified resource gaps
- Expand awareness and public outreach for both mental health and substance use disorders
- Provide additional law enforcement mental health peace officers with specialized training to address public safety issues involving mental health.

Connection to Implementation:

The SETCJSP serves as a roadmap for future criminal justice activities in the Southeast Texas region. It identifies, in a coordinated, comprehensive and methodical manner, priority gaps in current criminal justice services. Possible solutions are included that would improve the quality of life for the estimated 430,169 people who call South East Texas home. This plan be a useful tool in guiding the **Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC)** in funding prioritization and will support evidence-based improvements across the continuum of justice. The CJAC will use this plan to guide funding recommendations, ensure alignment with regional needs, and support ongoing program evaluation and collaboration.

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1. Community Engagement in the Planning Process

This section should provide a comprehensive explanation of how the COG engaged local communities during the development of the plan, with emphasis on both methods of outreach and the contributions those communities made to shaping priorities. Describe not only what was done, but also what input was received and how that input was incorporated.

The development of this strategic plan was guided by a comprehensive and inclusive community engagement process designed to ensure that regional priorities reflect the lived experiences, professional expertise, and identified needs of Southeast Texas residents. The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC), as the Council of Governments (COG), gathered input from stakeholders, Criminal Justice Advisory Committee Members and subject matter experts to ensure community representation and underserved populations. This process emphasized not only broad participation, but also meaningful incorporation of feedback into the final plan.

Stakeholder Representation

The planning process included strong participation from a diverse group of stakeholders representing the criminal justice system, juvenile justice, victim services, substance abuse, behavioral health providers, education systems, and community-based organizations. Law enforcement agencies provided critical insight into the increasing frequency of mental health-related calls for service and the need for additional mental health officers and crisis intervention resources. Prosecutors and defense attorneys contributed perspectives on the impact of untreated mental illness and substance use disorders within the justice system, including case delays and challenges related to competency restoration. Probation and community supervision officers identified gaps in treatment availability for individuals under supervision, particularly in rural areas. Victim service providers emphasized the need for expanded access to shelter, trauma-informed care, and crisis counseling services. Mental health and substance use providers, including the Spindletop Center, highlighted workforce shortages, funding limitations, and barriers to accessing inpatient and outpatient care. County juvenile probation representatives and education partners contributed valuable insight into youth behavioral health trends, noting increased anxiety, depression, and the need for early intervention, school-based mental health services, and prevention programming.

Ongoing Communication and Collaboration

Community engagement for this plan was not limited to a one-time effort but is intended to be part of an ongoing, collaborative process. The region benefits from established partnerships and workgroups to address needs. These existing networks will continue to serve as a platform for communication, coordination, and feedback throughout the implementation of the strategic plan. Future engagement efforts will include continued

stakeholder meetings, periodic plan updates, and opportunities for community input to ensure that priorities remain responsive to emerging needs. The establishment of regional collaborations, including potential behavioral health coalitions, will further strengthen ongoing dialogue and coordination among stakeholders.

Impact on Priorities

Stakeholders and subject matter experts' input played a critical role in shaping the priorities outlined in this strategic plan. Feedback directly influenced the identification of a needs to sustain and maintain service needs addressing youth and juveniles; criminal justice and law enforcement; victim services; and mental health and substance abuse. Additionally, consistent feedback regarding transportation barriers resulted in the inclusion of strategies to improve transportation access for individuals seeking services.

Overall, the engagement process ensured that this strategic plan reflects a broad and representative understanding of the region's challenges and opportunities. By incorporating input from those who serve the region, the plan establishes priorities that are both data-driven and grounded in real-world experience, positioning Southeast Texas to more effectively address its needs.

2. Data Sources Used to Support the Plan

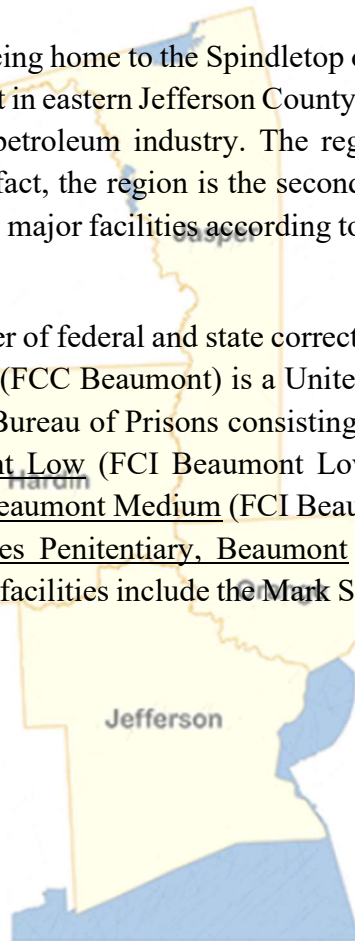
This section should provide a comprehensive overview of the data sources used in developing the Criminal Justice Strategic Plan. The goal is to demonstrate that the plan is grounded in reliable, relevant, and current data.

Regional Profile:

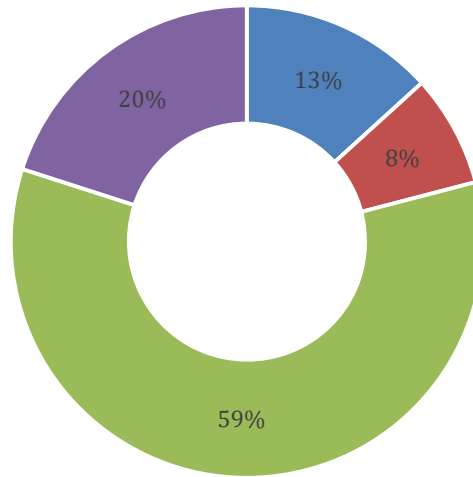
The South East Texas Region lies within the Gulf Coastal Plain in the southeastern portion of Texas. The region stretches from the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Sabine to the heavily forested Big Thicket in Hardin County. The four-county region (Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson and Orange) encompasses an area of 3,039.24 square miles with an estimated of 430,169 citizens according to the 2019 population estimates census data. The three central cities of the region (Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange) contain over half of Southeast Texas' population. Hardin County is the fastest growing county in the region. This highly industrialized, yet significant agricultural region, is served by two navigable rivers (Sabine and Neches), which allow ocean-going vessels to transport, import and export trade.

The region has the distinction of being home to the Spindletop oilfield, discovered on a salt dome formation south of Beaumont in eastern Jefferson County on January 10, 1901, which marked the birth of the modern petroleum industry. The region remains critical to the petrochemical industry today. In fact, the region is the second largest industrial complex in the nation containing roughly 53 major facilities according to the South East Texas Plant Manager's Forum.

South East Texas contains a number of federal and state correctional facilities. The Federal Correctional Complex, Beaumont (FCC Beaumont) is a United States correctional prison complex operated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons consisting of three facilities: Federal Correctional Institution, Beaumont Low (FCI Beaumont Low): a low-security facility; Federal Correctional Institution, Beaumont Medium (FCI Beaumont Medium): a medium-security facility; and United States Penitentiary, Beaumont (USP Beaumont): a high-security facility. State correctional facilities include the Mark Stiles Unit and the Larry Gist Unit.



South East Texas Population



■ Hardin County ■ Jasper County ■ Jefferson County ■ Orange County



Population:
57,126
Square
Miles:
890.57
Population
Density:
65.54

Population:
32,980
Square
Miles:
938.70
Population
Density:
35.13

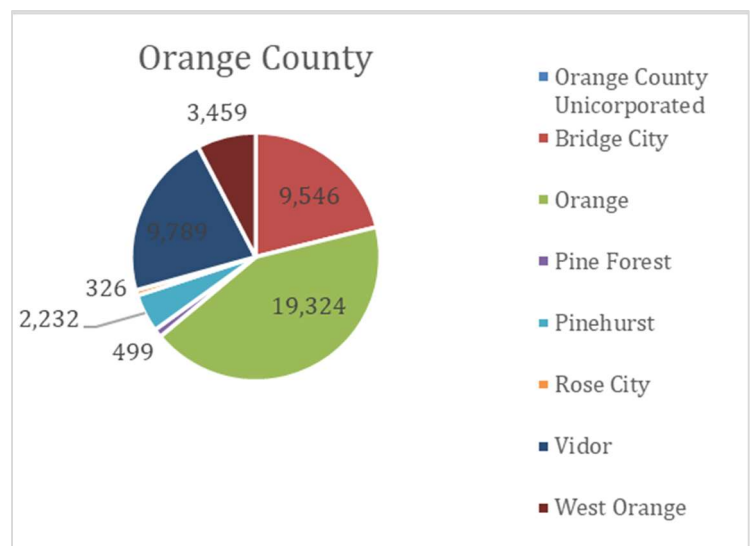
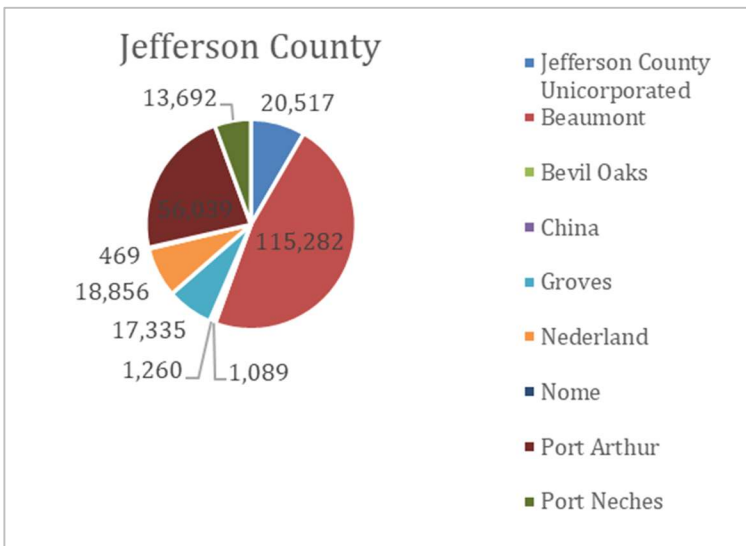
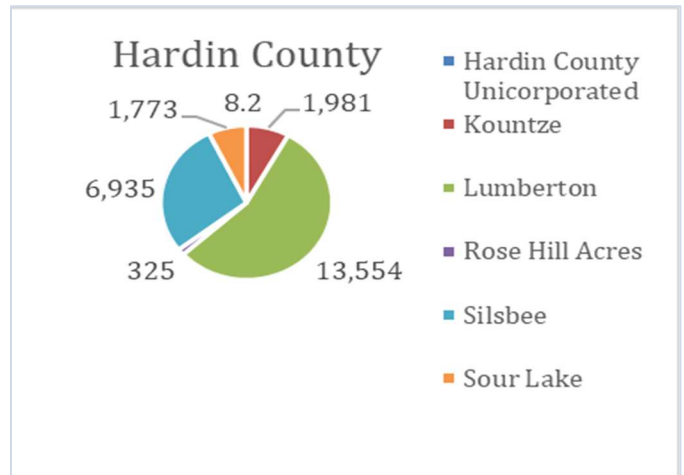
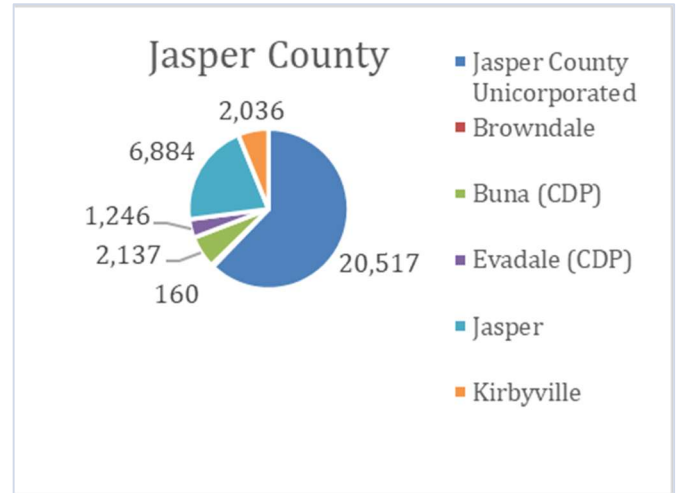
Population:
253,948
Square
Miles:
876.30
Population
Density:
289.79

Population:
86,115
Square
Miles:
333.67
Population
Density:
258.08

Jurisdiction Population by County

according to 2020 Census Data

<https://www.setrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SETRPC-2020-Census-Profile.pdf>



SOUTH EAST TEXAS CENSUS DATA

RACIAL / ETHNIC COUNTS

COUNTY / CITY	2020 POPULATION	NON-MINORITY* (WHITE ANGLO)	PERCENT	MINORITY	PERCENT	MINORITY POPULATION BREAKDOWN									
						BLACK*	PERCENT	HISPANIC	PERCENT	AMERICAN INDIAN*	PERCENT	ASIAN* PAC. ISLD.	PERCENT	OTHER	PERCENT**
HARDIN	56,231	48,005	85.4%	8,226	14.6%	3,072	5.5%	3,417	6.1%	259	0.5%	446	0.8%	4,449	7.9%
Kountze	1,981	1,363	68.8%	618	31.2%	443	22.4%	106	7.8%	6	0.3%	20	1.0%	149	7.5%
Lumberton	13,554	12,049	88.9%	1,505	11.1%	81	0.6%	971	7.2%	62	0.5%	274	2.0%	1,088	8.0%
Rose Hill Acres	325	288	88.6%	37	11.4%	5	1.5%	16	4.9%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	31	9.5%
Silsbee	6,935	4,611	66.5%	2,324	33.5%	1,793	25.9%	352	5.1%	18	0.3%	50	0.7%	463	6.7%
Sour Lake	1,773	1,519	85.7%	254	14.3%	45	2.5%	92	5.2%	7	0.4%	31	1.7%	171	9.6%
Jasper	32,980	24,327	73.8%	8,653	26.2%	5,594	17.0%	2,198	6.7%	182	0.6%	146	0.4%	2,731	8.3%
Browndell	160	76	47.5%	84	52.5%	78	48.8%	2	1.3%	0	0.0%	2	1.3%	4	2.5%
Buna (CDP)	2,137	1,751	81.9%	386	18.1%	233	10.9%	99	4.6%	1	0.0%	8	0.4%	144	6.7%
Evadale (CDP)	1,246	1,154	92.6%	92	7.4%	5	0.4%	48	3.9%	4	0.3%	5	0.4%	78	6.3%
Jasper	6,884	2,774	40.3%	4,110	59.7%	3,111	45.2%	878	12.8%	29	0.4%	57	0.8%	913	13.3%
Kirbyville	2,036	1,456	71.5%	580	28.5%	377	18.5%	140	6.9%	30	1.5%	5	0.2%	168	8.3%
JEFFERSON	256,526	108,905	42.5%	147,621	57.5%	84,835	33.1%	58,915	23.0%	1,787	0.7%	10,192	4.0%	50,807	19.8%
Beaumont	115,282	35,844	31.1%	79,438	68.9%	54,549	47.3%	20,602	17.9%	745	0.6%	1,441	1.2%	10,741	9.3%
Bevil Oaks	1,089	789	72.5%	300	27.5%	115	10.6%	175	16.1%	6	0.6%	15	1.4%	47	4.3%
China	1,260	773	61.3%	487	38.7%	354	28.1%	101	8.0%	4	0.3%	14	1.1%	43	3.4%
Groves	17,335	11,126	64.2%	6,209	35.8%	1,098	6.3%	5,149	29.7%	95	0.5%	602	3.5%	1,079	6.2%
Nederland	18,856	14,118	74.9%	4,738	25.1%	843	4.5%	3,376	17.9%	121	0.6%	833	4.4%	888	4.7%
Nome	469	354	75.5%	115	24.5%	59	12.6%	41	8.7%	6	1.3%	0	0.0%	14	3.0%
Port Arthur	56,039	13,496	24.1%	42,543	75.9%	21,320	38.0%	21,165	37.8%	539	1.0%	3,349	6.0%	8,858	15.8%
Port Neches	13,692	11,043	80.7%	2,649	19.3%	307	2.2%	1,979	14.5%	81	0.6%	473	3.5%	653	4.8%
ORANGE	84,808	66,942	78.9%	17,866	21.1%	8,081	9.5%	7,265	8.6%	459	0.5%	1,132	1.3%	8,194	9.7%
Bridge City	9,546	8,023	84.0%	1,523	16.0%	99	1.0%	1,042	10.9%	60	0.6%	267	2.8%	341	3.6%
Orange	19,324	9,945	51.5%	9,379	48.5%	6,858	35.5%	1,843	9.5%	89	0.5%	348	1.8%	718	3.7%
Pine Forest	499	454	91.0%	45	9.0%	0	0.0%	45	9.0%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	43	8.6%
Pinehurst	2,232	1,505	67.4%	319	14.3%	339	15.2%	327	14.7%	15	0.7%	36	1.6%	69	3.1%
Rose City	326	263	80.7%	63	19.3%	1	0.3%	48	14.7%	9	2.8%	2	0.6%	32	9.8%
Vidor	10,579	9,789	92.5%	790	7.5%	44	0.4%	677	6.4%	57	0.5%	51	0.5%	311	2.9%
West Orange	3,459	2,365	68.4%	1,094	31.6%	445	12.9%	575	16.6%	38	1.1%	41	1.2%	590	17.1%
REGIONAL TOTAL	430,545	248,179	57.6%	182,366	42.4%	101,582	23.6%	71,795	16.7%	2,687	0.6%	11,916	2.8%	66,181	15.4%

* category does not include Hispanics

^includes some other race alone and persons reporting two or more races

Census Table DP-1

3. Stakeholder Participation

This section should provide a detailed record of the individuals and organizations that actively participated in the development of the Criminal Justice Strategic Plan. The goal is to demonstrate that the plan reflects broad input from across the criminal justice system and related service networks.

Stakeholder Group/Individual	Name/Organization	Role in Planning
Juvenile Justice / CJAC Member	Craig Corder / Orange County Juvenile Probation Department	<p>Provided statistical information</p> <p>Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025;</p> <p>Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025;</p> <p>Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025;</p> <p>Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025</p>
Law Enforcement / CJAC Chair	Dale Williford / City of Kountze Police Department	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Juvenile Justice / CJAC Member	Monica Kelley / Hardin County Juvenile Probation Department	<p>Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025;</p> <p>Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025;</p> <p>Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025</p>

Law Enforcement / Education	Michael Nixon / Lamar Institute of Technology (LIT) Police Academy	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Victim Services	Lisa Nix Broucher / Hardin County Crime Victim Assistance Center	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Victim Services	Autumn Ruggles / Hardin County Crime Victim Assistance Center	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Victim Services / Health Care	Angela Dillahunty / Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025

Law Enforcement	Barbara Hollier / City of Nederland Police Department	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Law Enforcement	Mike Zeto / City of Orange Police Department	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Law Enforcement / Elected Official	Mark Allen / Jasper County Judge	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Juvenile Justice	Joe Evans / Revision SETX	Participated in Law Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Substance Abuse / CJAC Member	Robin McCutcheon / Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeast Texas	Participated in Juvenile Justice Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025 Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / CJAC Member	Maureen McAllister / United Way of Orange County, Texas	Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025

		Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Juvenile Justice	Regina Rogers / Revision / IEA-Inspire, Encourage, Achieve	Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Mental Health & Substance Abuse	Sheri Aldrich / Spindletop Center	Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Mental Health & Substance Abuse	Danielle Pardue / Spindletop Center	Participated in Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Victim Services	Hannah Padia / Embracing Freedom	Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Victim Services	Tracie Middleton / Crisis Center of Southeast Texas	Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Victim Services	Lexi Molina / Embracing Freedom	Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Victim Services	Ruby Leday / Crisis Center of Southeast Texas	Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Community Non-Profit / Victim Services	Bonnie Spotts / Crisis Center of Southeast Texas	Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Victim Services / CJAC Secretary	Misty Craver / Jefferson County Victim Assistance Center	Participated in Victim Services Stakeholder Meeting – June 2025
Juvenile Justice	LaRonda Turner / Jefferson County Juvenile Probation	Provided statistical information
Juvenile Justice	Jarrod Fountain / Hardin County Juvenile Probation	Provided statistical information
Juvenile Justice	Edeska Barnes / Jasper County Juvenile Probation	Provided statistical information
Community Service	Sara Garcias-Torres / South East Texas Regional Planning Commission	Provided statistical information



Law Enforcement Stakeholder's Meeting
June 17, 2025

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Stakeholder's Meeting
June 17, 2025





Juvenile Justice Stakeholder's Meeting
June 17, 2025

Victim Services Stakeholder's Meeting
June 17, 2025



4. Gaps in Criminal Justice Resources and Regional Priorities

This section outlines the most significant gaps in criminal justice resources within the South East Texas region and identifies the corresponding priorities and strategies to address them. By linking each gap to a proposed priority action, the region ensures that planning efforts are both evidence-based and solution-oriented.

Criminal Justice:

Law Enforcement planning meetings included participants from law enforcement representatives from the counties and local agencies. A Regional Stakeholder’s Planning meeting was held for Law Enforcement/Adult Criminal Justice participants to identify the most critical gaps in the region and gather supporting information for the Criminal Justice Strategic Plan. The list of regional priorities are outlined below:

Law Enforcement

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Information Sharing	Timely, expedient access to and sharing of data between public safety agencies in the region and state	<p>Different platforms and record management systems</p> <p>Not all jurisdictions have information-sharing platforms</p> <p>Lack of willingness to share information</p> <p>No statewide system for law enforcement data sharing</p> <p>Budget restraints and difficulty obtaining buy-in</p>	Establish a regional, standardized information sharing system with statewide integration and agency participation	<p>Implement regional information-sharing platform that can integrate with state systems</p> <p>Seek out funding opportunities for jurisdictions to adopt the platform</p> <p>Conduct regional workshops to build interagency trust and promote data-sharing benefits</p> <p>Advocate for statewide legislation or funding for a centralized law</p>

				enforcement data system
Accessibility to emerging equipment and technology	Access to funding, equipment, and technology upgrades for law enforcement officers in the field	High cost of equipment Frequent end-of-life and upgrade requirements Rapidly evolving tech and security needs Limited grant opportunities	Ensure sustainable funding mechanisms for technology acquisition and upgrades	Maintain the Southeast Texas Regional Radio System (SETRRS) that utilizes cost-sharing for costly technology and equipment Advocate for dedicated state/federal grant programs targeting small jurisdictions Implement lifecycle planning for technology replacement
Radio Interoperability	Provide public safety radio coverage for 100% of the region, including maintenance and equipment replacement	Obsolete equipment is costly Vendor-driven obsolescence Shortened equipment lifespans Costly infrastructure needs and maintenance	Achieve full regional radio interoperability with sustainable infrastructure funding	Maintain and update a long-term regional radio infrastructure plan (RICP) Seek federal and state grant programs for large-scale interoperability projects Maintain shared maintenance agreements among jurisdictions
Mental Health	Ensure safe and efficient	TCOLE-mandated	Expand regional mental	Seek funding for designated

	<p>mental health commitment warrant services; mental health intake processes; and mental health training for officers and consumers</p>	<p>training requirements</p> <p>Need for additional specialized training</p> <p>Lack of designated mental health officers</p> <p>Insufficient multi-disciplinary collaboration</p> <p>Limited transport resources after EDO issuance</p>	<p>health response capacity and training for law enforcement and partners</p>	<p>regional mental health officer positions</p> <p>Expand regional training programs for law enforcement and mental health professionals</p> <p>Develop mobile crisis intervention teams for adults and juveniles</p> <p>Establish agreements with transportation providers to improve EDO response</p>
<p>Forensic Analysis</p>	<p>Forensic analysis capability for computer and cell phone evidence. Availability to aid investigations and prosecution</p>	<p>Insufficient agencies providing forensic support</p> <p>Inconsistent practices</p> <p>High turnover among specialists</p> <p>Costly and evolving technology</p> <p>Growing case demands</p>	<p>Build a regional forensic analysis task force with standardized practices and sustainable resources</p>	<p>Create a centralized forensic analysis unit to serve multiple jurisdictions</p> <p>Seek funding for equipment, staffing, and training</p> <p>Implement standardize forensic protocols across agencies</p> <p>Provide retention incentives for</p>

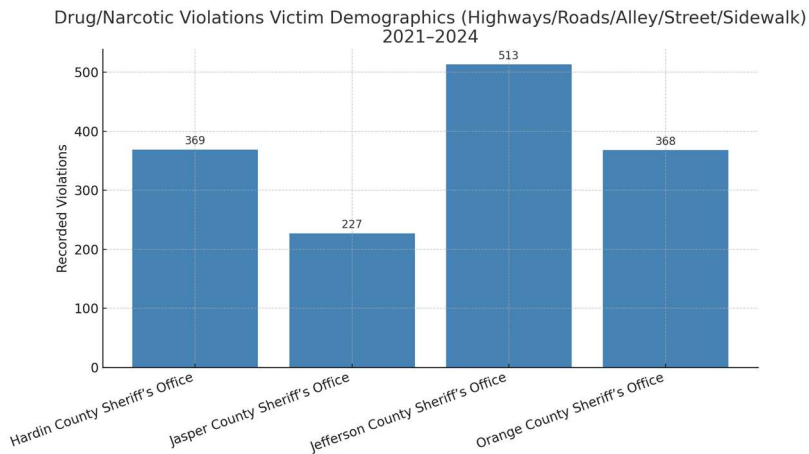
		Need for regional task force		forensic specialists Partner with state and federal forensic labs to expand capacity
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Information Sharing - Access to funding, equipment, and technology upgrades for law enforcement officers in the field:

It is imperative to have timely access to data from various law enforcement agencies in the region with criticality that exists in Southeast Texas. The region is home to several major cross-country highways including:

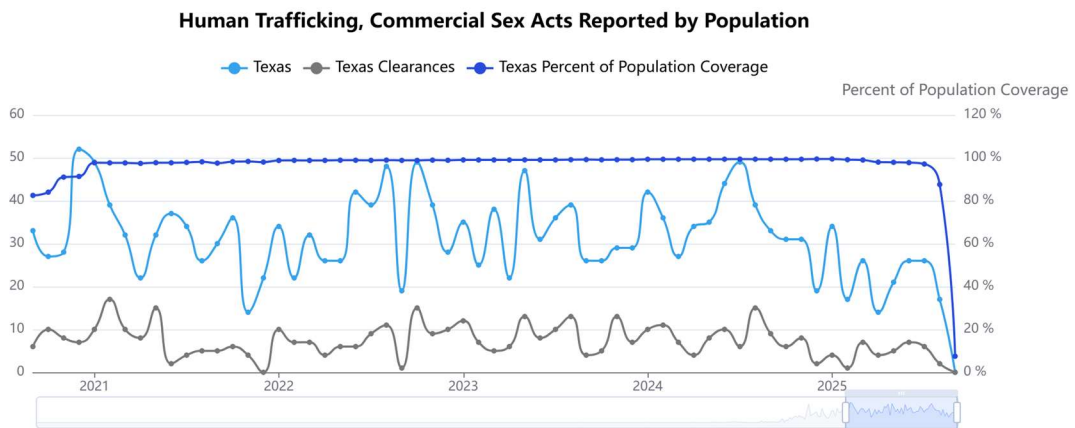
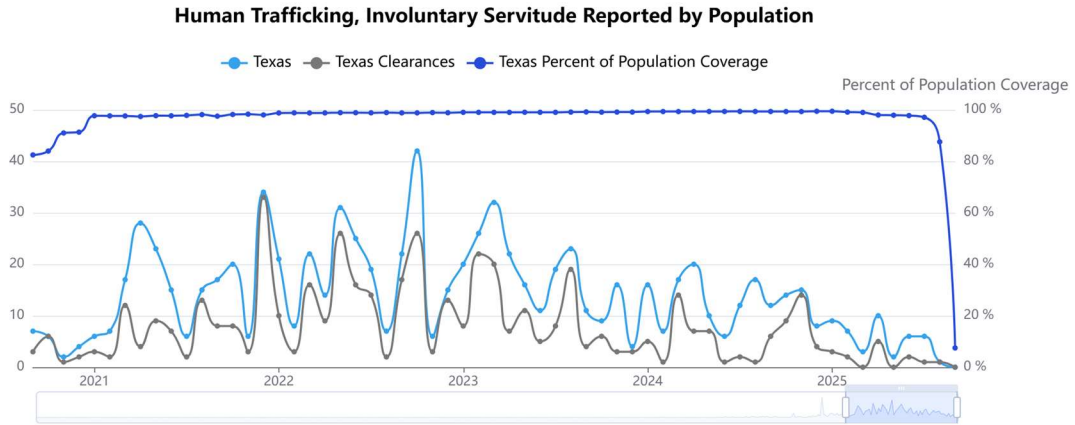
- Interstate 10 (east/west) which runs 24 miles through Orange County and 36 miles through Jefferson County
- Highway 69 (north/south)
- Highway 96 (north/south) ties into Highway 59 and therefore considered a major thoroughfare as well

Over the last five years, 2021-2024, the county sheriff’s offices have recorded the following “Drug/Narcotic Violations Victim Demographics – Highways/Road/Alley/Street/Sidewalk:”



“Human Trafficking, Involuntary Servitude” and “Human Trafficking, Commercial Sex Acts” were not available for Hardin, Jefferson, Jasper, and Orange counties. The statistics for these crimes for the State of Texas are graphed below. The miles of major

thoroughfares within Southeast Texas increases the need for public information sharing among law enforcement agencies to combat these crimes.



Law enforcement agencies throughout the region safeguard these highways and those who travel on it. The ability to share information between law enforcement agencies within the region is fundamental to public safety.

The City of Beaumont’s Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC) is improving public safety by enhancing real-time information sharing, situational awareness, and coordination among law enforcement agencies. Initially implemented in Beaumont and Jefferson County, the program is expanding to serve additional counties across Southeast Texas, supporting a more unified regional approach to crime prevention and response.

However, expansion is limited by funding constraints. Many agencies, particularly in smaller or rural areas, lack the resources to purchase the equipment and technology needed to participate fully in the system. These limitations create gaps in coverage and reduce the overall effectiveness of the RTCC.

Strategic investment in equipment and infrastructure is needed to support regional expansion. Increasing access to the RTCC will strengthen interagency collaboration, improve response capabilities, and enhance public safety across Southeast Texas

Accessibility to emerging equipment and technology - Access to funding, equipment, and technology upgrades for law enforcement officers in the field:

Access to funding and equipment for emerging law enforcement technologies including but not limited to fingerprint readers, license plate readers, radios – in car and mobiles, laptops, body-worn cameras, and in-car videos.

Technology serves as a critical force multiplier for law enforcement agencies, enabling them to operate more efficiently, protect the public more effectively, and achieve cost savings. In a region as vital to the state and nation as Southeast Texas, maintaining access to advanced technologies is essential for both crime prevention and the rapid apprehension of offenders. Sustained investment in technology is key to ensuring the highest possible level of public safety.

However, budget constraints across local jurisdictions, particularly smaller agencies, limit the ability to acquire or replace even standard, day-to-day operational equipment. This financial reality creates significant challenges in maintaining modern capabilities. Essential tools such as fingerprint readers, license plate readers, radios, laptops, body-worn cameras, and in-car video systems are no longer optional; they are critical assets required to deliver effective and responsive public safety services.

Radio Interoperability - Provide public safety radio coverage for 100% of the region, including maintenance and equipment replacement:

Operable and interoperable communications remain a cornerstone of first responder's ability to protect the public and themselves. In a region as large, densely populated, and home of the some of the nations and world's most critical infrastructure, as Southeast Texas, communication among public safety agencies is essential.

The events that have occurred in Southeast Texas including tropical storms/hurricanes, other severe weather events, industrial incidents, and acts of terrorism, highlight the priority of communications not only among first responders but also with industrial partners and the private sector.

To ensure rapid, coordinated responses and safeguard both responders and the public, all first responders must be equipped with fully operational, P-25 compliant radios, as well as, integrated into the Southeast Texas Regional Radio System (SETRRS). The SETRRS successfully transitioned to P-25 compliance in 2021, however, this exceptional milestone and accomplishment requires very costly upgrades and ongoing maintenance. The financial costs associated with maintaining the SETRRS, aging, end-of-life, and

rising costs of new equipment create a burden on agencies, particularly small agencies with limited budgets.

Mental Health - Ensure safe and efficient mental health commitment warrant services; mental health intake processes; and mental health training for officers and consumers:

The Southeast Texas region continues to face a shortage of specialized law enforcement personnel trained to respond to mental health-related calls and execute warrant services. Currently, patrol officers are routinely pulled from their regular duties—often for hours at a time—to serve warrants and manage mental health incidents. While these calls represent a small percentage of total law enforcement activity, they demand a disproportionate amount of time and resources due to their complexity and potential volatility. These situations also present significant safety risks for the responding officers, the individuals in crisis, and bystanders.

The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) mandates mental health training for officer basic, intermediate, and advance certificates. However, additional training for officers is necessary. There is a great need for designated multi-disciplinary mental health teams with specialty trained law enforcement officers and mental health specialists qualified for responding to both adults and juveniles.

Given that mental health calls are unpredictable and often volatile, having an adequate number of Mental Health Liaison Officers and ensuring that all law enforcement officers receive crisis response training is essential. These measures help de-escalate tense situations, enhance officer and community safety, and connect individuals in crisis with the mental health services they need—ultimately promoting safer, more effective outcomes across the region.

Filling out Emergency Detention Orders (EDOs) is another challenge. Having certified Mental Health Peace Officers in each agency would allow these orders to be processed more efficiently, ensuring individuals in crisis receive appropriate intervention more quickly.

The Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office Mental Health Response Team, funded by Spindletop MHMR, has demonstrated measurable success in diverting hundreds of individuals from arrest to treatment, significantly reducing strain on the criminal justice system. This program represents a regional best practice and a model for expansion throughout Southeast Texas. Establishing similar specialized teams in each county would strengthen crisis intervention capacity, improve public safety outcomes, and ensure more individuals with behavioral health needs receive timely care.

Forensic Analysis - Forensic analysis capability for computer and cell phone evidence. Availability to aid investigations and prosecution:

The ability to conduct forensic analysis of computer and cellular device evidence is increasingly critical to modern criminal investigations and successful prosecution. Digital evidence is now a central component in a wide range of cases, including violent crime, narcotics, financial crimes, and offenses involving exploitation. Access to timely and reliable forensic analysis allows investigators to extract, preserve, and analyze data such as communications, location history, and digital activity, which can provide key evidence for building cases and securing convictions.

Across Southeast Texas, forensic analysis capacity for digital evidence is limited. Many agencies lack the specialized equipment, software, and trained personnel required to perform these analyses in-house. As a result, agencies often rely on external resources, which can lead to delays in evidence processing and case progression. These delays can impact investigations, extend case timelines, and create challenges for prosecutors who depend on timely evidence to move cases forward.

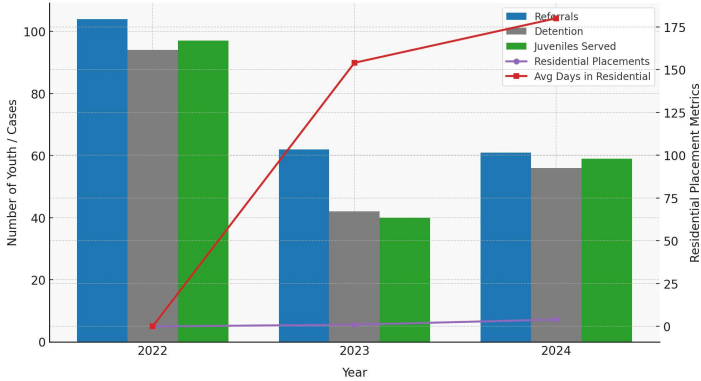
Expanding regional forensic analysis capabilities would improve both investigative efficiency and prosecutorial outcomes. Investment in digital forensic tools, training, and shared regional resources would allow agencies to process evidence more quickly, reduce backlogs, and enhance collaboration across jurisdictions. Strengthening this capacity will be essential to keeping pace with the growing role of digital evidence in the criminal justice system and ensuring that law enforcement and prosecutors have the tools needed to effectively pursue justice

Juvenile Justice

Each county, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange counties have juvenile probation departments. Jefferson and Hardin Counties have juvenile detention centers, however, Jasper and Orange county work with Jefferson and Hardin when detention services are needed. The juvenile probation departments provided the following statistical information regarding the number of juveniles involved in the criminal justice system.

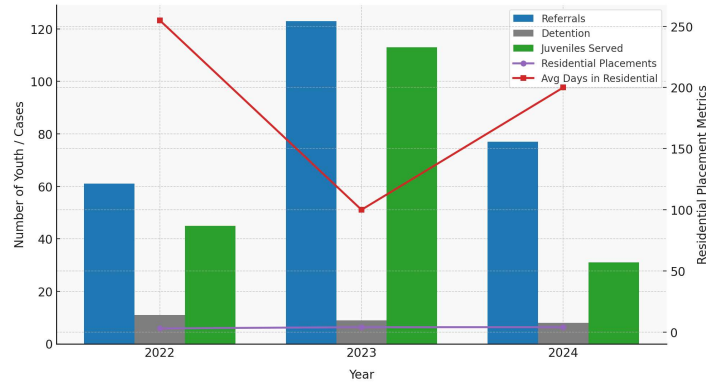
Within the four juvenile probation departments within South East Texas (Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, and Orange), for 2024, 421 juveniles were served; 482 juveniles referred; 360 placed in detention centers; and 28 placed in residential treatment facilities to address substance abuse and/or mental health needs.

Hardin County Juvenile Justice Trends (2022-2024)



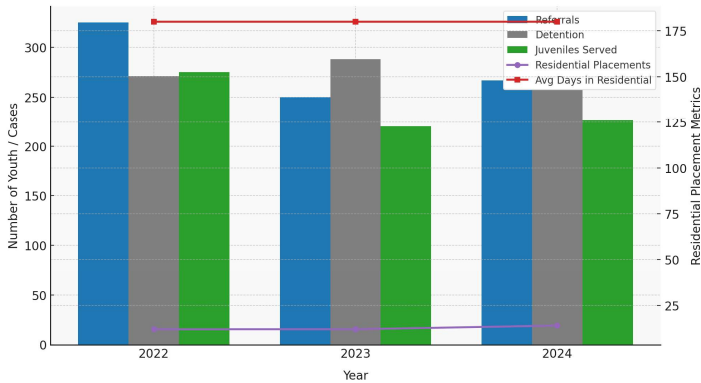
Source: Hardin County Juvenile Probation Department, 2022-2024

Jasper County Juvenile Justice Trends (2022-2024)



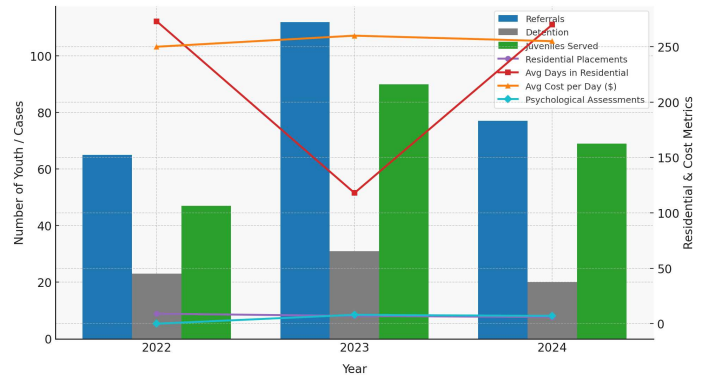
Source: Jasper County Juvenile Probation Department, 2022-2024

Jefferson County Juvenile Justice Trends (2022-2024)



Source: Jefferson County Juvenile Probation Department, 2022-2024

Orange County Juvenile Justice Trends (2022-2024)



Source: Orange County Juvenile Probation Department, 2022-2024

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Mental Health / Substance Abuse	Secure residential facilities for substance abuse and/or mental health for youth	Growing need and lack of resources for residential facilities for substance abuse and/or mental health for youth	Affordable, specialized counseling for juveniles Alcohol/substance use disorder prevention programs; Aftercare and continuation treatment	More facilities or the expansion of existing facilities that treat mentally ill and substance use disorder patients
Professional counseling, psychotherapy, and specialized mental health care	Affordable specialized counseling for juveniles and families including ongoing after care professional counseling, services, and resources for individuals, families, and group psychotherapy	Increased need for specialized mental health care Lack of affordable counseling and mental health services	Need for residential placement facilities for youth that specialize in mental health, substance use disorder, human trafficking, and behavioral health issues	Increase residential placement facilities within the state (there is not a residential placement facilities within the region), particularly for female victims of trafficking or is at “high risk” of being trafficked
Advocacy programs and family resources	Resources for youth with conduct/behavioral problems and their families including trained mentors, advocacy programs, and other resources that encompass individual and family	Lack of resources/services for youth with conduct/behavior issues (anger management classes, counseling) Lack of resources for families	Life skill classes; trainings Resources for youth and families with behavioral health issues Resources needed for aftercare and	Establish educational programs and community awareness trainings, as well as, specialized trainings for professionals handling youth Establish aftercare

		Lack of resources/services that encompass wholistic approaches for juveniles and families	continuation treatment	programs for both juveniles and families coming out of juvenile detention or residential placement facilities
Mental Health/ Substance Abuse Prevention Programs	Alcohol/Substance Abuse and/or mental health prevention programs; Life skill classes and job training skill classes		Alcohol/substance use disorder prevention programs; Affordable, specialized counseling for juveniles Life skill classes; trainings Resources for youth and families with behavioral health issues Resources needed for aftercare and continuation treatment	Integrate more evidence-based substance/alcohol abuse programs into the schools, detention centers and substance use and alcohol facilities. Educate and create awareness for resources within the region
Transportation	Transportation of youth for treatment (medical, psychological, substance abuse) and classes (life skills, diversion)	Lack of transportation services, particularly in rural areas for youth to receive treatments and services	Transportation of youth for treatment (medical, psychological, substance use disorder) and classes (life skills, diversion)	

Secure residential facilities for substance abuse and/or mental health for youth:

The Southeast Texas region currently lacks a residential treatment facility dedicated to addressing mental health issues among juveniles. Many youth who enter detention for behavioral problems, poor conduct, or substance use disorders also struggle with undiagnosed or untreated mental health conditions. Juvenile detention centers are not equipped to provide the specialized care these youth require. Establishing a secure, regional residential mental health treatment facility would address this gap by ensuring that juveniles receive appropriate clinical intervention rather than punitive measures.

A regional facility would shift treatment responsibilities from detention centers to the mental health system, where specialized professionals can effectively manage care. It would also provide comprehensive family counseling and after-care services to support long-term rehabilitation and community reintegration. Per the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in 2020, suicide was the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10-14. This statistic increased another 20% in 2021.

The lack of local treatment options creates significant financial strain on the Jasper, Jefferson, Hardin, and Orange County Juvenile Probation Departments. The average cost of placement in an out-of-region residential facility ranges from \$250 to \$300 per day, per youth, with an average stay of approximately 180 days.

Compounding this issue, the few mental health treatment facilities that do exist in the region face ongoing operational and financial challenges. Factors such as changing insurance policies, increased regulation, and rising workloads have strained resources, resulting in facilities operating at or near capacity. Strict intake requirements, while necessary for safety, often limit access for juveniles experiencing acute mental health crises. There is an urgent need for a secure, youth-focused mental health facility in Southeast Texas capable of treating adolescents in crisis without restrictive admission barriers.

Resources for juvenile substance use disorder (SUD) treatment in Southeast Texas are extremely limited. The region lacks facilities that offer comprehensive treatment options combining inpatient and outpatient care, family counseling, and education. Existing residential treatment programs often rely on voluntary participation and may dismiss youth for behavioral noncompliance, leaving few alternatives for juveniles under court supervision who require structured intervention.

Not only is there an extreme shortage of availability for juveniles needing residential placement treatment, the cost is sometimes too high for local juvenile probation departments. Local juvenile probation departments have stated due to budget restraints, juveniles who would greatly benefit from residential treatment are only provided local resources until the next budget year when funds will be available for treatment. This

delays the juvenile from getting the treatment they need but also keeps the child in the same environment and home situation that is not always conducive to rehabilitation and positive change. Juveniles usually get more benefit out of placement facilities where they learn coping mechanisms and life skills in a positive, structured environment.

Another financial burden that local juvenile probation departments bear is that once a juvenile is in a placement facility, medication is no longer covered by Medicaid and it becomes the responsibility of the local juvenile probation department.

Additionally, specialized residential placement centers are not only needed for juveniles who suffer from mental health and substance/alcohol abuse but unfortunately, there is a growing need for a placement center that specializes in human trafficking and sex trafficking rehabilitation as well. It was stated during the Strategic Plan working group meetings that the most profound gap in housing is for juvenile human trafficking victims who suffer from substance use disorders.

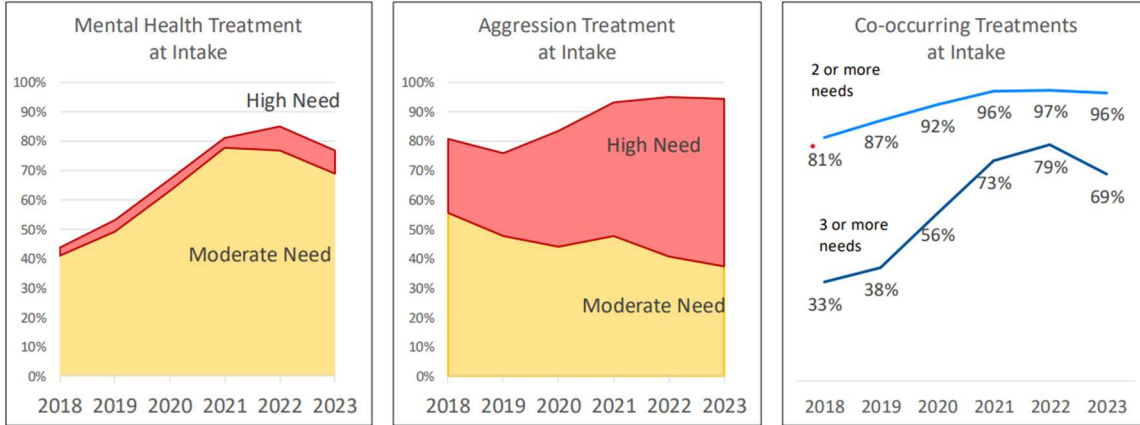
Affordable specialized counseling for juveniles and families including ongoing after-care professional counseling, services, and resources for individuals, families, and group psychotherapy:

Access to mental health services in Southeast Texas remains a significant challenge. Across the region and the state, there is an ongoing shortage of qualified mental health providers, including psychiatrists, licensed professional counselors, therapists, and treatment facilities. The existing network of counseling and treatment services is insufficient to meet the growing demand, particularly for juveniles. The gap is even more pronounced in specialized areas such as sex offender therapy, where few professionals possess the necessary training and expertise to provide appropriate care.

The Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Plan, April 2025 discussed the needs for adolescent mental health services, specifically a need for more psychiatric rehab services. It was also noted that there is an increase in drug use among the youth population.

This shortage directly impacts both intervention and prevention efforts. Many youth could potentially avoid involvement in the juvenile justice system if early intervention and diversion services—such as counseling, school-based support, and after-school mental health programs—were more widely available. Increasing access to licensed professional counselors (LPCs) and school-based counseling services would help address behavioral health needs proactively, reducing long-term system involvement and improving overall youth outcomes.

This is not isolated at the local level, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department reported from 2018-2023 that there was an increase in higher-risk youth with higher needs. Aggression and mental health treatment needs as a percentage of population are at an all-time high (Texas Juvenile Justice Department).



Resources for youth with conduct/behavioral problems and their families including trained mentors, advocacy programs, and other resources that encompass individual and family:

The region does not have facilities equipped to handle juveniles with severe conduct and behavioral issues. The lack of resources expands outside the region to the state and the nation. In some situations, locally, a juvenile cannot be properly taken care of in the local detention centers because their behavior puts themselves, staff, and others in danger. The need for such facilities is drastically increasing. Juvenile suffering from conduct and behavior issues must be taken to a secure, residential facility that is suitable to best meet the needs of the juvenile.

Once a juvenile is in a facility that is able to treat his/her specific needs and complete the program, the juvenile comes back to the same environment that led them to the residential facility. Aftercare is essential to maintaining the focus of these youth, not only for the juvenile themselves, but also with the family. Family involvement and education is extremely important in the success of the child.

	Hardin County		Jasper County		Jefferson County		Orange County	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
# of Referrals	62	61	123	77	250	267	112	77
# of youth served	40	59	113	31	220	226	90	69

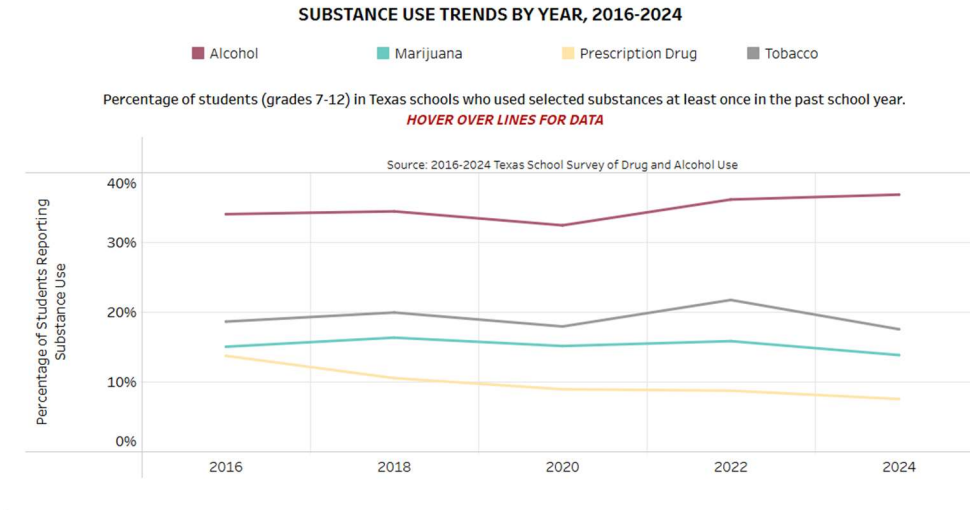
# of youth in detention centers	42	56	9	8	288	276	31	20
# of youth placed in residential facilities	1	4	4	4	12	14	7	6

In our region, local resources for youth experiencing significant conduct and behavioral challenges remain limited. For instance, in both Jefferson County and Hardin County, a Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) is available for students who are repeatedly disruptive in school or face expellable offenses. While Jefferson County operates a mandatory JJAEP as required by state law, Hardin County functions as a discretionary JJAEP. In contrast, Orange County and Jasper County do **not** have a county-operated JJAEP.

Declining state and local funding over recent years has placed increasing strain on the efficient operations of these programs. For these alternative education settings to remain viable and capable of meeting both educational and disciplinary needs, sustained investment and local commitment are essential. To that end, maintaining operational JJAEPs is critically important — they serve as a vital structured alternative when students cannot safely continue in their home campus, helping ensure continuity of education, supervision, and behavioral intervention.

Alcohol/Substance Abuse and/or mental health prevention programs; Life skill classes and job training skill classes:

The region is in need of targeted programs and activities that focus on substance and alcohol abuse education and prevention for juveniles in the system and at-risk teens. The Texas Health and Human Services conducted the Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use survey and collected data among students grades 7-12. The results of students surveyed are graphed below:



In the South East Texas Region, the four-county juvenile probation departments have observed a growing trend of youth abusing alcohol and/or substances.

Over the past years, evidence-based programs have been replacing traditional substance use disorder and alcohol awareness programs in schools, detention centers, at-risk teen programs and in inpatient/outpatient treatment facilities. These programs focus more on high-risk youth rather than youth as a whole. This prevents exposure to low-risk youth while allowing for a more targeted educational program for those who really need it. Though some education is appropriate for all youth, it is important that the focus be on those who are likely to or have already abused drugs and/or alcohol.

Transportation of youth for treatment (medical, psychological, substance abuse) and classes (life skills, diversion):

Transportation remains a significant barrier to accessing behavioral health and supportive services for youth across Southeast Texas, particularly in rural areas such as Hardin, Jasper, and Orange Counties. Many juveniles who require medical care, psychological counseling, substance use treatment, or participation in life skills and diversion programs are unable to consistently access these services due to limited transportation options. Public transportation in the region is minimal or nonexistent in many rural communities, leaving families to rely on personal vehicles. For households without reliable transportation—or those unable to afford associated costs such as fuel, maintenance, and repairs—this creates a substantial barrier to care.

The impact of this gap is far-reaching. Youth who are unable to attend scheduled treatment appointments or program sessions may experience worsening mental health or substance use conditions, increased risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system, and reduced opportunities for early intervention and rehabilitation. Missed appointments and inconsistent participation can also diminish the effectiveness of diversion programs

designed to prevent deeper system involvement. Additionally, families already facing economic challenges may experience increased stress and limited ability to support their child's recovery and development.

Addressing transportation barriers is essential to improving access and outcomes for youth in the region. Expanding transportation solutions—such as coordinated ride programs, partnerships with local transit providers, mileage assistance, or mobile and school-based services—can help ensure that youth are able to consistently access the care and programming they need. Increasing the availability of telehealth services where appropriate may also reduce the burden of travel for certain types of treatment. By improving transportation access, the region can strengthen participation in treatment and diversion programs, support better long-term outcomes for youth, and reduce strain on the juvenile justice system.

Victim Services

Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Expansion of services/resource for existing organizations	Enhance/expand existing victim services agencies that demonstrate a proven record of quality services	The region has long-standing, highly regarded agencies with a proven track record of providing quality services to victims of: child abuse; sexual assault, domestic violence, crimes against women, human trafficking (adults and children), victim assistance centers servicing victims of all crimes – however these services need to expansion	Sustainment of services already being provided while continuously expanding capabilities and enhancing services for a comprehensive recovery program	Cash match/In-kind waiver consideration for agencies with proven records of success so that fundraiser resources can be used for expansion and growth projects
Housing	Ensure shelters/appropriate alternate housing available for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking victims including for victim with substance abuse disorders; there is	Limited housing forces victims to remain in or return to unsafe situations, increasing risk of continued abuse or exploitation. Victims with substance use	Expand safe, inclusive shelter and transitional housing, including options for individuals with substance use disorders, and integrate supportive	Housing priority vouchers for victims of crime including domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking

	a high need for transitional housing	disorders face additional barriers, and the lack of options places added strain on emergency systems	services to promote stability and recovery.	Cash match/In-kind waiver consideration for agencies with proven records of success so that fundraiser resources can be used for expansion and growth projects
Regional Interagency Coordination	Enhance Regional Interagency Coordination related to victim services included multi-disciplinary teams	Without coordination amongst victim service agencies, victims encounter reduced effectiveness of support and aid. Without strong multidisciplinary collaboration, victims may face fragmented services, inconsistent communication, and delays in access critical resources.	Build a comprehensive prevention and education initiative that expands coordinated outreach, increases public awareness, and ensures equitable access to services. A unified educational approach and improved interagency collaboration	Establish and formalize multidisciplinary teams, implement regular interagency meetings, develop shared protocols for communication and referrals, and enhance data-sharing practices to ensure coordinated, victim-centered service delivery
Navigation aid to victims through the Criminal Justice system	Provide resources and education on how to access resources to crime victims and specialized training to crime victim providers that will render	Lack of awareness and limited provider training make it difficult for victims to access services and navigate	Expand outreach and education for victims and provide specialized training for service providers to	Funding to provide court education for professionals who can navigate adult and child victims through the

	more effective navigation of the criminal justice system	the criminal justice system, leading to delays in care, unmet needs, and increased risk of re-traumatization	improve access, coordination, and effective navigation of the criminal justice system	criminal justice program
Short- and long-term restorative needs	Deliver emergency and long-term services to meet the immediate and restorative needs of victims	Limited access to timely emergency and long-term services leaves victims without critical support, increasing risk of ongoing harm and delaying recovery.	Expand availability of comprehensive emergency and long-term services to address both immediate safety and long-term recovery needs	Increase funding and coordination for victim service providers to expand crisis response, case management, counseling, and long-term support programs.

Enhance/expand existing victim services agencies that demonstrate a proven record of quality services:

Sustainment of current services to victims of crime:

The region has long-standing highly regarded agencies with a proven track record of providing quality services to victims of:

- Child abuse
- Sexual Assault
- Domestic Violence
- Crimes Against Women Prosecution
- Human Trafficking (children and adults)
- Victim Assistance Centers serving victims of all crime

Agencies within the region currently funded through the Public Safety Office, Criminal Justice Division have identified the need to sustain the level of services in the region. Without sustainment of the current services, any gains realized in the region regarding victims' services will be lost. Those agencies that have demonstrated their ability to provide these high-quality services are a priority for continued funding and expansion where-ever possible.

Sustainment of services is a growing concern in Southeast Texas.

A sustainment challenge in the region pertains to Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funding. Two counties in the region have excellent track records for very critical services in prosecution of crimes against women special prosecutors through VAWA funding. Both programs are needed and could expand to provide more services were more VAWA funding available. New programs meeting a unique need have also been identified as worthy and of benefit; however, with the VAWA funding already stretched beyond the regional allocation, expanding VAWA programs is increasingly difficult.

The need for sustainment and expansion of services provided through the VAWA funds is justified and quantifiable. Funding is all that is lacking. Southeast Texas is concerned that these funding limitations will continue to threaten the agencies' ability to provide the unduplicated services to violent crimes against women. The prosecutors dedicated to domestic violence crimes which increases prosecution and victim awareness of available options remains a need and the region is very concerned that due to more VAWA requests and VAWA reduced funding, gains made in the region in this area could be lost.

Human trafficking of both adults and children is rapidly growing problem. Local victims need resources and services to not only get out of human trafficking but also recover from the trauma they have endured.

Few crimes have a more complicated dynamic than family/domestic violence. While men are the victims in some domestic violence cases, 85% of victims are female. A prosecutor dedicated solely to domestic violence crimes would, naturally, increase the number of cases that could/would be prosecuted because of the singular focus and mission. However, because this specialized prosecutor would have presumably received more training in and an increased understanding of domestic violence cases, he or she could also work more closely to enlist and maintain the cooperation of the victim. Currently, in many situations, victims feel as though they have one of two options: prosecute the crime or drop the charges. In fact, there are many other options available to domestic violence victims but due to the large caseloads in the courts, there is no one to explain this to them. Victims do not realize that there are other options whereby the batterer can be held accountable and can be influenced to acknowledge and change the abusive behavior. With a dedicated prosecutor, when a victim request that charges be dropped, the prosecutor could work to create an action plan for or educate the victim regarding the options open to them that would still hold the batterer accountable.

Jefferson County Victim Assistance Center:

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Victims Served</u>
2020	950
2021	860
2022	665
2023	801
2024	756

Hardin County Victim Assistance Center			
<u>Domestic/ Family Violence</u>		<u>Non-Family Violence Assault</u>	
2019	338	2019	287
2020	304	2020	183
2021	297	2021	109
2022	450	2022	114
2023	613*	2023	57
2024	522*	2024	57
2025	358	2025	41
Child Abuse		Stalking	
2019	19	2019	13
2020	6	2020	18
2021	24	2021	26
2022	25	2022	32
2023	55	2023	42
2024	89	2024	40
2025	54	2025	33

Crisis Center of Southeast Texas

	Hardin County		Jefferson County		Orange County		Jasper County		Other	
	Victims	Services	Victims	Services	Victims	Services	Victims	Services	Victims	Services
2024	11	19	79	226	26	42	10	20	72	157
2025	9	16	89	247	26	72	7	11	66	195

Ensure shelters/appropriate, alternate housing available for domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking victims including for victim with substance abuse disorders; there is a high need for transitional housing;

Adequate emergency shelter, transitional housing, and long-term housing options remain a critical regional need. Since the previous Criminal Justice Strategic Plan update, the region has identified an increasing demand for alternate housing options specifically designed for victims with co-occurring substance use disorders. Victim advocates participating in the Strategic Plan Working Group report that a disproportionate number of victims experience substance use challenges, underscoring the need for specialized services and housing arrangements.

Family Services of Southeast Texas currently provides emergency shelter services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking when domestic

violence is the primary victimization. According to Family Services leadership, the Shelter routinely evaluates whether sexual assault and human trafficking victims have experienced domestic violence at any point; most have, allowing the Shelter to provide services even in cases involving substance use disorder.

Family Services Statistical Report

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Statistical Data from the Family Services Shelters and Non-residential program by Year: *January-December*

DV and SA victims served	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Hardin	52	48	68	57	79
Jefferson	541	626	1161	1050	1028
Orange	83	96	115	79	88
Jasper	29	38	56	74	69
	705	808	1400	1260	1264

Other services provided by the Family Services Shelters and Non-residential program:

Please note victims receive more than one of the services below.

Type of Service	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Information and Referral	102	98	941	2351	3521
Individual Counseling (Restorative)	1788	696	1089	1589	1034
Crisis Counseling (immediate)	435	339	241	415	631
Individual Advocacy	6614	9627	24889	30087	39127
Transportation	563	440	851	625	702
Legal Assistance	207	87	596	549	531

The regional capacity remains inadequate to meet current and projected needs. Family Services of Southeast Texas operates a 65-bed facility in which residents can stay for 30 to 90 days. Exacerbating the limited short-term transitional housing and long-term permanent housing options for victims is that local advocates estimate that approximately 75% of victims, or family members of victims, experience substance use disorder. Although some reports suggested that shelters do not accept victims facing substance use issues, Family Services leadership clarified that the Women’s and Children’s Shelter does accept these individuals, including unaccompanied youth ages 16+ for up to 15 days.

Limited resources for the growing number of juvenile victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation is a rapidly growing concern for Southeast Texas. Human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEY) continue to increase at both national and state levels, placing significant strain on local victim service systems. National estimates indicate that more than two million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade, with numbers continuing to rise. Texas is disproportionately impacted, with an estimated 25–30 percent of sex trafficking reports occurring within the state and approximately 79,000 children trafficked annually. The presence of the I-10 Corridor, designated by the U.S. Department of Justice as a primary human trafficking route, further elevates regional vulnerability and demand for specialized juvenile services.

Despite the scope of the problem, resources for juvenile victims of human trafficking and child sex trafficking in the South East Texas Region remain extremely limited. The region benefits from the presence of key nonprofit partners, including Harvest House and the Garth House, both of which provide critical advocacy, assessment, prevention, and recovery services. However, limited funding, capacity constraints, and lack of awareness among victims and families restrict the number of youth who can be served and the intensity of services provided. As a result, many juvenile victims and at-risk youth do not receive timely or comprehensive support.

Embracing Freedom plays a central role in regional response efforts, focusing on prevention through education, survivor advocacy, and long-term mentoring support for CSEY survivors up to age 22. The organization also serves as a referral option for juvenile probation departments when youth are identified as high risk for trafficking. While this partnership has helped bridge service gaps, demand continues to exceed available resources.

EMBRACING FREEDOM STATISTICS 2020-2024		
Year	Total Number of Survivors Served	Total Number of Youth Referrals Received
2020	43	
2021	53	
2022	69	46
2023	80	56
2024	87	48

The Brandice Drop-In Center is a trauma-informed, survivor-centered safe space operated by Embracing Freedom to serve commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEY) and youth at high risk of trafficking in Southeast Texas. The center provides immediate access to basic needs, supportive services, and trusted adult relationships designed to meet youth where they are. The Brandice Drop-In Center fulfills a critical need in

Southeast Texas by providing short-term, trauma-informed stabilization services for youth impacted by or vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation when no immediate safe placement is available. As part of Embracing Freedom’s continuum of care, the center strengthens the region’s coordinated response to trafficking by ensuring youth safety during critical transitions, supporting youth during periods of crisis, and maintaining consistent, long-term engagement that promotes stability, recovery, and long-term well-being.

Enhance Regional Interagency Coordination related to victim services included multi-disciplinary teams:

The Victim Services Stakeholders continue to identify enhanced regional interagency coordination as a critical need. Although collaboration among agencies has improved in recent years, participants consistently emphasize that greater coordination, resource sharing, and joint outreach efforts are necessary to maximize impact. Time and resource limitations currently restrict the scope of collaborative initiatives, indicating the need for a more intentional and structured regional approach.

Regional stakeholders also highlighted the importance of community education as a key strategy in preventing victimization. While crime victims currently receive state-issued informational pamphlets, stakeholders agreed that the region would significantly benefit from a locally developed, culturally responsive resource guide. Such a guide would focus on educating the public—including school-aged children—on prevention strategies, the recognition of victimization, and the availability of local support services. Although individual agencies engage in limited outreach, the region lacks a unified and comprehensive educational effort. Participants stressed the need for an integrated response model that includes consistent outreach and a clear directory of available services for individuals who have experienced victimization.

Existing service delivery structures also vary across the region. Jefferson and Hardin Counties currently operate Victims Assistance Centers, while Orange County relies on a single crime victim liaison and has no formal center. The absence of a centralized access point in Orange County represents a gap in equitable service availability and limits public awareness.

Human trafficking response data further underscores the importance of outreach and education. The majority of victims in the region are identified through referrals by law enforcement or service providers (95%), followed by word of mouth (54%) and community outreach efforts (51%). This demonstrates the essential role of community education and awareness in identifying victims and connecting them to services.

The region seeks to build a comprehensive prevention and education initiative that expands coordinated outreach, increases public awareness, and ensures equitable access

to services. A unified educational approach and improved interagency collaboration have the potential to prevent victimization before it occurs and provide timely support when it does.

Provide resources and education on how to access resources to crime victims and specialized training to crime victim providers that will render more effective navigation of the criminal justice system:

Victims' advocates report that communication amongst all crime victims regarding available resources remains a challenge. The criminal justice system is a complex one and a victim navigating the criminal justice system will interface with numerous agencies and professionals. Just as medical navigators have been found to be beneficial for medical patients, victims' advocates identified the need for more 'victim navigators' who would initiate with the victim immediately after the crime has occurred and remain with them until the crime has been prosecuted. Since the creation of the Southeast Texas Criminal Justice Strategic Plan in 2014 and in every annual update since, the need for a "one stop shop" or "directory" for a victim to access all services regardless of victimization or individual needs (housing/ counseling/ medical/ shelter etc.) has been recognized.

Child Abuse Victims: Consider that a child sexual assault victim may encounter numerous agencies such as forensic exam programs, rape and suicide crisis centers, law enforcement, victim's assistance centers, Child Protective Services and CASA (if the child is removed from the home). With several partners involved, one can quickly see the opportunity for a breakdown in communication about the child's case and their smooth navigation through the criminal justice system. Garth House bridges this gap by facilitating the Multidisciplinary Team for 56 agency partners. This team meets regularly to "staff" cases and is comprised of representatives from law enforcement, district attorney offices, sexual assault forensic exam programs, child welfare, Garth House family advocates that stay with a family through the duration of their case, and Garth House counselors. This team coordinates investigations and informed service provision.

Child Human Trafficking Victims: For child victims of trafficking, Embracing Freedom provides comprehensive and on-call case advocacy. An advocate is assigned at the point of identification and dispatched immediately upon recovery and remain that child's advocate until 25 years of age. They represent the child's voice and are not to be confused with family advocates.

Embracing Freedom, a local nonprofit addresses this gap by providing Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth (CSEY) advocacy. CSEY advocates are dispatched by first responders immediately upon recovery of a survivor and meet the youth where they are—literally/geographically, and figuratively, whether the survivor is or is not yet cognizant of their own victimization or need for help. Embracing Freedom receives referrals from partner agencies when a youth is in crisis or is newly identified. Advocates respond immediately and commit to continue in a trust-based relationship with the survivor

throughout their progression through the stages of healing, including relapse, without judgement. Embracing Freedom is the specialized Advocacy Agency for the local Care Coordination Team. It provides services that include: case management, advocacy, and mentoring; court and healthcare accompaniment; crisis response; and basic needs, prevention, and intervention for at-risk youth, as well as awareness events in schools, churches, and social events. Embracing Freedom also provides community education for parents, professionals, and community members.

Adult Victims: Victim advocates estimate that most adult victims of crime will interface with an average of at least 15 professionals. Victims' advocates also acknowledge that even they, seasoned professionals, have challenges keeping apprised of all the available services in the region. Trust plays a critical role in the victim obtaining what they need from the criminal justice system and more victims' advocates are needed.

Victims' advocates also identify the need for additional/sustained training on ever-evolving crime victim's compensation, victim advocacy, in general, and on other agencies and what they provide. There is also a need for specialized training on court preparation for professionals who will facilitate and support victims of crime—particularly child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and other victims of crime—through the criminal justice system. Some victim advocacy groups state that law enforcement training for sexual assault and human trafficking, in particular, with imparting correct information to victims is a huge need. They report times when victims have been told that if they are not filing charges, a SANE exam is not needed. Another example is that some law enforcement may be unaware that in the case of a sexual assault an exam must be performed within 96 to 120 hours after the crime is committed.

Deliver emergency and long-term services to meet the immediate and restorative needs to victims:

Victim service providers across the region continue to identify significant barriers that prevent crime victims from accessing timely emergency and long-term restorative services. The Victims' Services Working Group identified transportation and access to preventative medical care—particularly HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment for sexual assault survivors—as the most critical and persistent challenge.

Transportation barriers exists across all criminal justice services addressed in the strategic plan. With limited local transportation services available in Southeast Texas, victims are often unable to receive the help and aid needed to recovery.

For Hardin, Jasper, and Orange counties who need to travel to Jefferson County to receive essential services transportation needs are limited if not, non-existent. Many victims must make frequent trips for restorative services and criminal justice legal system support and appointments.

Transportation challenges extend beyond child victims to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and other crimes. To address these gaps, law enforcement agencies, Victims Assistance Centers (VACs), and social service organizations frequently provide transportation support. However, this practice diverts staff from specialized duties and can delay service delivery when personnel are unavailable. These challenges are compounded by staffing limitations: Hardin County's VAC has limited staff positions; Orange County does not have a VAC; and Jefferson County VAC services transportation primarily for court appearances, not counseling or medical follow-up. Although Beaumont offers public transportation, many victims cannot afford bus fares or are unaware of available options. Similarly, South East Texas Transit provides limited service in Jasper, Orange, and Hardin Counties, but awareness remains low and, in some areas, costs are prohibitive.

Mental Health and Substance Use

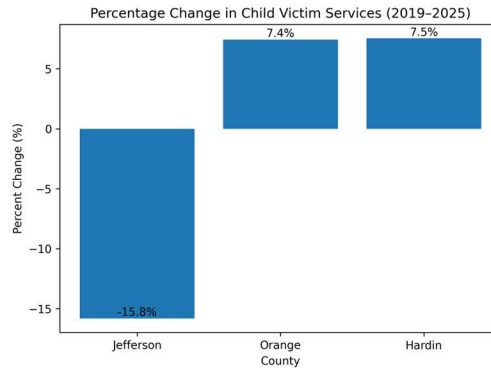
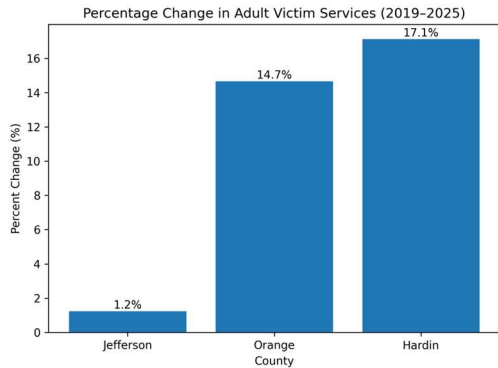
Category	Description of Gap	Impact	Priority Need	Proposed Strategy/Action
Mental Health Resources in Rural Communities/Lack of transportation services	Need for additional mental health and substance use disorder resources particularly within the rural communities including additional services, transportation to/from services, jobs, mental wellness learning in schools, and education	Limited services and transportation barriers prevent individuals from accessing care, leading to untreated conditions, increased crises, and greater strain on emergency and justice systems	Expand access to behavioral health services, transportation options, and prevention programs in rural communities	Develop mobile services, telehealth options, transportation assistance, and school-based mental health and prevention programs
Mental Health Resources	Enhance mental health resources in every facet of mental health including a psychiatric crisis care center, access to psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors both inpatient and outpatient, particularly for those not involved in a	Insufficient access to care leads to delayed treatment, increased crisis situations, and reliance on emergency and criminal justice systems	Increase availability of comprehensive mental health services across the continuum of care	Invest in crisis care centers, expand provider capacity, and increase funding for inpatient and outpatient services

	criminal proceedings			
Regional Coordination	Enhance regional interagency coordination to address mental health and substance use disorders	Lack of coordination results in fragmented services, duplication of efforts, and gaps in care for individuals in need	Strengthen collaboration and communication among regional partners	Establish multidisciplinary teams, formalize partnerships, and implement regular coordination meetings and data-sharing practices
Public Outreach	Expand awareness and public outreach for both mental health and substance use disorders	Limited awareness and stigma prevent individuals from seeking help early, leading to worsening conditions and increased crisis intervention	Increase education, awareness, and targeted outreach efforts	Implement community campaigns, expand school-based education, and utilize evidence-based prevention programs targeting at-risk populations
Mental Health Peace Officers	Provide additional law enforcement mental health peace officers with specialized training to address public safety issues involving mental health	Lack of specialized officers limits effective crisis response, increasing risk of escalation, arrest, or inappropriate service use	Expand the number of trained mental health officers and crisis response capacity	Increase funding for officer training, hire additional mental health officers, and expand crisis intervention and co-response programs

The South East Texas region, like many regions across the nation, is struggling with the increased demand for mental health providers, treatment programs, facilities and extended care options. The ever-growing need for mental health services and diminishing funds has created a massive burden for this region. This issue is not exclusive to those in the mental

health profession; this problem is far reaching and involves law enforcement agencies, schools, the juvenile justice system, victim assistance centers and many more. The chart below indicates the number of clients in South East Texas served by the Spindletop Center in 2025 for a mental illness.

Hardin County		Jasper County		Jefferson County		Orange County	
Adults	Children	Adults	Children	Adults	Children	Adults	Children
896	257	544	152	4918	1315	1658	390



Between 2019 and 2025, adult victim service delivery increased in Orange County (14.7%) and Hardin County (17.1%), while Jefferson County remained relatively stable with a modest 1.2% increase. These increases suggest expanded service reach and/or growing demand in surrounding counties. In contrast, child victim services increased in Orange County (7.4%) and Hardin County (7.5%), but decreased in Jefferson County (15.8%), indicating a potential shift in service patterns, reporting trends, or resource allocation. Overall, the data demonstrates regional growth in adult service demand and highlights the need to monitor and assess child service capacity to ensure equitable access across counties

Substance use disorder which includes alcohol abuse are also major concerns in the Southeast Texas area. Law enforcement agencies, hospitals, schools, juvenile justice systems, treatment facilities, counseling services and families struggle with understanding, coping and saving those who abuse or are dependent on drugs and alcohol. The chart below indicates the number clients served by county by the Spindletop Center in 2025.

Hardin County	Jasper County	Jefferson County	Orange County
91	38	577	224

Need for additional mental health and substance use disorder resources particularly within the rural communities including additional services, transportation to/from services, jobs, mental wellness learning in schools, and education:

A significant challenge facing Southeast Texas is the shortage of available, affordable, and easily accessible resources for individuals experiencing mental health and substance use disorders (SUD), particularly in rural communities. Across the region, gaps exist

along the entire behavioral health continuum—from early prevention and youth engagement programs to intensive treatment and recovery support services for individuals with serious mental illness or substance use disorders. These shortages affect both children and adults and are compounded by workforce limitations, transportation barriers, and economic constraints that disproportionately impact rural residents.

One of the most critical service gaps is the limited availability of early intervention and prevention programs for youth. Research consistently demonstrates that structured after-school programs, mentoring initiatives, and school-based mental wellness education can reduce risk factors associated with substance use, depression, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. However, many rural communities within Southeast Texas lack sufficient youth engagement opportunities outside of the school day. Without these preventative supports, young people may face increased exposure to risk factors such as social isolation, family instability, and substance misuse. Expanding youth-focused programs—particularly those that incorporate mental wellness education, resilience training, and positive mentoring relationships—can serve as an important protective factor and help reduce the likelihood that behavioral health issues escalate later in life.

For adults, access to behavioral health care is similarly limited. Individuals seeking counseling, psychiatric care, or substance use disorder treatment frequently encounter long wait times due to shortages of qualified providers. Rural areas face the most significant workforce shortages, as mental health professionals are often concentrated in larger metropolitan areas. Financial barriers also play a major role in limiting access to care. Many residents lack adequate insurance coverage or cannot afford out-of-pocket costs associated with counseling, psychiatric medication management, or residential treatment services. As a result, individuals may delay or forgo treatment until symptoms worsen and a crisis occurs, placing additional strain on emergency departments, law enforcement agencies, and community support systems.

Transportation barriers further exacerbate these challenges. Even when services exist within the region, individuals without reliable personal transportation may be unable to access them consistently. Public transportation options are extremely limited in many rural communities, and travel distances between counties and service providers can be substantial. Individuals seeking counseling, substance use treatment, or medication management may need to travel significant distances to attend appointments, creating additional financial and logistical burdens. For individuals with limited income, unstable housing, or employment constraints, transportation challenges can make consistent treatment participation difficult or impossible. Transportation concerns have been repeatedly identified as a major barrier to accessing services and are a common issue noted across multiple disciplines within the Southeast Texas Regional Criminal Justice Strategic Plan.

Employment opportunities and economic stability also play an important role in behavioral health outcomes. Individuals recovering from mental illness or substance use disorders often face barriers to employment due to stigma, gaps in work history, or lack of job training. Expanding workforce development initiatives that support individuals in

recovery can help improve long-term stability, reduce relapse rates, and strengthen community resilience. Programs that combine job training, recovery support services, and employer partnerships can provide meaningful pathways for individuals to re-enter the workforce and rebuild independence.

Schools also play a critical role in supporting mental wellness and early intervention. Increasing access to school-based mental health education and counseling services can help students develop healthy coping strategies, recognize signs of distress, and seek help before issues escalate into crises. Integrating mental wellness learning into school environments—through partnerships with behavioral health providers, counselors, and community organizations—can help normalize conversations around mental health while providing early support to students who may be struggling.

Addressing the behavioral health needs of Southeast Texas will require a coordinated regional approach that expands services across the continuum of care. Key strategies include increasing the availability of mental health and substance use disorder treatment services in rural communities, strengthening prevention and youth engagement programs, expanding school-based mental wellness education, improving transportation solutions to increase access to care, and developing employment and recovery support opportunities for individuals in treatment. By investing in these areas, the region can work toward a more comprehensive and accessible behavioral health system that supports prevention, early intervention, treatment, and long-term recovery for residents across Southeast Texas.

Enhance mental health resources in every facet of mental health including a psychiatric crisis care center, access to psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors both inpatient and outpatient, particularly for those not involved in a criminal proceeding:

According to the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council 2025-2029 Strategic Plan, 46.6% will experience a diagnosable mental disorder in their lifetime. Annually, over one in four adults (26.2%) in the U.S. experience mental illness and 5.8% experience a serious mental illness. An estimated 14-20% of young people experience mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders annually, while half of diagnosable mental disorders begin by age 14 and three-fourths by age 24.

The Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Plan, April 2025, states that Jefferson and Orange Counties do not have adequate access to mental and behavioral health care services and providers while experiencing a higher percentage of adults with depression who expressed they had frequent mental distress.

The shortage of mental health and substance use disorder needs is more severe regionally, in Southeast Texas. Inpatient mental health treatment capacity in Southeast Texas is limited and often strained during periods of increased demand. Currently, there are only

two inpatient psychiatric facilities serving the region: Baptist Behavioral Health, which operates 70 beds including a geriatric unit, and The Medical Center of Southeast Texas, which has 20 inpatient behavioral health beds. At times, both facilities reach full capacity and must enter “diversion” status, meaning they are temporarily unable to accept additional patients. When this occurs, individuals experiencing a mental health crisis in Jasper, Jefferson, Hardin, or Orange County may have no local inpatient facility available for treatment.

Recent state analysis reports that more than 60 percent of adults treated in Texas state hospitals come from the criminal justice system, often requiring competency restoration before court proceedings can continue. As a result, individuals seeking civil (non-criminal) psychiatric treatment frequently face extended wait times for placement. State data indicate that thousands of Texans may be on waitlists for inpatient psychiatric beds at any given time, highlighting the persistent shortage of treatment capacity statewide. Per Senate 719, filed in April 2025, the average number of patients using inpatient beds at mental health facilities increased almost twelve percent between 2023 and 2024.

Due to the growing demand for services within the four-county region, outpatient services have expanded. Currently, outpatient services are available throughout the region, however, the demand is still greater than the supply. In 2025, the Spindletop Center provided outpatient treatment services to 930 individuals within the region.

Inpatient and outpatient facilities are very expensive. Many of those who suffer from a substance use disorder or a mental illness do not have adequate means of obtaining funding to pay for treatment services. . In past years, the State of Texas has continually decreased the amount of money being spent on mental health related issues. With more and more Texans being diagnosed with a mental illness and less funds to treat them, many go untreated. Many, if not the majority, simply cannot afford the treatments.

Below is the financial breakdown that the Spindletop Center used in the treatment of their clients in 2025:

Jasper					
Local Psychiatric Inpatient					
Admission Days	Value of Bed Days				
264	\$174,240				
Jefferson		Orange		Hardin	
Local Psychiatric Inpatient		Local Psychiatric Inpatient		Local Psychiatric Inpatient	
Admission Days	Value of Bed Days	Admission Days	Value of Bed Days	Admission Days	Value of Bed Days

4791	\$3,162,060	929	\$613,140	404	\$266,640
Total Local Beds All Counties					
Jefferson, Orange, Jasper, and Hardin Counties					
Admission Days		Value of Bed Days			
6,388		\$4,216,080			
Jefferson					
State Hospital (outside of four catchments areas/no-local):		Orange		Hardin	
Admission Days		Admission Days		Admission Days	
Value of Bed Days		Value of Bed Days		Value of Bed Days	
1171		57		0	
\$772,860		\$37,620			
Jasper					
State Hospital (outside of four catchments areas/no-local):					
Admission Days					
Value of Bed Days					
117					
\$77,220					

The April 2025, Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas Community Needs Assessment and Implementation Plan highlights that residents within the region face significant costs barriers when accessing the healthcare system. Due to higher unemployment rates and lower educational attainment rates compared to the State, the region faces a lower median household income.

Enhance regional interagency coordination to address mental health and substance abuse disorders:

Texas continues to face significant shortages in mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services, and Southeast Texas is no exception. Recent statewide reports by the *Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute* indicate that approximately 88% of Texans live in areas with insufficient mental-health providers, and the state currently averages only one mental-health professional per 690 residents—one of the highest ratios in the nation. Treatment access remains limited, with only about 21% of Texans with a mental illness receiving specialty care, and state-funded community centers serving less than 40% of adults with serious mental illness under 200% of the federal poverty level. Workforce shortages, geographic disparities, and growing population demand further strains already

limited regional resources. As the need for behavioral health services continues to outpace capacity, a coordinated, regional approach is necessary to close service gaps, improve access, and strengthen competitiveness for state, federal, and private funding.

Expand awareness and public outreach for both mental health and substance abuse disorders:

Expanding awareness and public outreach for both mental health and substance use disorders (SUD) is a critical strategy for improving overall community well-being in Southeast Texas. Stakeholders identified the need for a more proactive and targeted approach to education that promotes prevention, reduces stigma, and ensures individuals and families are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to seek help early. Increasing awareness not only improves individual outcomes but also strengthens community resilience by normalizing conversations around mental health and substance use and encouraging timely intervention.

The working group identified youth-focused mental health education as a high priority, particularly the need to introduce mental health concepts at an early age. Teaching “mental health hygiene” to young children—such as emotional regulation, stress management, coping skills, and help-seeking behaviors—can establish lifelong habits that support resilience and overall well-being. By integrating these concepts into early childhood and school-based settings, children are better equipped to manage stressors and reduce the likelihood of more serious mental health challenges later in life. This preventative approach shifts the focus from crisis response to early intervention, helping to mitigate the long-term impact of adverse experiences. Expanding school-based mental wellness education, along with parent and caregiver awareness, will be essential to reinforcing these skills both in and out of the classroom.

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of refining substance use disorder education to ensure it is both effective and appropriate for the intended audience. Research and local experience indicate that broad, non-targeted substance use education programs may unintentionally expose low-risk youth to information that is not developmentally appropriate, while failing to adequately address the needs of higher-risk populations. As a result, there has been a shift toward implementing evidence-based, targeted programs designed specifically for moderate- to high-risk youth.

Over the past several years, there has been an increased emphasis on implementing evidence-based programs across schools, juvenile justice systems, and treatment providers. This approach ensures that limited resources are directed toward interventions with proven effectiveness, particularly for individuals at higher risk of substance use or mental health challenges. Expanding access to these programs—while maintaining appropriate targeting—can significantly improve outcomes and reduce long-term system costs associated with untreated behavioral health conditions.

In addition to youth-focused efforts, public outreach must also extend to families, caregivers, and the broader community. Evidence-based programs can provide education not only to individuals experiencing mental health or substance use disorders but also to those supporting them. By equipping families with knowledge, coping strategies, and available resources, communities can create stronger support systems that promote recovery and reduce stigma.

Addressing the need for expanded awareness will require a coordinated, multi-faceted approach that includes school-based education, community campaigns, partnerships with local organizations, and integration with existing behavioral health services. Strategies should prioritize early intervention, target high-risk populations with evidence-based programming, and ensure that messaging is culturally appropriate and accessible to diverse communities. Additionally, restoring and sustaining funding for proven programs will be critical to maintaining long-term impact.

By strengthening awareness and outreach efforts, Southeast Texas can move toward a more preventative, informed, and supportive approach to mental health and substance use disorders—reducing stigma, improving early identification, and ultimately enhancing the overall health and resilience of the community.

Provide additional law enforcement mental health peace officers with specialized training to address public safety issues involving mental health:

Law enforcement officers are frequently the first point of contact for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Having specialized, trained mental health officers available to respond to these calls is widely recognized as one of the most compassionate, effective, and cost-efficient approaches to crisis response. Officers trained in crisis intervention and mental health response are better equipped to de-escalate situations, connect individuals with appropriate treatment resources, and reduce unnecessary arrests, incarceration, or emergency room visits. Research across the United States has shown that crisis intervention programs and co-response models can significantly reduce the use of force, increase diversion to treatment services, and improve outcomes for individuals experiencing behavioral health crises. These programs also reduce pressure on emergency departments, jails, and patrol officers by directing individuals toward appropriate mental health services rather than the criminal justice system.

Department	Population	Population Per/MH	MH Officers Currently	MH Officers Needed	Distinct Count	MH Follow ups
Jefferson County	253,948	84,649	3	10	816	1551
Orange County	85,209	85,209	1	8	166	252
Hardin County	58,670	58,670	1	5	155	284

Jasper County	32,907	32,907	1	4	294	559
Beaumont PD	119,114	119,114	0	10	0	0
Port Arthur PD	53,937	53,937	0	5	0	0

In Southeast Texas, the need for additional mental health officers remains significant. Data provided by the Spindletop Center indicates that the number of trained mental health officers currently available across Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, and Jasper Counties falls far short of what is needed to adequately respond to the volume of behavioral health calls. In Jefferson County, which has a population of approximately 253,948 residents, only three mental health officers are currently available to serve the county, equating to roughly one officer for every 84,649 residents. Based on service demand and population size, the county would ideally have approximately ten mental health officers available. During the reporting period, Jefferson County recorded 816 distinct individuals requiring mental health response and conducted 1,551 follow-up contacts to ensure individuals remained connected to services.

Orange County faces similar challenges. With a population of approximately 85,209 residents, the county currently has only one designated mental health officer, though eight officers are recommended to adequately meet demand. During the reporting period, Orange County recorded 166 distinct individuals requiring mental health response and completed 252 follow-up contacts. Hardin County, with a population of 58,670, also has only one mental health officer despite an identified need for five. The county recorded 155 individuals requiring mental health response and completed 284 follow-up contacts during the reporting period.

Jasper County, with a population of 32,907 residents, currently has one mental health officer but would ideally have four officers available to meet community needs. Jasper County reported 294 distinct individuals requiring mental health intervention and conducted 559 follow-up contacts. These follow-up contacts are an important component of effective crisis intervention, as they help ensure individuals receive appropriate referrals to behavioral health providers, medication management, or other community services that may prevent future crises.

Municipal law enforcement agencies within the region also face substantial gaps in mental health response capacity. The Beaumont Police Department serves a population of approximately 119,114 residents but currently has no dedicated mental health officers, despite an estimated need for ten officers to adequately respond to behavioral health calls. Similarly, the Port Arthur Police Department serves approximately 53,937 residents and currently has no mental health officers, though at least five officers would be needed to effectively support mental health crisis response within the city.

The shortage of trained mental health officers in Southeast Texas limits the ability of law enforcement agencies to respond effectively to the growing number of behavioral health

crisis calls. Without specialized training and dedicated personnel, patrol officers may have limited options beyond emergency detention, jail booking, or hospital emergency department transport. These responses can increase costs to the community while failing to address the underlying mental health needs of the individual. In contrast, communities that have implemented robust crisis intervention teams or mental health officer programs report improved de-escalation outcomes, increased diversion to treatment, and lower rates of repeat crisis calls.

Expanding the number of trained mental health officers across Southeast Texas would significantly strengthen the region's behavioral health crisis response system. Increasing staffing levels would allow agencies to provide more consistent coverage, reduce response times, and ensure individuals in crisis are connected with appropriate treatment and support services. In addition, expanding mental health officer programs would support stronger collaboration between law enforcement, behavioral health providers, hospitals, and community organizations, helping to create a more coordinated and effective behavioral health system across Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, and Jasper Counties. Investing in specialized mental health response capacity represents not only a compassionate approach to crisis intervention but also a cost-effective strategy for communities. By diverting individuals experiencing behavioral health crises away from jail and unnecessary hospitalization and toward appropriate treatment services, communities can reduce long-term costs while improving outcomes for individuals and families affected by mental illness.

5. Use of the Strategic Plan by the CJAC

This section should describe in detail how the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) will use the strategic plan in its decision-making process. Including bullets is acceptable, but each item should also have a narrative explanation describing its role in the prioritization process, implementation, and long-term use.

The plan should demonstrate how the CJAC will:

This strategic plan will serve as the primary guiding framework for the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) in making funding recommendations, evaluating project proposals, and supporting long-term system improvements across Southeast Texas. The plan establishes a clear, data-driven foundation that ensures decisions are aligned with identified regional needs, stakeholder input, and evidence-based practices. By consistently applying this framework, the CJAC will promote fairness, transparency, and accountability in the allocation of limited resources while addressing the most critical gaps in the region regarding criminal justice, juvenile justice, victim services, and mental health and substance abuse.

Prioritization of Grant Funding

The CJAC will use the plan to prioritize funding for projects that address the region's most critical gaps, including law enforcement/criminal justice, juvenile justice, and victim services. Proposals that clearly align with identified needs will receive higher consideration, ensuring limited resources are directed toward the greatest impact areas.

Alignment of Project Selection with Strategic Needs

All applications will be evaluated against the priorities outlined in the plan. Applicants must demonstrate how their projects address documented needs, serve high-risk or underserved populations, and incorporate effective or evidence-based practices. This ensures a fair, consistent, and objective review process.

Transparency and Data-Informed Decision Making

The plan provides a clear, data-driven basis for decision-making, allowing stakeholders to understand how funding priorities are established. This transparency strengthens accountability and encourages applicants to design projects that directly respond to regional needs.

Implementation in CJAC Processes

The CJAC will incorporate the plan into all phases of the funding process, including application review, scoring, and deliberation. Evaluation criteria will be aligned with plan priorities to ensure consistency in decision-making.

Guidance for Evaluation and Long-Term Use

The plan will also guide evaluation of funded projects by comparing outcomes to

identified needs. It will serve as a roadmap for long-term improvements to address regional needs.

Plan Updates and Ongoing Use

The CJAC will review and update the plan at least every five years, or as needed, to reflect new data, emerging issues, and stakeholder input. As a living document, it will remain a relevant and adaptable tool for guiding both current and future decision-making.

RESOURCES:

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