

THE BRIEF



Information for Texas Municipalities about Texas Municipal Courts (November 2019)

TML Annual Conference Recap Councils, Courts, and Cities: The C3 Initiative One-Year Anniversary

The C3 (Councils, Courts, and Cities) Initiative is a public information and education campaign aimed at filling the information gap between city halls and municipal courts in Texas. The initiative was created by the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center and launched at the Texas Municipal League Annual Conference in 2018. To mark the one-year anniversary of the launch of C3, TMCEC Executive Director, Ryan Kellus Turner, addressed local officials from cities of all sizes at the TML Annual Conference in San Antonio on October 10, 2019.

Turner recapped the progress of C3 in the last year and reflected on a recurring theme: public perception. Public perception was the catalyst for the creation of C3 and continues to influence municipal policies. More people come in contact with municipal courts in Texas than all other courts combined. These contacts tend to define the public's perception of the entire Texas judicial system. At the same time, the public's safety and quality of life rely on the enforcement of traffic laws, local ordinances, and other state laws. The public increasingly depends on city officials and employees to understand key issues pertaining to these laws, their enforcement, and their adjudication in court. Understanding that municipalities both influence and are influenced by public perception can help cities improve the local administration of justice.

The presentation also touched on the role procedural fairness plays in public perception. If a lack of public confidence in the criminal justice system were poison, procedural fairness (A.K.A., procedural justice) is viewed by many as an effective remedy. Procedural fairness has four key components that are increasingly the focus of court practices: (1) voice, (2) neutrality, (3) respect, and (4) understanding. In the context of courts, this means ensuring that people in court have the opportunity to be heard by an unbiased decision maker who treats people with dignity and makes sure that people understand their rights and the court process. In an era of increased scrutiny of the criminal justice system most city officials and staff will want to be familiar with these concepts.

Turner stressed that the decisions made at city hall have an effect on people's public perception of justice. As explained in the [August 2018](#), most municipal judges in Texas are appointed by the city council. Additionally, most city prosecutors and municipal court clerks are hired (directly or indirectly) by the city council. However, folks at city hall are often unaware of the effect these actions have on public perception. Turner reiterated that cities can

increase their awareness by staying up-to-date on recent studies providing insights into the Texas judicial system and municipal courts. Two studies were detailed in the [October 2018](#) issue of *The Brief*.

Finally, Turner gave three examples of how C3 has bridged the information gap between courts and city hall in its first year:

C3 Statewide Conference - Part retrospective, part preview, an examination of big ideas and best practices, in May, TMCEC hosted the C3 Fines and Fees Exposition and Showcase. Registration was open to mayors, city council members, and other city officials and employees who attended with a municipal judge, court personnel or city attorney. The conference was sold out. More than 200 people attended and it received rave reviews. The next C3 Exposition and Show is planned for June 1-3, 2020 in Austin and will focus on bail and bond practices.

The Brief - You are reading it right now. *The Brief* is a periodic briefing for Texas mayors, city council members, and other local officials. This is the fourteenth issue of *The Brief*. To check out past issues online, visit www.tmcec.com/c3. Want to know about C3 related happenings and receive the most recent issue of *The Brief* in your email inbox? Just send an email to tmcec@tmcec.com. In the subject line, type: "Add me to C3." You can also get *The Brief* by following @C3ofTexas on Twitter.

The Role of Municipal Court in City Government - In 2019, TMCEC produced a [15 minute video](#) that is ideal for city officials and employees wanting to know more about the role municipal courts play in the lives of our communities.

A good idea knows no geographic boundaries. Interest in C3 was not limited to Texas cities. Partially in response to the success of C3 in Texas, the National Center for State Courts recently created a [resource guide](#) for local governments across the nation. In 2017, municipal courts and their variously named counter parts throughout the country adjudicated more than 80 million cases. That is nearly 75 percent of all cases adjudicated in state courts. Take the time to check out the resource guide's interactive tour which is intended to assist municipal and other funding officials in better understanding the role and purpose of local courts.

It has been a great first year for C3. If you have ideas for future issues of *The Brief*, let us know at tmcec@tmcec.com.

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