

HARRIS COUNTY Frequent Courthouse Visitors Badge Program Overview

I. Purpose

To create a uniform, visual medium for the identification and monitoring of individuals designated as Frequent Courthouse Visitors (FCV). This program enables any person holding an FCV badge to enter Harris County Courthouse facilities by bypassing the magnetometers and/or x-ray machines used for security screening.

II. FCV Oversight Committee

As part of the administration of this program, an FCV Oversight Committee was formed and authorized by Commissioners Court on December 17, 1996. The purpose of the FCV Oversight Committee is to review applications for issuance of an FCV Badge and to insure ongoing compliance of the program.

The FCV Oversight Committee is made up of a representative from each of the following six (6) Harris County Departments. Each Department listed below shall designate a representative to serve on the Committee:

- District Court Judges
- County Court Judges
- Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Facilities & Property Management Department (FPM)
- Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Constable—Precinct 1

Department designations must be submitted to the Director of FPM no later than September 30th of each year. Thereafter, the Director of FPM will submit the names of all designees for approval by Commissioners Court.

The FCV Oversight Committee will meet via telephone, email, or in person for the purpose of reviewing applications for the issuance of an FCV Badge. Committee Members will review and discuss all applications prior to submitting the name to the Director of FPM for consideration.

The FCV Oversight Committee will meet annually to review the Frequent Courthouse Visitors Badge Program and monitor the operation of the program. The committee may be requested to meet more frequently to address program issues requiring immediate action.

Persons interested in applying for an FCV Badge may obtain an application from FPM's Customer Service Section located at 1310 Prairie Street, Suite 140. Applications are accepted in FPM at 1310 Prairie, Suite 140, Monday thru Friday between the hours of 7:30AM and 4:00PM.

III. Qualification of Applicants

An individual must meet the following criteria in order to qualify for the issuance of an FCV Badge:

The applicant must demonstrate to the FCV Oversight Committee, a frequency level of required access to the Courthouse facilities which would demonstrate the applicant's need to bypass the magnetometers and/or x-ray machines, as well as indicate a significant benefit to Harris County.

Applicants are required to undergo a criminal history background check secured from the approved and authorized vendor contracted to perform such service on behalf of Harris County.

If, in the opinion of the FCV Committee Members, an applicant is determined to be a security risk, the request for an FCV Badge will be referred to the Director of FPM or his or her designee. The Director, or his or her designee, will review the application for an FCV Badge and will make a final determination. If the application is denied, the appeals process will go through the Director of FPM, or his or her designee, as outlined in Section V.

An example of what the FCV Oversight Committee would view as security risks for the FCV program may include, but is not limited to:

- Individuals with charges or indictments of criminal conduct or incidents that may, directly or indirectly, impact security of a facility.
- Convictions, probations and/or deferred adjudications, in this or any other jurisdiction, for the following offenses: carrying a prohibited weapon, assault or violent offense, including but not limited to, family violence, aggravated assault, sexual assault, etc. and a felony of any nature.
- Individuals who have made threats against a judge, court personnel, or other litigants.

IV. Application for Issuance of an FCV Badge

To secure applicant approval, the following procedures shall apply:

The completed original badge application should be submitted in person, unsigned, along with the following:

1. A valid Texas Driver License or a state-approved photo/signature identification card.
2. Applicants with Texas Concealed Handgun License shall make disclosure and provide their state issued license.
3. A copy of these documents will be made by Harris County FPM for inclusion in the applicant's file.
4. A non-refundable application fee of \$50.00. Acceptable forms of payment are: MasterCard, Visa, Discover, American Express, money order, or cashier or corporate check made payable to Harris County Facilities & Property Management. This fee will be used to defray the cost of producing, processing and monitoring the FCV Badge Program.
5. A non-refundable background fee is paid directly to the authorized vendor to perform the background request. Former Judges, County, Municipal, State and Federal elected officials will not require a background check.

The required badge fee will be waived for the following classification of applicants:

- Individuals appointed by Commissioners Court to serve on various boards and committees
- Employees of area public law enforcement crime labs that are required to offer professional testimony in the courts
- Employees of the Texas Attorney General's office
- Staff members of the 2nd Administrative Judicial Region IV-D Courts
- Staff members of Harris County Dispute Resolution
- Employees of MHMRA's Forensic Services Division
- Employees of the Special Audit Division of the Harris County Appraisal District
- Employees of the Child Protective Services Program of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- Certain Assistant United States Attorneys assigned to work with the District Attorney's Office
- Certain investigators assigned to work with the District Attorney's Office
- Floating Court Reporters
- Employees of the Texas Court System with offices in the Criminal Justice Center
- Former Judges
- Tax Court Masters
- Current Municipal, County, State and Federal elected officials

FCV Badges are issued with an expiration date of December 31st of each calendar year. Each year the badge issued will be of a different color from that of the previous year.

Each FCV Badge recipient will be responsible for the retention of his/her card. Lost or misplaced cards will be replaced after the recipient reports the loss to the FPM's Customer Service Section, signs an affidavit stating the badge has been lost, and pays a replacement fee of \$35.

FCV badges that have been damaged or torn will be replaced, at no cost to the badge holder. The damaged badge must be returned to FPM's Customer Service Section in order for the fee to be waived.

V. Denial of Application for Issuance of an FCV Badge

If an applicant is denied, the following procedures shall apply:

1. The Director of FPM, or his or her designee, shall notify applicant in writing that his/her request to participate in the FCV Badge Program has been denied and the reason why the application was denied.
2. Applicant may petition the Director of FPM in writing to appeal the decision. A written request must be submitted along with any and all documents that may indicate that special circumstances should be considered.
3. The Director shall set a hearing date on any written request for appeal of the denial. Following the hearing, the Director shall make a finding and render a decision and inform the applicant of the decision in writing within 60 days. Any decision issued by the Director of FPM shall be final.

VI. Display and Presentation of the FCV Badge

FCV Badge recipients are required to display the badge in order to be exempted from the normal courthouse security screening procedures.

An FCV Badge recipient must present or clearly display his or her identification badge to security personnel, police personnel, or County management personnel while on County property, if requested. Refusal to do so is justification for revocation of FCV Badge privileges.

VII. Other Considerations

FCV Badge recipients acknowledge that firearms or any other type of weapons are prohibited from being brought into a County facility, except as permitted by the Harris County Building Regulations, as amended.

All FCV Badge recipients must cooperate fully with any officer representing Harris County. Failure to do so may result in the termination of FCV Badge privileges.

Any FCV Badge recipient who is involved as a party in either civil or criminal courtroom litigation, will have his/her badge suspended during the period of litigation. The badge recipient shall voluntarily surrender his/her badge to FPM's Customer Service Section immediately. **Failure to do so will result in permanent revocation of badge privileges.** Once the Director of FPM, or his or her designee, becomes aware of an FCV Badge recipient's involvement as a courtroom litigant, the recipient's badge privileges will be suspended. The badge may be returned to the badge recipient at the end of the litigation process.

Any FCV Badge recipient charged with criminal conduct must immediately report such charges to the Customer Service Section of FPM for review. Failure to do so will result in revocation of badge privileges.

FCV Badge recipients shall not allow another individual to use his/her badge. To do so will result in revocation of the badge.

VIII. Annual Renewal Process

Prior to issuance of an FCV Badge for a new calendar year, an FCV Badge recipient must complete a profile update and go through the background screening with a review of any criminal history. Applicants with a cleared background report are required to submit a \$40 renewal fee with their profile update. Acceptable forms of payment are: MasterCard, Visa, American Express, money order, or cashier or corporate check made payable to Harris County Facilities & Property Management.

The Profile Update and payment should be hand delivered to Harris County Facilities & Property Management, Customer Service Section, located at 1310 Prairie Street, Suite 140, Houston, Texas 77002.

IX. Revocation of Privileges

The County reserves the right to terminate the FCV Badge Privileges at any time.

Any person may petition the FCV Oversight Committee to show cause why the access privileges of any FCV Badge recipient should be revoked. The FCV Oversight Committee will make a recommendation for revocation of access privileges to the Director of FPM. The decision of the Director of FPM shall be final.