

HEART OF TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS REGIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE PLAN 2026

A Strategic Plan for Meeting the
Criminal Justice Needs of the
HOTCOG
Region



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Regional Profile

The Heart of Texas Council of Governments (HOTCOG):

- Is an organization of local governments working together voluntarily to solve mutual problems and plan for the future of this six-county area
- Has over 80 member governments made up of counties, cities, school districts, community colleges, and special districts.
- Was originally established in 1966.
- Serves a geographic area covering Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan counties
- contains 5611 sq miles with a population of 349,273 (2010 US Census)
- Contains 57 incorporated and four unincorporated communities.
- Includes 52 school districts.
- Two major interstates cross through our counties; I35 through Hill, McLennan and touches Falls; I45 through Freestone County.

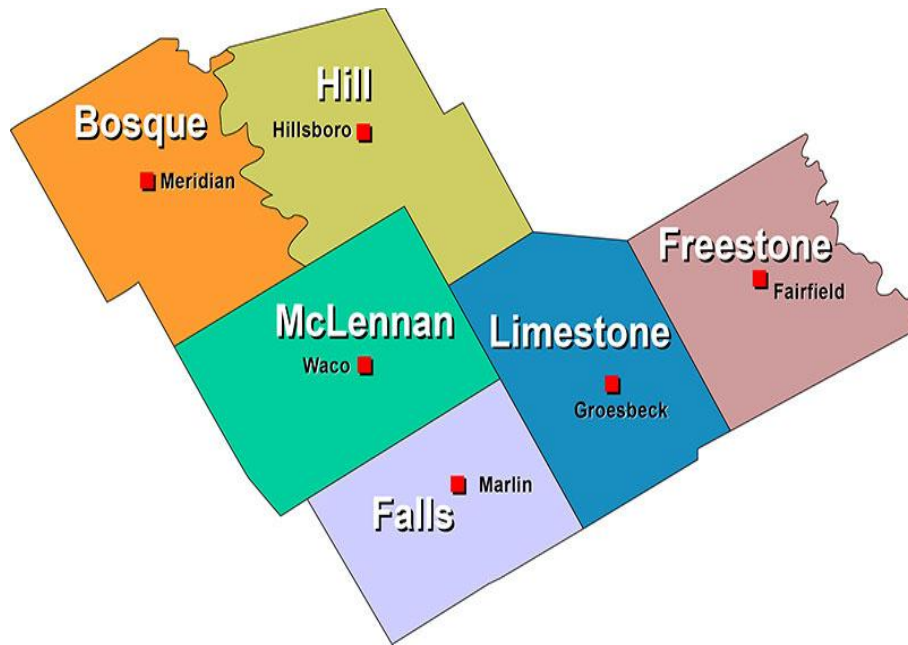


Figure 1- Heart of Texas Council of Governments Region

Executive Summary

The HOTCOG Regional Strategic Plan encompasses Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan counties. This centrally located area contains 5611 square miles with a population of 349,273 (2010 US Census). Two major interstates cross through the counties: Interstate 35 and Interstate 45.

This strategic plan identifies the regional needs in Law Enforcement, Juvenile Justice, Victim Services, Violent Crimes Against Women, and Mental Health and Substance Abuse. The information is derived from an annual community planning process by the Criminal Justice Planner of the Heart of Texas Council of Governments. Each year, Community Planners are called together or asked for input by email to keep current with identified needs, gaps, and priorities. Each county has a Community Planning Team responsible for submitting updates and information to the HOTCOG Criminal Justice Planner of additional resources available.

The HOTCOG Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) is a critical resource for creating this document. The committee met and reviewed the six-county community plans and determined the top priorities to be addressed in this Strategic Plan. Additionally, last year the committee created a survey to poll community planners further and determine needs in the six

counties. All the information gathered will determine future goals and funding needs.

The following Juvenile Justice issues were identified as regional priorities: Delinquent Behavior / Truancy, Alcohol/Substance Abuse, Counseling Services / Aftercare/Case Management, Diversion, and Mental Health Services.

Regarding Victim Assistance needs, the CJAC identified the following priorities: Support Services, On-scene Victim Services, Case Management, and Education and Training.

The Violent Crimes Against Women priorities are Support Services, On-scene Victim Services, Case Management, Education and Training, and Increased collaboration and communication across all levels of government and among all victim services.

As for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, the following priorities were drawn from the community plans: Transport of Mental Health Individuals, Limited beds for short/long-term services, Need for indigent services, and Substance Abuse.

The HOTCOG Regional Planning Teams intend to improve outcomes for families struggling with problems described in the plans for focus areas. Many agencies and organizations are trying to address issues with local funds and grant funds from multiple state and federal sources to the extent that these funds are available to provide services that address the outlined focus areas.

Victim services in all areas should continue to be a priority. The Region should continue to look for ways to expand all victim services to the rural counties to include counseling, sheltering, victim assistance, and education.

The HOTCOG Region must continue searching for and obtaining federal, state, and local funding to ensure that its law enforcement agencies, courts, and detention facilities are equipped with up-to-date equipment and training to provide the highest service to the communities served.

Regional Planning

Biannually the HOTCOG Criminal Justice Planner meets with the Community Planners in each county to update their County Community Plan. After the plans are updated, they are posted on the www.hotcog.org website. The Community Planners are elected Officials, Chiefs, Sheriffs, city managers, city secretaries, concerned citizens, probation officials, victim advocates and coordinators, law enforcement officers, emergency management coordinators, district attorney staff, Department of State Health Services staff, and others that are concerned about the welfare of their county.

An agency that plans to apply for the Criminal Justice Division through the Heart of Texas Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) must ensure that the needs of the regional as the services provided. It was sent to the Community Planners in the six counties. The results will be discussed by category in the following pages and considered in all future planning processes.

In 2020 the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee (CJAC) for the Heart of Texas Region created a survey to gather information on the region's needs and the services provided. It was sent to the Community Planners in the six counties. Each year the HOTCOG Criminal Justice Planner sends a new survey request to the community planners in the six counties to gather information. The results will be discussed by category in the following pages and considered in all future planning processes.

Juvenile Justice Priorities

Priority #1	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Delinquent Behavior / Truancy	There is substantial evidence that youth who become truant will eventually drop out of school and put themselves at high risk of becoming disadvantaged unproductive citizens.
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
School Resources Officers offer a full range of services to youth and parents, including intervention, prevention, diversion programs, school programs, summer camps and other positive first-time offender programs, Teen Court, Drug Court, DARE, and other productive programs, and outpatient counseling. Provide rural transportation for school-aged youth to access alternative school and after-school programs. Increase funding opportunities for programs such as the Boys and Girls Club. Increase funding opportunities for 4-H programs.	

Priority #2	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Alcohol/Substance Abuse	Lack of Community-based services, prevention, or treatment programs.
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
More funding for long- and short-term treatment, early identification/diagnosis, outpatient counseling, prevention alternatives, and education	

Priority #3	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Counseling Services / Aftercare / Case Management	Rural client's areas must travel out of the county for juvenile or family counseling services
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
More accessible outpatient counseling, more treatment centers for adolescents, programs for bullying, first offenders, prevention, support, families, parents, need more local counselors.	

Priority #4	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Mental Health Services	Lack of transitional services for youth
<i>Potential Response to Problem</i>	
Transportation for youth needing to travel to larger service areas for services, more services in rural counties, more State and local beds.	

Additional information gathered from the survey: services important for juveniles; after-school programs, bullying prevention, character building, community education, community services, diversion programs, family stability, job skills training, life skills, mentoring, parent education, substances abuse prevention, substance abuse early intervention, suicide prevention and intervention, tobacco use prevention, truancy prevention, and violence prevention.

In FY 2020, 5% of supervised youth tested positive for illegal substances, according to the Hill County Juvenile Probation Department. One thousand one hundred ninety-one tests were administered, with 49 resulting in positive screens.

In the fiscal year 2020, 32 youths were detained at a contracted juvenile detention facility. Currently, the Juvenile Probation Department pays \$110-\$140 per day to house juvenile offenders' dependents on offense and facility use. The total detention expense for FY 2020 exceeded \$42000.00.

The availability of juvenile detention beds has become an issue, and there have been circumstances where youth have not been detained because of no availability in rural areas.

Victim Services Priorities

Priority #1	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Support Services	Direct services needed for victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes, and promotion of victim restoration
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Promote collaboration of service agencies, increase outreach, access, and availability to rural areas, and increase transportation to shelters and counselors	

Priority #2	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
On-scene Victim Services	Limited law enforcement and public awareness of services offered, limited bi-lingual services
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Increase awareness among all agencies, promote coordination among agencies, and develop a team of on-scene volunteers	

Priority #3	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Case Management	Need for long and short-term care and transportation to those services, need for local counselor and assistance coordinators
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Identify funding sources to increase the number of counselors and sustain them	

Priority #4	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Education and training	Increase public and agency awareness of services
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Develop a team of trained on-scene volunteers	

Violent Crimes Against Women Priorities

Priority #1	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Support Services	Direct services needed to victim's abuse, domestic violence, and promotion of victim restoration
<i>Potential Response to Problem</i>	
Promote collaboration of service agencies, increase outreach, access and availability to rural areas, increase transportation to shelters and counselors.	

Priority # 2	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
On-scene Victim Services	Limited law enforcement and public awareness of services offered, limited bi-lingual services
<i>Potential Response to Problem</i>	
Increase awareness to all agencies, promote coordination among agencies, develop a team of on-scene volunteers	

Priority # 3	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Case Management	Lack of counselors in rural areas
<i>Potential Response to Problem</i>	
Identify funding sources to increase number of counselors and sustain them	

Priority # 4	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Education and training	Increase public and agency awareness of services
<i>Potential Response to Problem</i>	
Develop a team of trained on-scene volunteers	

Priority # 5	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Increase collaboration and communication across all levels of government and among all victim services	Community Response and Coordination Groups meeting in each county, Networking meetings offered through HOTCOG
<i>Potential Response to Problem</i>	
Encourage involvement in meetings, make all agencies aware of resources available	

Law Enforcement Priorities

Additional information gathered from the recent survey: List the most important pieces of law enforcement equipment needed in your county; body armor, body-worn cameras, evidence/property room, in-car computers, in-car video systems, radar unit, radio systems, records management systems, and surveillance. What equipment is lacking in your county; automated external defibrillators, computer forensic software, crime scene investigation equipment/supplies, live scan, mobile command unit, SWAT equipment, and watch tower.

Priority #1	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Transport of Mental Health Individuals	Causes strains of law enforcement time and manpower.
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Contract out transport of mental health individuals, make more beds available, streamline the processing of individuals	

Priority #2	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Equipment Deficiencies or Training	Restraints on officers and agencies due to lack of funds to purchase needed equipment, attending training can be hindered by the inability to provide backfill or provide traveling funds, on-site training is needed
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Locate and obtain funding streams to purchase equipment, hire officers, and provide in-house training or train-the-trainer courses	

Priority #3	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Evidence Security/Storage Capabilities	Lack of space, security, technology, software, trained personnel, and equipment
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Need sources of funding to create more space and obtain equipment and personnel, and then train	

Priority #4	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Substance Abuse	Users setting up their labs, transport of illegal substances, need for forensic equipment, increase in manpower needed, need for hazardous waste disposal
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Hazardous materials training, increase in manpower, community awareness, increase in resources available to identify and treat those addicted	

Priority #5	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Crime Prevention or Animal Control	Restraints on officers and agencies due to lack of funds to purchase needed equipment, attending training can be hindered by the inability to provide backfill or provide traveling funds, on-site training is needed, limited animal sheltering facilities, limited control officers
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Locate and obtain funding streams to purchase equipment, hire officers, and provide in-house training or train the trainer courses and for animal control officers and facilities	

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Priorities

Results of the recent survey indicated: Important mental health issues within the counties; intensive outpatient treatment programs, veterans' services, sliding scale fee-based services for individuals without insurance, and specialized training for court, law enforcement, and victim assistance personnel.

Identify the important substance abuse issues; aftercare treatment, education programs, counseling/therapy, dual diagnosis treatment, DWI intervention, and school-based prevention programs.

Priority #1	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Transport of Mental Health Individuals	The difficulty for persons in rural areas to access transportation to services
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
More accessible transportation for mental health clients, develop resources and make them known to all counties and agencies	

Priority #2	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Limited beds for short/long-term services	Shortage of space in hospitals for mentally ill clients
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
More local inpatient beds or local beds in adjacent counties, more civil beds in state hospitals	

Priority #3	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Need for indigent services	Chronic homelessness, need for more shelters, and services for healthcare
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Locate funding streams and agencies that will offer more services	

Priority #4	
<i>Problem Identified</i>	<i>Data</i>
Substance Abuse	Effective and consistent monitoring and counseling is necessary for success
<i>Potential Response to the Problem</i>	
Support groups, prevention programs, court programs, long-term care, counseling and counseling are necessary for success	

RESOURCES

JUVENILE JUSTICE:

McLennan County Youth Collaboration - works with students in schools who are at risk for dropping out and also works with students who are in juvenile detention.

Education Service Center Region 12 - college preparedness for students, student leadership forum.

Central Texas Youth Services Bureau - assists troubled youth and families toward the development of their full potential by providing quality community-based services.

Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center - The Teen Safe Youth Traffic Safety Educational program focuses on teen traffic safety, driving responsibility, underage drinking, substance abuse, and driving under the influence. The Kid Safe program is an injury prevention program sponsored by the Trauma Center at Hillcrest. It is available to parents, caregivers, children, teenagers, and the community.

Center for Learning and Development - conducts research-based projects and provides workshops, seminars, learning tools, and group processes aimed at preventing and/or intervening with behavioral and educational difficulties.

Klara's Children Center, Early Childhood Intervention - services to children ages birth to 3 years with developmental delays.

Department of State Health Services - this State governmental agency is responsible for bringing comprehensible public health services to the citizens of all regions in Texas.

Boy & Girls Club - provides after-school and summer activities for youth ages 13+ and immediate family members.

Baylor University - Baylor Buddies

Baylor Buddies is a partnership between Baylor University and communities in school (CIS). Through the program, Baylor students mentor children in the Waco Independent School District. Children range in age from early elementary school through middle school. Baylor Buddies allows children in the community and mature as leaders.

McLennan Community College - Upward Bound Program

The upward Bound Program is designed to prepare high school students with college potential to pursue a college degree.

Hill County has hosted two Human Trafficking training events aimed at rural communities

HOTRMHMR Crisis Respite Center for Youth

City of Hillsboro Recreational Programs

Hill County Truancy Prevention Program- Truancy Prevention/Truancy Court. A voluntary program (or maybe court-ordered) that provides intensive services to youth that are using illegal substances and alcohol.

LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Heart of Texas Council of Governments - provides in-service training to officers, court personnel, advocates, and others that have a need; there is no charge to attendees that live or work within the six-county region.

McLennan Community College - offers a Law Enforcement Academy that provides in-service training to officers.

McLennan County Sheriff's Office - offers Law Enforcement training that provides in-service training to officers and deputies.

SafeCallNow.org - provides public safety, emergency services personnel, and their families with a simple, confidential way to

ask for help with an emotional crisis, addictions, or just a desire for someone to listen.

Sheriff's Offices and some Police Departments can offer their officers and deputies training.

In some cities, there are Police Departments for Independent School Districts.

SAFVIC - offers training for Law Enforcement in the area of family violence and sexual assault, and human trafficking.

VICTIM SERVICES:

Advocacy Center for Crime Victims and Children - 24-hour hotline, sexual assault nurse examiner, short-term counseling and case management, legal advocacy, and assistance in filing crime victim's compensation and VINE registration through its Victim Center program, Court Appointed Special Advocates are available to children in all counties.

Area Agency on Aging - education events regarding prevention, education regarding Texas Law, and Elder Law Assistance with filing complaints and making reports of abuse.

Catholic Charities of Central Texas - homeless prevention and rapid re-housing.

Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center Mature Driver Program - a traffic safety injury prevention program for drivers age 55 and up, also serves caregivers, families, and healthcare providers

TX Dept of Public Safety - all crime victims in the region are eligible for services: crisis intervention, personal advocacy, assistance filing for crime victims' compensation, and court accompaniment.

Some counties and cities can maintain a position of Crime Victim Assistance Coordinator - which assists all victims of violent crime within the county.

Aware Central Texas - parenting and anger management classes and educational support groups for victims of violence.

VIOLENT CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

Family Abuse Center - 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, counseling, case management, legal advocacy, court accompaniment, outreach, serving rural areas.

Some counties and cities can maintain a position of Crime Victim Assistance Coordinator - which assists all victims of violent crime within the county.

MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Bluebonnet Trails Community Services - provides outreach, screening, assessment, referrals, crisis intervention, education, support, and case management for substance and alcohol abuse.

Heart of Texas Mental Health Mental Rehabilitation - provides a full array of services to children and adults.

Cenikor Foundation - short-term addiction treatment, detoxification

Heart of Texas Recovers! - Recovery Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) focuses on education, employment, housing, peer support, transitional support, transportation, and veterans for long-term recovery.

The Area Agency on Aging has a Resource Guide available through the 2-1-1 referral service. HOT 2-1-1 is the HOTCOG component of 2-1-1 Texas which is a free social service helpline answered by trained specialists who service providers or agencies that can best assist them. The helpline is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week by Information and Referral Specialists with multi-lingual capabilities available, if needed. HOT 2-1-1 provides assistance and information to callers of any age concerning food, clothing, shelter, utility bill payment assistance,

medical assistance, affordable childcare, eldercare, disaster relief, and much more.

REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

The issues facing the citizens of our rural counties are that not all of the above-mentioned services are available within their county. Where funding allows, the services area are sometimes made available on a limited basis, such as one day a week. Therefore, travel to the larger McLennan County or even an adjacent county may be necessary to obtain needed services. All rural counties mention transportation to services as a limitation to some degree.

The Heart of Texas Rural Transit District, through HOTCOG and one subcontractor, provide transportation to the general public, including transportation from county to county or within a county. There is a 48-hr. notice required; the fee is nominal.

HOTCOG continues to increase collaboration and communication throughout all agencies offering services and to ensure that agencies and individuals needing services become aware of what is available.

The HOTCOG Regional Planning Teams intend to improve outcomes for families with problems described in the Plan's focus area. Many agencies and organizations are trying to address problems with local funds and grant funds from multiple state and federal sources. To the extent that these funds are available, the Regional Planning Teams will continue encouraging agencies to provide services that address the outlined focus areas.

Victim services in all areas should continue to be a priority. The region will continue looking for ways to expand all victim services to the rural counties to include programs that offer

counseling, sheltering, victim assistance, and education and training.

The HOTCOG Region must continue to search for and obtain federal, state. Local funding to ensure that its law enforcement agencies, courts, and detention facilities are equipped with up-to-date equipment and training to provide the highest level of services to the communities served.

SUCCESS STORIES

Victims of Crime Act:

Advocacy Center for Crime Victims and Children provides counseling, case management, and advocacy to child and adult victims of all crimes. These vital services are not available anywhere else in the service area. These services are provided free of charge, which is crucial for victims without the resources to pay for counseling. Experiencing trauma affects the working of the brain. Chronic trauma, such as ongoing child physical, sexual or emotional abuse, can cause changes in the brain that can lead to problematic thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time. These issues will likely cause challenges throughout a person's life, even affecting how they parent & care for their children. We work with child victim to be more functional but potentially benefits multiple people in the victim's life. The staff has extensive training in treating trauma through various clinical methods.

One of our counselors worked with an adult female who, during counseling, was able to remove herself from a domestic violence relationship & begin college. She is currently in a job she enjoys with a healthy support system there. The client has been able to terminate counseling but will return if she should need further support.

A counselor worked with a parent whose child is displaying significant PTSD symptoms following sexual abuse by an adult acquaintance. Through counseling, the parent has been able to understand the symptoms & provide nurturing support, including the services of a psychologist & psychiatrist regarding academic decisions & medication. The parent's anxiety has decreased as they now better understand the presenting issues. The client has also begun to explore how childhood relationships have had a life-long impact on all other relationships & is currently working on strengthening the marriage to support their child better.

Counseling was provided for approximately one year to a 60+yo individual referred by a faith leader due to a previously undisclosed childhood trauma history. Years of untreated anxiety led to strained relationships & health issues. Through counseling, the client was able to understand the trauma's effect on her life, increase her self-esteem & begin to heal relationships.

Counseling was provided to a parent who found that her child's sexual abuse was triggering memories & symptoms of her trauma history. These symptoms began to impact her work, parenting & daily life. Through weekly counseling, the client learned distress tolerance & emotion regulation skills which she reported were helpful in all areas of her life, including improved relationships. She returns periodically when she recognizes that she could benefit from a "tune-up."

Long-term counseling was provided to a parent who was the victim of an extremely emotionally abusive relationship & whose children had been physically, emotionally abusive relationship & whose children had been physically, emotionally & possibly sexually abused by the alleged perpetrator. The cumulative trauma left her children with numerous complex trauma symptoms, which were difficult to understand & deal with. Counseling has helped the client to understand how her history has impacted her relationship choices. Multiple staff members & interns have services, including case management, crisis intervention, emergency financial assistance, court advocacy & trauma-focused therapy. The children's symptoms have decreased to the point that the family has been able to go from weekly therapy to an as-needed basis.

Law Enforcement:

In the last fifteen years, the Heart of Texas Council of Governments Law Enforcement Training Program has trained 10173 individuals, including officers, prosecution/court personnel, victim advocates, dispatchers, probation officers, and jail personnel. The program's success is due to the commitment to offer classes that meet the needs of the law enforcement-related issues in our region. Also, to increase the skill level of

officers, court staff, advocates, coordinators, and others working in law enforcement and victim advocacy.

This year the Heart of Texas County of Governments Law Enforcement Training Coordinator began working with the Heart of Texas Sexual Assault Response Team and the McLennan County Sexual Assault Response Team Family to develop a plan to reduce the number of / Sexual Assault related crimes in the region. The Training Coordinator will travel to all six counties to conduct/host short training on sexual assault-related issues. This training will cover issues such as the identification of strangulation and the risks of death for victims.

Violence Against Women Act:

Waco PD

The VAWA grant partially funds the salary of two detectives of the Waco Police Department Family Violence Unit (FVU).

Bellmead Police Department

The grant partially funds a V.A.W.A. Detective



LETAC Board



CJAC Board



**HEART OF TEXAS REGION
PLANNING COORDINATOR
LANA GUDGEL**

1514 S. New Road
Waco Texas 76711-1316
254.292.1891
Lana.Gudgel@hotcogtx.gov

**This Plan is available online at:
<http://www.hotcog.org./regional-services/criminal-justice>**