Houston County Report

**In Houston County, we have spent the past year adjusting to the challenges of the pandemic, as I’m sure you all have. W**e held hearings virtually  via Zoom for almost one year. When we resumed in person hearings, we had the bailiffs taking temperatures and handing out masks at the courtroom door. Then for a short while we loosened the requirements, but we are back to mandatory masks for everyone. We have all learned more than we ever wanted to know about Zoom. We quickly got proficient at changing the judge’s  screen name from Deborah Edwards to Judge Edwards, which cut down on the frequency of her being called “sweetie.”

     One development that has come out of all this is that we are holding hybrid hearings, where a party or witness can appear by Zoom while everyone else is in the courtroom. To aid in this, we were able to secure a 65 inch screen tv so that the Zoom images appear on the tv for everybody to see. This is especially useful for expert witnesses, as it lessens the amount of time they have to spend out of their offices.

      The biggest change in our office is that we have a new judge, Monica Wilburn, coming in to take over as judge as a result of the retirement of Judge Edwards on September 1. We are eager to continue to improve the quality of our dependency system as we go forward.