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Travis County DA says 51% of sex assault cases in her tenure ended with deal/ guilty verdict

Travis County District Attorney Margaret Moore. (KXAN Photo).
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AUSTIN (KXAN) — Days after Travis County District Attorney Margaret Moore stepped down from her role in the statewide Sexual Assault Survivor's Taskforce, she released data surrounding the prosecution of sexual assault cases by her office. Counsel for plaintiffs in a lawsuit targeting the DA's office among others over handling of sexual assault cases disputes what that data shows.

Moore left the taskforce amid criticism of how she handled these cases as District Attorney. A class-action lawsuit, brought about by three sexual assault survivors in June 2018, named the District Attorney's Office as one of several plaintiffs in the alleged mishandling of their cases.

In an effort to set the record straight, she released data about sexual assault cases her office has handled.

"It is imperative that the public know the truth," she wrote in a press release. "Those who spread false information regarding the prosecution of these cases by this Office only discourage survivors from coming forward."

Since Moore took office in 2017, she says her office received 215 adult sexual assault cases from law enforcement and of those, they negotiated a plea deal or got a guilty verdict in 111 of those cases.

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The District Attorney's Office said the data about how many cases ended in a plea deal or guilty verdict between 2011 and 2015 is pending. As a result, KXAN cannot immediately show how Moore's success during her tenure can be compared to her predecessor's.

Jennifer Ecklund of Thompson & Knight, which is representing the three women in their lawsuit, claims the District Attorney's office has not been completely transparent about its numbers. It claims she hasn't shown how many sexual assault cases were "exceptionally cleared" because her office didn't choose to indict.

“A number of our clients had their case … e the victim even had the opportunity to give a formal statement,” Ecklund sa…

The numbers Moore shared do show, h… arger percentage of sexual assault cases to trial than previous years.

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Ecklund added that through the lawsuit she looks forward “to working cooperatively with all parties to come to a resolution that holds our systems accountable for justice and for the rights of survivors. Everyone involved in this case should have the same goal—respect for survivors and justice for those who commit sexual assault.”

Moore says during her time as DA, her office added resources to create the Adult Sexual Assault Unit, increased the number of cases received from Austin police and indicted and tried more cases each year.

“In general, when I came into office, I placed a greater emphasis on our trial strength overall,” Moore said in an interview with KXAN. “We’ve had more trials each year, just overall. Since ’17 we’ve been increasing the percentage of those trials that are adult sexual assault trials, just because those cases are getting fully prepared and into courts.”

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