

What's Up College Station? Transcript

Oct. 2, 2026

Grace Hallowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today I'm joined by municipal court Judge Edward Spillane. Hi, Judge.

Judge Spillane: Hi there, Grace.

Grace Hallowell: It is that time of year again. We are here today to talk about the fall Warrant Amnesty and Roundup. We do it twice a year, and it is a very unique and beneficial program for our city. To kick things off, tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do as a municipal court judge.

Judge Spillane: I've been the municipal court judge now about 25 years. I started in 2002, and I see almost everyone in our community. It starts off when someone's 10, 11, or 12 with shoplifting, and then, of course, all the traffic citations. I see a lot of minor in possession of alcohol with college kids. The difference between my court and other criminal courts is our punishment is mostly a fine. You can go to jail if you ignore the case or don't pay the fine, but it's mostly fine-only punishment.

Grace Hallowell: What is your favorite part about your job? I know it can be a unique situation where you are the voice of authority over people, but you have some fun things that you can do as well.

Judge Spillane: Right. As I said, I see everyone. I used to be a felony prosecutor, and a lot of those cases were sad. What I like is I usually see people at the start of their ever going to a criminal court, so I get to try to prevent them from going to court again. That's my whole goal. We all get traffic tickets, but on non-traffic cases especially, my whole goal is to stop them from going to court again. Nowadays, with data centers and all that, people are very concerned about their record following them for 10 or 15 years. I really do help educate them on how they can clear their record if they're going to be a good citizen.

Grace Hallowell: What you do directly impacts our community. What are some of the ways that your job and your staff at the court help our community?

Judge Spillane: That's the joy with the court—we're helping the local community. We do a lot of education because most people are representing themselves. They can hire an attorney, but most represent themselves. We do a lot of education and teach them their options. We're not giving them legal advice, but we give them options and try to make it as smooth as possible while making sure people don't return to court. We want to make sure that for some it's a deterrent, and for other people, it's an education. A lot of college kids come here having never lived on their own, so city ordinances are not something they necessarily know. We teach them about the different laws we have in our court. I really

enjoy seeing people from across the community, and the crimes are not as serious as a felony crime.

Grace Hollowell: What changes for you in the fall? The weather is starting to get a little cooler—we hope, knock on wood. We've talked to a lot of other city employees, and this time of year things begin to change for them in their day-to-day job. What changes for you?

Judge Spillane: We've already had three home football weekends. The Texas A&M football schedule has an impact because we see a lot of alcohol cases—most of them are minor in possession of alcohol and public intoxication. They all come out of the Northgate entertainment area. In the last several years, due to many factors, there are so many people living around the Northgate area. There are a lot more underage students and individuals in our town, so the fall brings a lot more cases in terms of that.

Also, a lot more construction has happened now in the fall. Everyone's familiar with all the construction. That can have a big impact if you're speeding and not following the 60 mph limit on the highway or 45 mph on the feeders. If you get a speeding ticket and workers are present, you can't do defensive driving or deferred disposition. It's a permanent conviction on your driving record. We've seen an uptick in that because of all the construction going on this fall.

Grace Hollowell: Yes, definitely drive safely in those work zones. How can people contact you today if they have questions about anything we cover?

Judge Spillane: They can call our number at (979) 764-3683. During working hours, we're happy to help. You can leave a voicemail, but we have a very good website as well at cstx.gov/courts where you can do so much online. You can pay your fine, request deferred disposition, or request defensive driving. You can look up to see if you or a family member has an arrest warrant. People love using websites, and we recognize that there are forms on there. We also have a YouTube channel where you can learn about how to clear your case, take care of a traffic ticket, or handle an Alcoholic Beverage Code case. We do as much as we can to reach people and allow them to reach us without having to stand in line. You can always come to court, but we try to eliminate coming to court in person multiple times to make it efficient for the citizen.

Grace Hollowell: Talking about the fall Warrant Amnesty and Roundup, could you briefly explain what the amnesty period is and why our court has chosen to adopt it?

Judge Spillane: Starting October 12th and for three weeks—until the 30th, the day before Halloween—we have an amnesty. We've done this twice a year for many years. If you have a warrant and come to our court to take care of it, we will waive the warrant fee, which has gone up in the past year to \$75 per case, and you won't be arrested. It's a win for us too because you're taking care of your case and talking to us.

If you have an arrest warrant outstanding and you're driving around and a police officer stops you, they will see the warrant and you will get arrested. Even during the amnesty period, you have to come to court or reach out to us. It allows us to encourage people to clear their case. I'm happy to waive the warrant fee. Even for a Class C misdemeanor, if you get arrested, you have a booking photo on the internet with Brazos County, which isn't pleasant. We offer it for three weeks, from October 12th until October 30th.

Grace Hollowell: Times are tough right now financially for a lot of people, so anything we can do to help alleviate that burden is what we're here for. Since the program began in 2007, over 7,000 warrants worth over \$2 million have been cleared. What trends or patterns have you observed over the years during this program?

Judge Spillane: It's harder to reach people because of changing communication styles. We text people now and that works really well. It gets people in better than arresting and other methods. I've noticed a change in trying to contact people because a lot of times people just forget or put it off—they're not really trying to hide out. If we can contact them and get them to come to court, it's always better for them. During the spring, people get their tax refund checks, so sometimes they wait until then.

If you're not sure which court, contact us. We're good about telling you if it's at the JP court instead of here. The JP courts have always participated with us in the warrant amnesty as well. Any person we get in is good. Reaching people has become different through the years, and we just try to keep up with that.

Grace Hollowell: We try to meet you where you're at. After the amnesty period, the warrant roundup starts. What does that look like?

Judge Spillane: From about October 31st to November 8th—about nine days—if you have an outstanding warrant and didn't come in, officers will look for those warrants, emphasize that, and there's a good chance you'll get arrested. We call that the roundup. Those are warrants that are outstanding anyway, and officers concentrate on that as an incentive for people to come in.

If you call the court at any point and cooperate, we are not going to arrest you on court grounds, and we will work with you even during the roundup period. We have the roundup as an incentive to get the word out, because warrants tell officers to arrest a person for not communicating with the court. We do everything we can to give you notice, and hopefully people communicate back.

Grace Hollowell: Are there any measures in place to ensure fairness and avoid wrongful arrests or minimize conflicts for people who might have missed their notices, had technical issues, changed phone numbers, or lost email access?

Judge Spillane: It starts off when you sign the ticket. A lot of people are upset they got a ticket and tell the officer they don't want to sign it, but signing that ticket is your bond and your promise to appear. We look to that to make sure you have notice. Officers have body cameras now, so that's where it starts.

Notice is my main concern—I don't want anyone to get arrested who truly had no idea. If people don't come in, we call, text, and send mail to the last known address. We don't put people in warrant until over a month afterwards. If people have notice and choose not to come in, the warrant goes out. Keeping the court informed with an updated cell phone number will prevent you from getting into warrant status. The last thing I want to do is have you get arrested.

Grace Hollowell: Do you have any advice for someone who may have a warrant or isn't sure if they have a warrant? What is the first step they should take to get their case settled?

Judge Spillane: Either call the court, check online, or come by the court to double-check. We can clear it up or direct you if it's in another court. There is no penalty for asking questions. Making contact is step number one. If you give us your cell phone number, we will keep in contact, update you, and explain the law so you understand your rights.

You have a right to a jury trial or a bench trial. Most people ask for a bench trial with me because if a jury convicts you, you can't have deferred disposition or defensive driving. You have a right to a trial or to see the prosecutor. If you think you have a warrant, contact us as soon as possible to get that taken care of.

Grace Hollowell: Don't be afraid to ask questions. Do you have any final thoughts about the warrant amnesty and roundup period?

Judge Spillane: Contact us if you think you, a family member, or a child may have a warrant. You can look up the warrant list online. We work with people—if you are indigent or homeless, there are community service programs we can offer so you are successful. You don't have to pay immediately when you walk in; we will work with you. Contact us and we can help you with all of that.

Grace Hollowell: Before we go, we have a quick round of "this or that" questions related to coming to court and the warrant amnesty period. Say the first answer that pops into your head. Ready? Paying fines online or in person at the court?

Judge Spillane: Online. People like it, and you get a receipt immediately. If you have questions, you may want to go in person or call us, but online works great.

Grace Hollowell: That's how I pay all my bills.

Judge Spillane: Yeah, that's where we do everything.

Grace Hollowell: If you could eliminate one common misconception about municipal court, what would it be?

Judge Spillane: That it's an obstacle course or a place where you're waiting around like at a doctor's office or the driver's license office. We do everything to make your trip efficient and explain things to you. People aren't happy when they get a ticket, but they appreciate that we help them out. We believe in customer service, allowing people to tell us what they need to say, and making sure they understand the process.

Grace Hollowell: If the warrant amnesty and roundup period were a movie, what would the title be?

Judge Spillane: *Safe Harbor*. If you come to our court and cooperate, we will take you out of warrant status and work with you.

Grace Hollowell: That's a good one. A quick stop at court or a long stay in jail?

Judge Spillane: Definitely a quick stop in court. No one wants to be arrested and go to jail.

Grace Hollowell: What is one piece of advice you wish everyone knew about dealing with court business?

Judge Spillane: We are not there to humiliate you or make you feel bad. We are there to help you and make the process as understandable and smooth as possible. We truly want to help you.

Grace Hollowell: Thank you so much for being here today.

Judge Spillane: Thank you.

Grace Hollowell: Thank you, and that's what's up.