

Council Member Ora Houston - Biography



Council Member Ora Houston, daughter of O.H. Elliott and Thelma M. Elliott, was born in Rome, GA., and has lived in east Austin for most of her life. She attended Blackshear Elementary School, Kealing Jr. High School, the 'old' L.C. Anderson High School, and received her Bachelor of Arts in psychology and sociology from Huston-Tillotson University—all in Austin's newly-defined District 1.

Houston's father graduated from the University of Kansas in 1933. Her mother was one of the first women of African descent to graduate from the School of Social Work at the University of Texas. Houston credits her parents with instilling in her the desire to serve her community and to engage in social and civic activism.

Houston's long professional history of service-oriented work includes 27 years with the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and, prior to that, working as a caseworker with Child Protective Services and Austin Travis County MHMR. After retirement Houston worked in the office of Texas Senator Gonzalo Barrientos from 1999 to 2003.

Houston has participated in many local organizations and commissions. She was a member of the Citizens Advisory Task Force of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan and a member of the collaborative council of the Travis County Model Court for Children and Families. Houston was vice-chair of the Upper Boggy Creek Neighborhood Planning Team, and she was a part of the Disproportionately Committee of Family and Protective Services. She is an active member of St. James' Episcopal Church—an inclusive, multicultural, multilingual congregation.

Houston has received a number of awards in recognition of her community involvement including the Pioneer Spirit Award, Outstanding Women in Texas Government (1998;) Public Citizen of the Year, Texas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers (2009;) Outstanding Civic Engagement, Austin Branch, NAACP (2011;) and outstanding alumni, Huston-Tillotson International Alumni Association, (2012.)

Houston lives in the home her parents built in 1954 on East 22nd. When she isn't volunteering or performing advocacy work, Houston enjoys caring for her plants and bird watching. She is the proud parent of two adult children, Askia Shomari and Gina Houston.