



Stephen M. Howe

A MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

As I start my fourth term as your District Attorney, I would like to thank the people of Johnson County for the support and trust they have placed in me. I pledge that under my leadership the office will continue to focus on:

1. Pursuing public safety, not politics;
2. Running a professional office both inside and outside the courtroom;
3. Ensuring transparency in decisions made by government.

I have fulfilled those pledges and continue to make Johnson County a safer place. The job is not over. New challenges are on the horizon. Our office will continue to focus on public safety.

The population of Johnson County has increased greatly. We are the largest jurisdiction in Kansas. The challenges faced by law enforcement and my office have increased accordingly. Safety concerns can be kept to a minimum by working as a team with law enforcement agencies, community partners and many diverse groups within our county. This has been a major initiative of my office. We have made strides in reaching out to our partners and to the community at large, and it is my intention to continue to build upon this success.

The laws we enforce do not just happen. It would be easy to sit back and wait for the new statute books to arrive every July from Topeka. That is just not my nature. If I see that we have a problem, I strive to be part of the solution. Toward that end, I have advocated for a number of changes to the law which promote public safety and help victims of crime.

My office has worked hard with our criminal justice partners and other government and nonprofit agencies to develop many innovative programs. They include:

- The Lethality Assessment, to reduce recidivism and protect domestic violence victims;
- FAST teams, to protect our elderly population;
- Veteran's Treatment Court, to assist Veterans;
- The Co-Responder Program, to avoid incarceration of the mentally ill;
- Mental Health Diversion, to assist seriously mentally ill involved in the criminal justice system;
- NICHE Records Management System, to standardize the police reports and their submission to our office; and
- Leading efforts to create a Family Justice Center.

While we have placed great emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable of our community, we have also made it a priority to expand our efforts to combat two growing areas of criminal activity - white collar crime and violent crime directly associated with the sale of illegal narcotics.

It has been an honor to serve as your District Attorney. Our work over the past eleven years has resulted in a professional office with a renewed focus on achieving justice through the fair and open application of the law and evidence.



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WHO WE ARE

The District Attorney is both a state constitutional officer and a locally elected official. The DA's Office represents the "People of the State of Kansas" in the prosecution of criminal cases and in various civil actions. We work closely with the police agencies of Johnson County, providing and gaining support toward public safety. In addition to these services, the DA's Office provides a number of programs and services toward community education, law

enforcement training, and victim services.

The District Attorney's Office seeks to protect the safety of the public through a fair application of the law. The office seeks to achieve this by implementing the following values:

- Earn and maintain public trust by exhibiting personal integrity and professionalism,
- Advocate for victims' rights,
- Cooperate with partner agencies,
- Responsibly manage public funds, and
- Treat all individuals with fairness and sensitivity.

K.S.A. 22a-101 establishes the District Attorney of the 10th Judicial District. K.S.A. 22a-104 requires the District Attorney "to prosecute or defend, on behalf of the people... all matters arising under the laws of this state, and such civil matters... in which the state or any county in such judicial district is a party or has an interest."

CASE TRENDS

In 2020 case filings in many categories remained consistent. We saw a slight increase in domestic violence cases. Domestic violence filings handled by our office increased by 1.5%. We also saw an increase of 6.5% in person felony criminal case filings.

WHAT WE DO

In 2020 the District Attorney's Office consisted of 111 employees, including one District Attorney, 35 Assistant District Attorneys, 9 Legal Interns, and 66 support staff. With these resources in place, the Johnson County District Attorney's Office:

- Reviewed 10,943 cases for filing;
- Filed 3,191 criminal cases;
- Filed 1,789 domestic violence cases;
- Filed 1,182 juvenile offender cases;
- Filed 336 Child in Need of Care actions;
- Prosecuted 13,535 traffic citations;
- Diverted 402 criminal and 1,883 non-DUI traffic cases;
- Served 10,382 new victims entering the justice system;
- Provided 34,035 victim notifications;
- Scanned 212,317 documents into the JIMSWeb document imaging program;
- Filed 54 appellate briefs and petitions for review;
- Handled 541 consumer fraud complaints resulting in restitution ordered or mediated in the amount of \$59,496.82;
- Helped facilitate the entry of numerous low-level juvenile offenders into a wide variety of diversion/immediate intervention programs;
- Assisted with 587 protection orders.

ADDITION OF JUVENILE DIVERSION UNIT

In July of 2020 the Juvenile Diversion Unit, formerly part of the Court Services department, transitioned to become part of the District Attorney's Office. The Juvenile Diversion Unit is made up of 8 staff members who support all Intermediate Intervention Programs (MIP Program, Youth Court, and Diversion) as well as Project SKIP (Truancy). The MIP Program is a program in which a juvenile may resolve first-time minor in possession of alcohol offenses without having charges filed in the Juvenile Court System. Conditions include obeying the law and parents, not using drugs and alcohol and following the recommendations of the drug and alcohol evaluation. Youth Court is a program in which a juvenile may resolve first-time misdemeanor offenses without having charges filed in the Juvenile Court System. Youth Court is peer court wherein juveniles serve as lawyers, judges and jurors. The program utilizes community service among other sanctions at the conclusion of the Youth Court hearing. Diversion can be either pre-file (misdemeanor offenses) or post-file (misdemeanor offenses and low level felony offenses). Conditions of diversion include obeying laws, going to school, completing community service, victim restoration, completing drug and alcohol treatment or mental health treatment if applicable and meeting regularly with a diversion officer. Project SKIP is an early intervention program designed to help lower-level truant students. These students come before a panel of their peers for their case to be reviewed. Truancy review panels question truant students and attempt to identify solutions to their truant behavior. Panel members assign services to each truant based upon specific case circumstances and severity of the truancy.

MASK MANDATE

Governor Laura Kelly issued executive order 20-52 on July 2, 2020, mandating the wearing of masks by individuals in certain circumstances. The law required local District Attorney's to enforce the order. The Johnson County District Attorney's Office has received numerous questions and complaints. The District Attorney has implemented an educational response to possible violations. Callers are directed to a specific hotline phone number where information can be reported, or inquiries made. Since implementation of the hotline, 2,081 calls have been documented. An examination of the information is conducted on each call, and if a pattern of complaints develops, investigators contact the possible violators in person and document their findings. To date, 19 businesses have been contacted and educated about the mask order. The mask mandate was allowed to expire on April 30, 2021.

PLEASE WEAR A MASK

AT JOHNSON COUNTY BUSINESSES



For more information: jocgov.org/coronavirus



VIRTUAL COURT HEARINGS

The Johnson County District Attorney's Office, Justice Information Management Systems (JIMS) & the District Courts successfully conducted over 42,000 virtual court hearings throughout the pandemic. This has been vitally important to be able to keep as many cases as possible moving through the criminal justice system. We will, however, be faced with a large backlog of cases awaiting Jury Trial, Court Trial, Preliminary hearings and Severance of Parental Rights Trials when the courthouse opens back up to the public in 2021.

SERVING CRIME VICTIMS

In 2020 Victim Assistance staff and volunteers spoke to 1,874 victims about filing civil protection orders, and provided over 3,096 referrals to community resources available to them. The United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics reports in its annual Crime Victimization study that only about 50% of violent crimes and 40% of property crimes are reported to law enforcement. This means many crime victims live and work in our community who may not be receiving sorely needed assistance to recover from their victimization or to break a cycle of violence. This is why the District Attorney's Victim Assistance Unit remains committed to serving crime victims regardless of whether or not they are involved in a criminal prosecution. Many individuals seeking a protection from abuse order involving intimate partners do not call the police. This is why we administer the lethality assessment to them during this process. Over the past 12 months 49 victims completed the lethality assessment with 46 or 94% of them scoring high lethality. Though the advocates do not provide legal advice, letting victims know what resources are available and how to access them ensures all members of the community have the opportunity to be safe. Additionally, our office has two Safehome Court Advocates imbedded in our office to provide support to plaintiffs seeking protection orders and victims of domestic violence. This collaboration has been in place over 25 years.

VANGUARD REGIONAL AWARD FOR 2020

Assistant District Attorney, Vanessa Riebli, received the Vanguard Regional Award for 2020. Vanessa was nominated by her peers for her highly effective efforts put forth to prevent Elder Abuse through multi-faceted endeavors.

SUNFLOWER HOUSE CHILD ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

Assistant District Attorney, Sara Walton, received the 2020 Child Advocate of the Year Award from Sunflower House. This award highlighted Sara's work with partner agencies to hold offenders accountable and provide support and justice to children who suffer from abuse.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

In October of 2020, in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the Johnson County District Attorney's Office teamed up with Safehome to run an informational booth at Oak Park Mall. Information was handed out regarding the many services that both agencies provide survivors of domestic violence.

ONLINE PROTECTION ORDERS

Beginning in March, 2020, and in response to ever-changing barriers imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic impacting Johnson County Court procedures and services, the District Attorney's Office's Victim Assistance Unit began what ultimately became a multi-phased, systemic re-creation of Protection From Abuse and Protection From Stalking Order service to the citizens of this County and the KC Metro Area. Throughout all phases of this now year-long journey, all Victim Assistance Advocates and Volunteers worked diligently to gather resources and learn new processes, only to start adjusting all over again as the demands of the pandemic evolved. Ultimately it was adherence to District Attorney Steve Howe's motto urging us to be "flexible and nimble" and the strong community collaboration values held by this Office, we continued to provide protective order services vital to the security of so many in this County.

In effort to solve the issue of transitioning from in-person service to remote/electronic filing, the VAU began hosting virtual meetings with our in-house partners - Courthouse Security, the Civil Clerk's Office, the Help Center and the JCSO Civil Division. After first devising what was termed a "Minimal Contact Process" for protective order filings, Victim Assistance Advocates and Courthouse personnel teamed-up to develop forms which could be emailed from the VAU or the Help Center to applicants and completed electronically. With the Courthouse closed to the public, this became the only viable option for those seeking protective orders until options for collaboration eventually expanded. Our outstanding community partners – Kansas Legal Services, Safehome and MOCSA – now meet monthly to evaluate the current processes, address barriers and work to further protect those in need in Johnson County. These efforts have resulted in our Victim Assistance Unit and the Help Center emailing protective orders the Civil Clerk's Office has created a specific Protection Order email address for citizens, Kansas Legal Services created a Protection Order Hotline and both Safehome and MOCSA have staff attorneys and legal assistance staff to aid applicants.

The processes in place now ensure that all in need have access to applicable protective orders – regardless of technological ability or access – and are the result of true, community-wide collaboration.

ONLINE TRAFFIC DIVERSION

The District Attorney's Office debuted the online traffic diversion program on July 6, 2020. This was a collaborative effort with the JIMS department. The pandemic pushed this project to the forefront, as the courthouse was not accessible to the public for many months. The online diversion program allows defendants charged with certain traffic infractions issued by the Johnson County Sheriff's Department, Kansas Highway Patrol and Johnson County Park Police, to complete the diversion process, without the need to come to the courthouse. A typical traffic diversion consists of a 6-month term with no new violations, resulting in the case being dismissed after the end of that term. The on-line traffic diversion program diverted 397 cases from July 6-December 31, 2020. In second quarter 2021, the online-traffic diversion program will be expanded to include certain traffic misdemeanors.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

"I believe we can make a difference in the courtroom, but also out in our community. That is why Johnson County District Attorney's Office staff volunteer thousands of hours of time a year to various private/public, groups and non for profit agencies to make Johnson County a safe and vibrant community."

- Stephen M. Howe, Johnson County District Attorney

NEW JOHNSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

In December of 2020 all occupants of the old Johnson County Courthouse moved into the new Johnson County Courthouse located at 150 W. Santa Fe St., Olathe, KS 66061. The Johnson County District Attorney's Office is located on the 3rd floor of this new building.



**JOHNSON COUNTY, KS
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S
OFFICE**

We are grateful to our many community partners, who include, the programmers and network managers of the Justice Information Management System (JIMS), Safelink, MOCSA, Sunflower House, CASA, TLC, and many more.

To learn more, visit our website at <http://da.jocogov.org>.

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VOLUNTEERS

The criminal justice system is overwhelming to most people who become involved as victims or witnesses. Volunteers for the District Attorney's Office serve as victim advocates, educating the public about the criminal justice process, thereby enhancing the efficiency of prosecuting the case. Volunteers help the unit to serve more victims in a timely manner and allow for more individualized time to be given to victims.

DA volunteers provide notification and information to victims concerning the victim's case and the criminal justice system. They refer victims to available services/resources to help reduce physical, social and psychological problems resulting from victimization.

Additional services include:

Assisting victims with protective orders.

Escorting victims and witnesses to court and signing them up for witness fees.

Making telephone contact with victims to answer questions and explain information they have received.

Attending first appearances to gather information for the unit.

Answering phones and performing other office tasks such as filing and entering information into the computer.

The DA generally has around 15 active volunteers who are mainly located in the Victim Assistance Unit. In 2020, the number of active volunteers had to be reduced due to the pandemic, but volunteers were still able to donate over 1,400 hours to the DA's office. They range from high school students to retirees.

Anyone who wishes to volunteer may contact the Johnson County District Attorney Office's Volunteer Coordinator @ 913-715-3029, for further information.

THANK YOU

None of the work accomplished in the District Attorney's Office is done without the support, collaboration, and assistance of our many community partners. With that in mind, we would like to offer this special note of thanks to the following:

- Ed Eilert, Board of County Commissioners Chairman
- Becky Fast, 1st District County Commissioner
- Jeff Meyers, 2nd District County Commissioner
- Charlotte O'Hara, 3rd District County Commissioner
- Janee' Hanzlick, 4th District County Commissioner
- Michael Ashcraft, 5th District County Commissioner
- Shirley Allenbrand, 6th District County Commissioner
- Calvin Hayden, Johnson County Sheriff
- Penny Postoak Ferguson, County Manager
- Johnson County Chiefs of Police

District Attorney's Office Units and Divisions:

Main Line	913-715-3000
Victim Assistance	913-715-3004
Diversion	913-715-3114
Traffic	913-715-3011
Juvenile	913-715-3149
Consumer Fraud Hotline	913-715-3003
Juvenile Diversion	913-715-7476