



Stephen M. Howe

A MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY:

As I start my sixteenth year 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 these pledges and continue to help 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 greatly increased. 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 the 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.

I continue to work with legislators in Topeka and Washington, D.C. to advocate for common sense approaches to public safety and public health.

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;
- Drug Treatment Court;
- Behavioral Health Court;
- 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.

My office has always placed an emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable in our community, the children and the elderly. We have also focused additional resources on combating organized crime hitting our retail businesses and deaths associated with the sale of illegal narcotics, especially the rise of fentanyl in Johnson County.

It has been an honor to serve as your District Attorney. Our work over the past fifteen 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.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Case Filings	2
Case Trends	2
Community Involvement	3
Awards & Initiatives.....	4
Initiatives	5
Volunteers/Victim Assistance	6





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 2023 case filings in several categories increased. Our office saw a 25.3% increase in felony level juvenile offender case filings and a 17% increase in criminal case filings. We continued to see an increase in Care and Treatment cases by 12.5%.

WHAT WE DO

In 2023, the District Attorney's Office consisted of 124 full time employees: including one District Attorney, 41 Assistant District Attorneys, 9 Legal Interns, and 73 support staff. With these resources in place, the Johnson County District Attorney's Office:

- Reviewed 12,037 cases for filing;
- Filed 3,705 criminal cases;
- Filed 1,737 domestic violence cases;
- Filed 1,144 juvenile offender cases;
- Handled 339 pretrial diversion juvenile cases;
- Filed 223 Non-Truancy & 246 Truancy Child in Need of Care actions;
- Prosecuted 8,555 (non DUI) traffic citations;
- Diverted 674 domestic violence and criminal cases;
- Diverted 1,492 non-DUI traffic cases;
- Assisted 1,184 victims with resources to file protection orders and provided 24,187 referrals to community resources;
- Filed 519 Care & Treatment cases;
- Provided 32,377 victim notifications;
- Filed 28 appellate briefs and petitions for review;
- Handled 330 consumer fraud complaints resulting in restitution ordered or mediated in the amount of \$150,159.55
- Reviewed Kansas open record and open meeting complaints.

ASSISTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Johnson County District Attorney's Office works very closely with our law enforcement agencies to assist them in their investigations. This includes assisting them with search warrants and inquisitional subpoenas. In 2023 our office handled 708 search warrants. Our office handled 842 inquisitional subpoenas. We saw a 7.77% increase in these requests from 2022. Working together on these matters helps us protect our community and hold offenders accountable.



POLICE ACADEMY TRAINING

This office encourages staff and attorneys to engage with our larger professional community. To that end, our assistant district attorneys teach 17 courses to police recruits. This translates to 57 hours of teaching per academy session for a total of 171 hours per year. Some of our ADAs have been teaching their classes for decades, to generations of Johnson County law enforcement recruits.

Additionally, many of our attorneys are subject matter experts who teach stand-alone classes or seminars in such subjects as ethics, domestic violence prosecution, economic crime prevention, juvenile law, and other areas of Kansas law such as KOMA/KORA.

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

PARTNER AGENCIES

I have and continue to assist our partner agencies in a variety of roles. This included serving on the fundraising committee that raised money to expand Safehome's domestic violence shelter, and MOCSA's advisory committee. I am currently serving on the board of directors for Sunflower House, our Child Advocacy Center (CAC) and the Family Justice Center which assists victims of violence.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COUNCIL (CJAC)

The District Attorney's Office is a member of the Criminal Justice Advisory Council. We also participate in several of their subcommittees including pre-trial stakeholders, Juvenile Corrections Advisory Board, Disproportionate Minority Contact and Justice and Mental Health Work Group. These groups are a partnership of criminal justice agencies, local government, and members of the public.

The goal of these committees is to:

- Reduce the number of mentally ill in the court system;
- Maintain public safety;
- Reduce recidivism;
- Ensure there are not disproportionate minority contacts;
- Fair and consistent bonds for offenders.

These efforts are some of the reasons why Johnson County is an "innovator county" as declared by the Council of State Governments.

KSARAC

District Attorney Steve Howe has continued to work with the state-wide Kansas Sexual Assault Response Advisory Committee (KSARAC) group. It is made up of members from numerous disciplines including prosecutors, law enforcement, crime labs, system and community-based victim services and the medical community. This committee is working on establishing best practices for each of these professions who work on sexual assault cases.

Steve had previously served on the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) committee that led the way in eliminating the State's backlog of untested DNA from sexual assault kits.

VIRTUAL COURT HEARINGS

The Johnson County District Attorney's Office, Justice Information Management Systems (JIMS) and the District Courts have conducted tens of thousands of virtual court hearings throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to do so in a limited capacity even today. This has been vitally important to be able to efficiently process the thousands of court cases per year. This has benefited victims and defendants alike by reducing the amount of time needed to appear in court.



Earl O'Connor Civility Award

The Johnson County Bar Association awarded the 2023 Earl O'Connor Civility Award to Assistant District Attorney Don Hymer at the Bar Association Luncheon held on December 6, 2023.

RISE OF FENTANYL

In 2023 we continued to see the impact of Fentanyl on our community. The medical examiner reported 48 fentanyl-related deaths. This is despite legislative efforts that made Narcan available to the public. We continue to work with other agencies and non-for-profit groups to educate our youth on its lethality.

District Attorney Stephen Howe has been working with Johnson County law enforcement on targeting dealers of fentanyl. This includes filing cases where dealers have sold fentanyl that resulted in deaths of our citizens. Under Kansas law, we can charge those individuals with a felony under K.S.A. 65-4107. A number of cases have been filed against these dealers of death.

Steve proposed legislation to strengthen penalties against dealers of this deadly drug. Senate Bill 413 was presented to the 2024 legislature and Steve testified on behalf of the KCDA.

VIOLENCE ASSOCIATED WITH MARIJUANA

Johnson County continues to see violence that is associated with the sale of marijuana. In 2023 we had four more incidents that resulted in juveniles and young adults being charged with felony murder. These cases plus other compelling data, including from our medical community, is why Steve testified in opposition to the medical marijuana bill at the Kansas Legislature during the 2023 legislative session.

WORKING ON THE CASE BACKLOG

During the pandemic we had several court shutdowns which impacted our ability to process the thousands of cases we handle each year. By early 2022, that backlog had grown to 2,000 cases. This resulted in staff carrying double the normal caseloads they handle. The office has worked diligently to eliminate this backlog. By the end of 2022 we had eliminated a third of this case backlog. We are confident that over the next couple of years the majority of this backlog will be eliminated.

SPECIALTY COURTS

The Johnson County District Courts began the process of creating two new "Specialty Courts". The goal of specialty courts is to create intense programs that aid in changing behavior and reducing recidivism. With the help of grant funding, the District Attorney and other criminal justice partners developed parameters for these courts. In the fall of 2023, the two new specialty courts began operations.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COURT

Johnson County has already been deemed an "Innovator County" by the National Association of Counties, for its work in keeping the mentally ill out of our jail. However, there are still individuals who suffer from serious mental illnesses that cause conduct which results in criminal charges being filed. The DA's office offers mental health diversion for some offenders who suffer from severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI). While this has been effective, there are individuals who do not meet the criteria for this diversion program. The behavioral health court will supplement the existing programs and provide additional opportunities for those criminal justice involved individuals who suffer from SPMI to obtain assistance and stabilize their behavior.

DRUG COURT

While Johnson County provides a number of programs to treat individuals who suffer from substance abuse, we all recognize that there are opportunities to develop a dedicated program for those most at risk. This Drug Court will focus on individuals who suffer from serious substance abuse issues which have resulted in criminal charges. Both criminal justice agencies and private providers were involved in structuring the parameters for this court. The goal is to provide intense programming to reduce offenders' involvement in the use of illegal drugs. Senate Bill 123 eligible individuals are allowed to participate in drug court.

PROSECUTOR OF THE YEAR

Assistant District Attorney Kendall Kaut was named Prosecutor of the year at the Impaired Driving Conference in October of 2023.



ADULT DIVERSION COMMUNITY SERVICE REQUIREMENT

The Johnson County District Attorney's Office partners with the Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission's Metro Community Service Program (MCSP) to monitor defendants required to perform community service as part of their diversion contract. MCSP collaborates with area non-profits to secure worksites for defendants to perform their required community service hours. One of our main missions is to promote justice. At times that means implementing programs such as community service that not only benefits our community, but the offender as well. This allows those who have taken from our community in some way the opportunity to give back. In 2023 there were 6,226 hours performed.

CARE & TREATMENT FILINGS HIT RECORD HIGH

The Johnson County District Attorney's Office files civil mental commitment cases under K.S.A. 59-2945. Under this statute, all county and district attorneys have the responsibility to file cases, when appropriate, to ensure the safety of the community and the mentally ill person in crisis. The purpose of this statute allows our office to file petitions on behalf of a qualified mental health professional, when a resident is thought to be a danger to themselves and/or others and lacks capacity to make their own mental health treatment decisions. In 2023 we saw a 13 % increase in filings for a total of 519. Since 2019 we have seen an increase of 190% of court filings. The District Attorney's Office has a dedicated Care and Treatment team responsible for the timely filing of petitions and handles court hearings for those cases.

ONLINE TRAFFIC DIVERSION

The District Attorney's Office began its online traffic diversion program on July 6, 2020. The creation of our online traffic diversion program 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, Kansas Highway Patrol and Johnson County Park Police, to complete the diversion process, without the need to come to the courthouse. Traffic diversion consists of a 6-month term and requires no new violations. Successful completion of the diversion allows the case to be dismissed. In September of 2023 our 3,000th traffic case was diverted through our online traffic diversion program. An estimated 54% of our traffic cases were processed online.

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), Safehome, MOCSA, Sunflower House, CASA, TLC, and many more.

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

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers for the District Attorney's Office continue to provide support through service in our Victim Assistance Unit and the Traffic Diversion Unit.

Volunteers provide a number of services to aid the public. They include:

- Answering victims and witnesses' questions and concerns,
- Assisting victims with protection orders,
- Referring victims to available resources,
- Escorting victims and witnesses to court,
- Notifying victims and witnesses of upcoming court hearings.

In 2023 volunteers provided over 2,596 hours to help support those efforts. Volunteers help create positive community connections which are not only an added bonus for us, but Johnson County at large.

If you have an interest in volunteering, please contact the Johnson County District Attorney Office's Volunteer Coordinator @ 913-715-3029, for further information.

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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 and law enforcement agencies. We would also like to thank the Johnson County commissioners for their continued support of this office, so we keep Johnson County a safe and vibrant community.

- Mike Kelly, 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

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

