



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
EIGHTEENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

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As my first year in office comes to a close, I thought it appropriate to send out a year-end update to let you know what we have accomplished and our future plans.

CRIMINAL DOCKET

The growing size of the criminal docket was my primary concern this first year. In July of 2012, the month before my election, the criminal jury trial docket had grown to 1246 cases, which was becoming more than our system could efficiently handle. Continuances exasperated witnesses, victims and law enforcement as subpoenas had to be issued and reissued while staff time was spent preparing and re-preparing cases. In cooperation with the courts, we reviewed the docket and discovered roughly 75% of the jury trial docket was populated by relatively low level, property crime cases.

I created an Initial Assessment Docket (IAD) with a full-time, experienced attorney to target low level, non-person crimes committed by first time offenders for resolution within days, not months. Since March of 2013, the IAD docket has processed over 350 cases. Additionally, I set up a new Economic Crime Unit with a chief attorney and 3 lawyers who devote their attention to the repeat property crimes offenders. In cooperation with the judges, our jury trial docket in December of 2013 fell to 860 cases (which includes certain DUI cases that had been left off the 1246 cases identified in July of 2012). This represents a 30% reduction in the size of our dockets, all while charging 380 more felony criminal cases than we did the year before I took office. Special thanks is due to support staff including our victim/witness coordinators, and records, charging, journal entry and diversion staff whose work contributed mightily to the gains we have made.

ECONOMIC CRIMES UNIT

The creation of the Economic Crimes Unit has also enhanced our focus on cases that might otherwise be delayed to focus on person crimes. While rapes, murders and gang crimes will **always** remain priorities, the truth is that more citizens are victims of forgeries, auto break-ins, and other "less serious" crime. This unit has processed over 170 cases prior to the first evidentiary hearing, meaning no witnesses were called or inconvenienced. These increased efficiencies have allowed us to focus on habitual property crime like the defendant responsible for several hundred thousand dollars in thefts, car burglaries and identity theft in Sedgwick, Harvey and Butler counties. Our office charged all the cases, bundled all his identified crimes into one prosecution and sent him to prison for over 11 years—all for

property crimes that by themselves typically lead to 1-3 yr sentences and probation when handled in isolation.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

I have attended more meetings than I thought possible this year but the results have been very positive. I initiated a meeting in April with law enforcement (prosecutors, Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police) from all the surrounding counties in the region with the goal of increasing cooperation in cross-jurisdictional investigations. The inroads made in the meeting lead to the joint decision to have the Sheriff of Reno County, Randy Henderson, handle the investigation of the 30+ hour standoff on South Seneca in July, ensuring an objective review of the incident as both the Sedgwick County Sheriff and the Wichita Police Department had been actively involved in the shooting/standoff.

JUVENILE AND CHILD IN NEED OF CARE

Our child in need of care division daily handles the most taxing and emotionally draining cases in the judicial system. This year, we inherited a docket that reaches approximately 900 cases from the state child protective services agency – without adding any attorney or staff positions to the office. This, in addition to handling our normal caseload which included 502 cases involving 315 families in 2013. Our juvenile offender division handled 1248 juvenile offender cases. In addition to their regular tasks, attorneys at the juvenile division also covered over 800 care and treatment cases (involuntary mental commitments) involving adult mental health patients.

GANG UNIT, SEX CRIMES UNIT AND TRAFFIC UNIT.

The attorneys in the Gang Unit and Sex Crimes Unit continue to handle a high volume of gun crimes, rapes, child sex crimes as well as 19 separate homicide jury trials in 2013. Meanwhile, the attorneys and staff in our traffic unit did yeoman's work in 2013, processing over 23,350 traffic cases, over 12,000 of which required personal handling.

One step I have personally taken with respect to murder cases is to meet personally with the family of each victim within days of the filing of homicide charges. Despite the terrible circumstances, we have received very positive feedback from the families regarding this practice.

CARR BROTHERS AND "HARD 50"

I recently attended the oral arguments before the Kansas Supreme Court regarding the quadruple murders committed by the Carr brothers in 2000. While the Carr case obviously received the most attention, our appellate division handled 299 appeals filed by defendants and appeared for 59 separate oral arguments before our state's appellate courts.

I was also part of the team of four prosecutors state-wide assembled by Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt to assist in the drafting of the "Hard 50" fix applicable to especially heinous murder cases.

CASES PROSECUTED BY THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Personally, I tried a sex crimes case in the spring against a local coach involving four former female students which lead to convictions and a sentence of exceeding forty-five years to life. This fall, I also tried the capital murder case arising from the double murder in a Dollar

General Store in Wichita, and obtained a guilty verdict in less than two hours of deliberation. I am scheduled to try the attempted murder trials of two individuals charged with shooting a Sedgwick County Sheriff's Deputy following a car chase into Butler County, and a cold-case murder from Park City. I will also handle the recent double murder of the Bluml couple from Valley Center. In short, I am trying to maintain a presence in the courtroom.

WEEKLY NEWS BRIEFINGS

In an effort to increase the transparency and accessibility of the office to the community, I have instituted weekly news briefings with the local media where I discuss matters affecting criminal justice in our community. I also have made on-camera presentations at these meetings to explain to the public my findings relative to officer-involved shootings that have taken place in the community.


FUTURE GOALS

We continue to work on improving the docket size and to increase efficiencies in the system. We are rolling out updates to our diversion program; preparing proposed legislation with the cooperation of the Sedgwick County legislative delegation designed to combat copper theft; and working to increase the scope of our consumer protection division. The task is made much easier by our excellent, dedicated and highly professional staff.

We hired an IT specialist whose sole task is to utilize technology to streamline processes. In one project alone, 40 + hours of data collection and analysis now takes less than 1/2 day. Moving forward, we will continue to look for ways to increase efficiencies, including an ongoing effort to issue law enforcement subpoenas by email rather than taking staff time to print, process and send paper subpoenas.

When people ask if the job is what I expected, I have said that while I knew it would be busy, it has been busy in ways that I might not have expected. The attention to administrative issues with 120 employees is quite time consuming. The number of meetings; paperwork and emails is at times staggering. But it has been an enormous privilege to sit at this desk and represent the citizens of my hometown.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Marc Bennett
District Attorney