



MISSOURI ASSOCIATION OF PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS

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PROSECUTORS PURSUE BEST PRACTICES FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Missouri's prosecutors have announced a new initiative aimed at improving the criminal justice system. The Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (MAPA) will establish a Best Practices Committee to make recommendations regarding the best ways to address complex issues routinely confronted by prosecutors.

The initiative stems from a unanimous vote of MAPA's membership at its Annual Meeting last week. Missouri's 115 elected prosecuting attorneys comprise the voting members of the organization.

MAPA created a six-minute public service video to accompany the new initiative, which can be viewed at [this link](#).

Eric Zahnd, MAPA President and Platte County Prosecuting Attorney, said, "As prosecutors, we don't just try to win cases. We embrace a higher calling to do justice, which means both convicting the guilty and protecting the innocent. Studying and implementing the best practices for law enforcement and prosecution will help us to fulfill our duty to obtain just convictions against only those who are guilty of victimizing law-abiding citizens."

The initiative will include several specialized subcommittees focusing on areas that are frequently subject to disputes with criminal defense attorneys, such as forensic sciences, eyewitness identification, jailhouse informant testimony, recorded interrogations, and the death penalty.

Other subcommittees will help establish best practices for prosecutors in specialized cases involving children, the elderly, victims of sex crimes and domestic violence, DWIs, and collection of child support.

The effort will also concentrate on performance aspects of prosecutors' offices in such important areas as ethics, cyber evidence, office technology, and courtroom presentation technology.

Matt Selby, MAPA's President-Elect and Stone County Prosecuting Attorney, noted that Missouri's prosecutors have been informally pursuing similar initiatives for several years. For

example, in 2009, Missouri prosecutors wrote and successfully persuaded the Missouri legislature to pass the law that requires police to record interrogations of people suspected of committing dangerous felonies.

“We believe juries have a right to the best evidence of whether someone is guilty of any crime charged—including actually seeing and hearing what a suspect told police,” Selby said. “So we worked to see that the law required interrogations to be recorded.”

St. Louis City Circuit Attorney Jennifer Joyce, a past MAPA president who serves as a member of the committee, said the Best Practices Committee’s work would further reduce the very rare instances of wrongful convictions.

As St. Louis City’s top prosecutor, Joyce began the DNA Justice Project, which reviewed about 1400 cases where modern DNA technology could shed light on crimes that had occurred decades earlier. In the vast majority of cases reviewed and tested, DNA results proved that the prior convictions were correct. However, in a handful of cases, DNA testing showed that the person who was convicted had not committed the crime, and Joyce worked with criminal defense attorneys to obtain the defendants’ release from prison.

Joyce said, “Unlike what we often see on TV, prosecutors aren’t focused on getting convictions at any cost. Prosecutors have an array of tools at our disposal to ensure we are prosecuting only those defendants for whom we have the evidence to proceed in court. We believe the work of this task force can enhance the quality, effectiveness and application of these tools to ensure the most just outcomes possible.”

Missouri will become the second state in the nation where prosecutors have instituted a Best Practices Committee. Prosecutors in New York created a similar committee in 2009, and MAPA consulted with the leader of the New York initiative in developing the project for Missouri.

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