



Missouri's Prosecutors  
- Innovative Programs -

National Prosecutors' Consortium



November 2019

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# The Evolving Role of the Prosecutor

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Over the last forty years, there has been a dramatic transformation and expansion of prosecutors' mission, to not only vigorously prosecute criminal cases, but also to engage in crime prevention, problem solving and community partnerships. Prosecutors' fundamental goal is to protect the community and ensure justice when enforcing the law. Traditionally, a prosecutor's role was a limited and relatively passive one - to evaluate and prosecute arrests made by the police.<sup>1</sup> That role has expanded and evolved significantly. The shift is driven by the need for more complex solutions that not only seek positive outcomes for victims, but also strive for long-term solutions for preventing crime and assisting those who are entangled in the criminal justice system.

Prosecutors are uniquely situated to be effective in carrying out these new initiatives. They play a pivotal role in the criminal justice system, making decisions and exercising discretion about whether to prosecute, whom to prosecute, and how to prosecute. Also, as leaders in law enforcement, prosecutors can work with the police and other partners to improve community relationships and to build trust in the criminal justice system.



1. Catherine M. Coles, *Evolving Strategies in 20<sup>th</sup>- Century American Prosecution*, in *THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE AMERICAN PROSECUTOR, 182-187* (John L. Worrall & M. Elaine Nugent-Borakov, eds., 2008).

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## The National Prosecutors' Consortium

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The National Prosecutors' Consortium (NPC) project is designed to collect information on innovative programs employed by prosecutor offices, to assist prosecutors in developing and deploy-

ing new programs, and to expand their research capabilities. The main areas of focus are the prevention of violent crime, community engagement, and encouraging victim/witness cooperation.

Many of the nation's prosecutors relish the opportunities presented by their expanded roles in the criminal justice system and have adopted innovative programs. However, the nature of their new initiatives is impacted by the size and resources of the organization. A large office with plentiful resources can implement multiple forward-thinking initiatives that impact a large segment of their population. Conversely, a smaller jurisdiction may only have the capacity to develop a smaller, yet still meaningful initiative.

Innovative programs described in this paper are newly developed initiatives undertaken by an office in keeping with its unique resources and the needs of its community. Ideas for new programs are freely shared amongst prosecutors and can nevertheless be innovative when they are introduced, implemented, and customized to suit the needs of a particular office. For instance, a program that would be considered innovative in a smaller office, may be more common-place in a larger office. We seek to highlight those offices that are embracing their new role by working within their capacity to bring effective and proactive programs to their communities.

As part of the NPC project, a prosecutor survey was administered during 2019 at the county level across the United States on a state-by-state basis. The survey captures baseline information about prosecutor offices and collects information about the various evolving and non-traditional aspects of a prosecutor's office, such as alternatives to incarceration, preventing violent crime, community outreach, victim/witness support, and treatment programs.



## Overview of Missouri Prosecutor Programs

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Missouri prosecutor offices range in size and in the types of communities that they serve. Some serve in large bustling cities like Kansas City and others work in suburban districts or rural areas. The available resources and staff vary greatly between the offices, as does the needs of their communities.

Out of 115 counties in Missouri, 47 counties (41%) participated in the NPC survey. The survey demonstrates that the responding Missouri prosecutors participate in a wide variety of programs and initiatives. These programs include Drug courts, community service, Drug/Alcohol treatment, Victim Assistance, Restitution, and Co-located Child Abuse reduction programs.<sup>2</sup>

The survey found that 85% of responding prosecutors engage in problem solving courts or other programs that offer alternatives to incarceration. Prosecutors most frequently run Drug/alcohol treatment (76%), community service (73%), anger management (64%), and domestic violence diversion (64%) programs. Some offices also provide training/education programs (51%) and mental health services (44%). Regarding specialized programs, the most common types of programs were Restitution (96%), Victim Assistance (89%), Witness Assistance (57%), and Victim Services without Arrest (57%).

Community programs that prosecutors either run or participate in are also common. Offices reported participating in Co-located Child Abuse reduction (48%), Community Engagement (40%), and Co-located Domestic Violence reduction (28%) programs.

2. Solomon, S. E., Uchida, C. D., Connor, C., Swatt, M. L., Revier, L., Quigley, A. M., Hock, S., & Barrera, V. (2019). National Prosecutors' Consortium Survey Highlights: Missouri. Justice & Security Strategies, Inc .

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## Innovative Programs - Examples

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To demonstrate the variety of innovative programs initiated in Missouri, three offices are highlighted: Jackson, the largest county with over 700,000 residents, St. Charles, a mid-sized county with almost 400,000 residents, and Platte, the smallest of the group with just over 100,000 residents.

Jackson County runs a Caring for Crime Survivors program where a team from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office delivers a fresh bag of groceries to crime victims. The team also offers a variety of services, including in-home counseling and more. In St. Charles County, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office implements an alternative to traditional probation or incarceration designed for young, first-time, non-violent offenders. Platte County takes proactive measures to better help kids whose parents may be involved in the criminal justice system, through its Handle with Care program. In cooperation with the local mental health provider, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office uses a web-based service that allows police officers to notify school district officials when officers respond to a call where children are present.

# Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

Population: 700,307

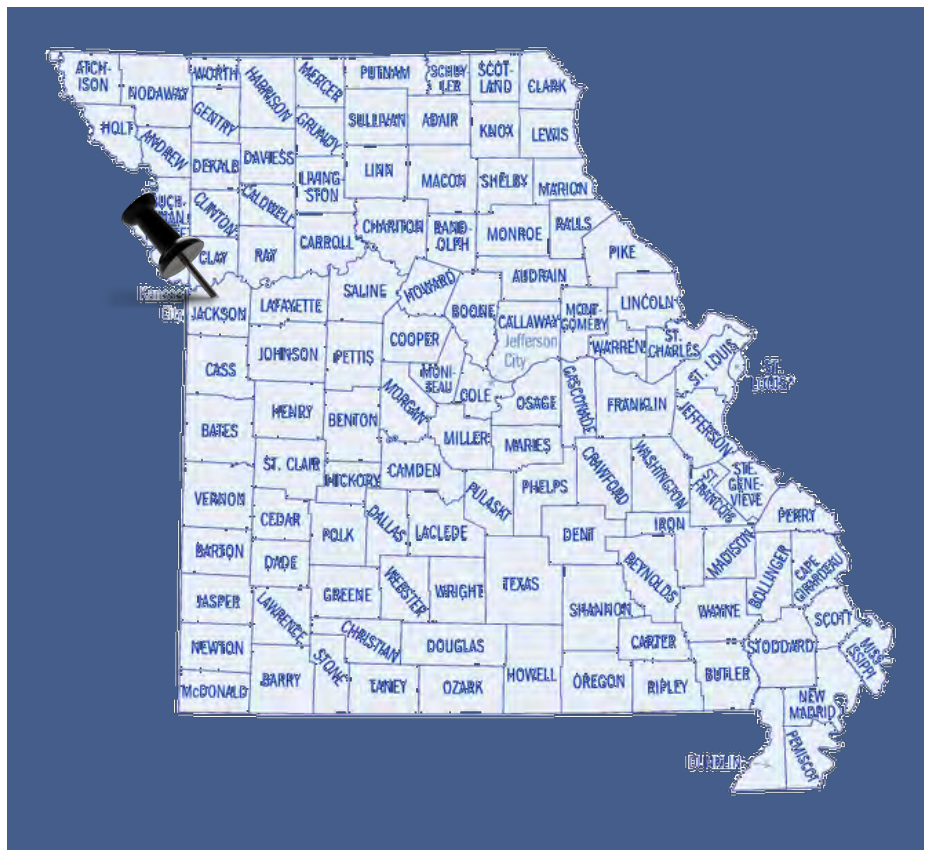
Number of Prosecutors: 65 full-time prosecutors, 5 part-time prosecutors

## Caring for Crime Survivors

Oftentimes, individuals who experience a particularly high degree of trauma from a crime rarely receive the support they need through filing a criminal case. In fact, there are about three times more crime survivors than there are victims in charged criminal cases. Leaving these crime survivors to fend for themselves was unacceptable to County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker, who instead wanted to build a strong and healthy community through providing better services to crime survivors.

Growing up in a small Missouri town, County Prosecutor Baker recalled, “when something happened to a neighbor, no matter whether it was good or bad, residents would stop by, usually with a casserole.” Caring for Crime Survivors applies the same principle, but with groceries and services, in hopes of positively impacting the local community.

According to veteran victim advocate Marilyn Layton, “Out of 25 years that I’ve worked at the prosecutor’s office, this is the best thing that has ever happened.” County Prosecutor Baker said she hopes that the program can additionally help mend the tattered trust between law enforcement and the community.



The primary individuals that the Prosecutor’s Office seeks to assist include drive-by and non-fatal shooting survivors. These crimes occur frequently in Jackson County, usually in the range of 500 or more each year. The program’s multidisciplinary team that includes the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime, Layton, and others, visit crime survivors involved in cases that have not been submitted for filing of criminal charges and deliver a fresh bag of groceries. The team also offers a variety of services, including in-home counseling for the victim and family members for the resulting trauma, minor home repairs resulting from gunfire, and crime scene cleanup – such as the removal of blood and other bio-hazardous materials.

The Caring for Crime Survivors program reached more than 100 households in 2018, and due to its success, was further expanded in 2019. The Prosecutor’s Office expects to continue program expansion through a hospital intervention effort that is underway. The Prosecutor’s Office and [Combat](#) additionally funded the creation of a victim service help line.





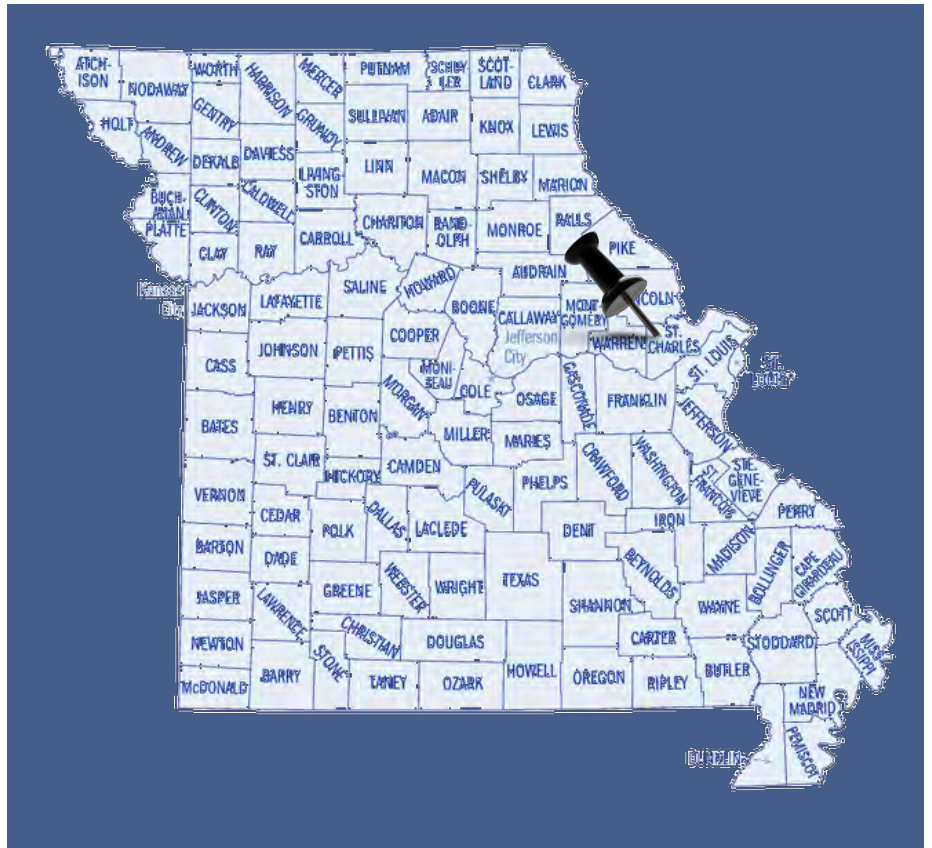
# St. Charles County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

Population: 399,182

Number of Prosecutors: 24 full-time prosecutors

## Taking Responsibility and Empowering New Direction (T.R.E.N.D)

In October 2018, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office implemented the T.R.E.N.D program as an alternative to traditional probation or incarceration. The six-month program is designed for young, first-time, non-violent offenders with the goal of providing them with an opportunity to take accountability for their actions, while at the same time empowering them to make better life decisions so as to avoid the criminal justice system. Eligible participants must be between the ages of 17 and 25, have no prior charges, and live within a reasonable distance of the Prosecuting Attorney's Office with reliable transportation to ensure they can attend the mandatory program lessons.



Once enrolled in the program, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office dismisses formal charges and defers prosecution until the program is completed. Participants are then required to complete 30 hours of community service, provide restitution, and participate in lessons on victim awareness, empathy, personal accountability, job searching skills, and financial responsibility. For the community service aspect of the program, the offender is able to choose where they complete their com-

munity service. They can either select an approved organization from the Prosecuting Attorney's list, or identify an organization of their choice. The organization, as long as it is not-for-profit, is typically approved by the Prosecuting Attorney's Office. This way, the participant has some interest in the organization and/or they selected it because it is most feasible for them to get to.



Regarding restitution, the participant is required to pay the amount determined based on the damages the victim incurred. Additionally, the participant is required to participate in a victim impact module, either online or in person.

Finally, the required lessons involve presenters from the community with different specialties, including representatives from the Health Department, Workforce Development, law enforcement, and financial institutions.

There are 12 lessons total taught in the program, held once every other week.

Since its inception, five individuals have successfully completed the program. With praise from law enforcement and victims alike, the program continues to grow, with the current number of participants at 30 and counting.

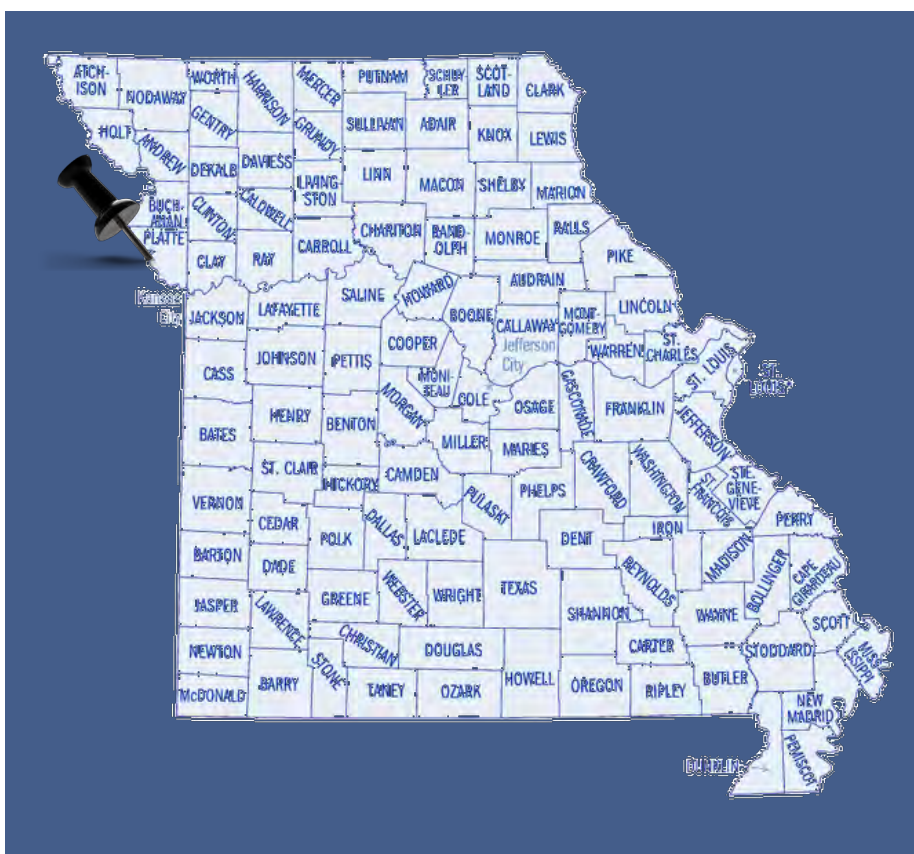
# Platte County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

Population: 102,985

Number of Prosecutors: 10 full-time prosecutors, 2 part-time prosecutors

## Handle with Care

Because prolonged exposure to violence and trauma can be detrimental to the developing brain's structure and can damage an individual's physical and mental health, children facing these issues experience greater risk for substance use disorders and other health problems. When children are exposed to toxic stress, it undermines their ability to focus, behave appropriately, and learn successfully. Oftentimes, this results in problems in school, truancy, or involvement in the juvenile justice system and, later, the adult criminal justice system. Therefore, it is paramount to reduce the effects of serious adversity on developing children.



In order to combat adversity and foster lifelong success, research shows that children should be provided with stability, skill building opportunities, supportive relationships, and positive experiences. Generally, schools are the ideal choice for the provision of this support. To this end, the Platte County Prosecutor's Office's and longtime prevention partner, the Northland Coalition, helped spearhead Handle with Care.



In cooperation with the local mental health provider, which also funds and provides staff support for the Northland Coalition, the Prosecutor's Office created a web-based service that allows police officers to notify school district officials when officers respond to a call where children are present. The alert system is both practical and efficient, as it only takes an officer a few seconds to enter the necessary information. Officers can often provide the information, which only consists of the child's address, from their cell phone while still on scene.

The alert then initiates a "Handle with Care" notification to a designated person at the relevant school district. School district personnel are trained on the impact of trauma and follow a simple protocol of notifying the appropriate staff to handle a particular student with care through additional observation and extra support. School officials generally do not reach out to the student proactively, but the information allows schoolteachers and administrators to be on the lookout for behavioral or other issues that may result from a police officer being at the student's home. Even though many cases involving the student's family members do not result in prosecution, the Prosecutor's Office believes in the importance of creating a caring school environment for children who have experienced a traumatic incident.