

## **National Prosecutor Recruitment Week**

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*Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan President, 2023-2024.*

National Prosecutor Recruitment Week is October 9th through the 13<sup>th</sup>. Across Michigan this week, and every week, our state's 83 elected county prosecutors are talking about how a career in prosecution and public service puts an assistant prosecutor on the first line of defense in our legal system and in protecting our communities.

The staffing shortfall facing many prosecutor's offices across Michigan is at a critical point. In my own experience and in speaking with my colleagues around the state, recruiting Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys is an ongoing challenge, and one that needs to be met for our criminal justice system to effectively function. On the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan's (PAAM) Web page at <https://michiganprosecutor.org/careers/>, you can generally count on there being postings for Assistant Prosecuting Attorney vacancies in at least one-third of Michigan counties. This is in marked contrast to several years ago when one would find only a handful of openings. A PAAM study released last year determined that prosecutors' offices in every county that participated was understaffed. Ten of those counties were operating at or below 50 percent of their recommended attorney staffing levels. When you consider that Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys can also be engaged in representing their county in civil matters, handling mental health commitment hearings, participating in problem solving courts, and coordinating with local Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) offices on a variety of issues, the need for more prosecutors becomes only more apparent and acute.

Advocating for our communities is at the heart of what prosecutors do. A prosecutor is a public servant that works to make our communities safer and our neighborhoods stronger. An Assistant Prosecuting Attorney has a unique opportunity to be a voice for children, to help victims, seniors, and our most vulnerable neighbors. Those who choose this profession do so knowing they will make less money, but will have a greater impact on their community, and the greater good. Being a prosecutor means you leave work every day knowing what you did mattered. Prosecutor Recruitment Week is, in part, about sharing the story of how prosecutors make a difference.

Recruiting new prosecutors has many challenges. In recent years, there are fewer people graduating from law schools, so the pool of potential applicants is smaller. Those who do graduate often have significant student loan debt. The lack of competitive pay, inadequate staffing, and heavy caseloads make it difficult for prosecutors' offices to attract even those graduates who want to serve as prosecutors. Our Counties, and the State, must improve funding for prosecutor offices to address this issue.

Fully staffed prosecutors' offices are one of the most important pieces of the criminal justice system. Prosecutors are not only the first line of defense for the victims of crime, they are the first line of defense for those accused of a crime. In Kalamazoo County this year, my office will review nearly 7,500 requests for criminal charges. 25% to 35% of those requests will be denied. Prosecutors decide not only whether someone should be charged with a crime, but also how a case should be resolved, whether a

case should be negotiated, whether charges should be reduced, and what sentence to recommend for the Judge to consider. This work is crucial for the fair administration of justice.

The critical shortage of assistant prosecutors in Michigan, and nationally, will not be solved in just a week or a year, but prosecutors our state will continue to draw public attention to the issue. Because in the end, it is not just county prosecutors who are impacted by this crisis, it is all of us- all of our neighbors and our communities. Michigan's elected prosecutors are privileged to work with tremendous public servants and committed advocates. Our challenge now is convincing more such people to join our ranks.