

2020

YEAR IN REVIEW

KNOX COUNTY DISTRICT
ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

A LETTER FROM YOUR DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL

Fellow Knox County Citizens,

After Governor Bill Lee declared a State of Emergency in March of 2020 due to COVID-19, the year took a turn no one expected. For the first time in its history, the Criminal Justice System had to retool and reconfigure its processes overnight for the unforeseeable future.

Since taking office in 2014, I have worked to improve and streamline my office's policies and procedures to maximize the Office's ability to meet its mission of pursuing the guilty, protecting the innocent, and upholding the Constitutions of the United States of America and the State of Tennessee. During my time as the Knox County District Attorney General, I have never had to balance the obligations of the office to the community with the physical health of my staff. However, the pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges. As you read this report, you will find these challenges did not deter prosecutors and victim/witness coordinators from seeking justice and doing everything in their power to maintain public safety.

Much like the rest of the community, we will feel the impact of the pandemic for years to come and in many different ways. Please know that the District Attorney's Office will never stop working for the citizens of Knox County. I am overwhelmed and impressed with the staff's commitment to our community, to crime victims, to public safety, and overall, to service. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your District Attorney General.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charmé P. Allen".

Charme P. Allen
District Attorney General
6th Judicial District

OFFICE OVERVIEW

The Office of the District Attorney General for the 6th Judicial District represents the people of the State of Tennessee in all criminal cases that occur within Knox County.

In the 6th Judicial District, most criminal cases are the result of investigations conducted by and arrests made by the Knoxville Police Department, the Knox County Sheriff's Office, the University of Tennessee Police Department, or the Tennessee Highway Patrol. The District Attorney's Office is responsible for determining whether there is enough evidence to prosecute persons accused of crimes. Assistant District Attorneys appear in the various General Sessions and Criminal Courts where such cases are tried before a judge or a jury or are resolved upon guilty pleas. In addition to courtroom duties, Assistant District Attorneys review citizen complaints about alleged criminal activity, consult with law enforcement agencies about on-going investigations, and provide legal advice to the police.



- 40+ Assistant District Attorneys
- 30+ Victim/Witness Coord./Legal Secretaries
- 3 Criminal Investigators
- 8 Executive & Admin. Team Members

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2020 CASE DATA

KNOX COUNTY GENERAL SESSIONS COURTS

35,000+ New Charges
32,300+ Dispositioned Charges



KNOX COUNTY CRIMINAL COURTS

5,490+ Opened Counts
5,340+ Dispositioned Counts
16 Trials

GRAND JURY

518 Indictments
144 Presentments



SPECIAL PROSECUTION UNITS

The District Attorney General's Office is organized into numerous specialized prosecution units to best serve law enforcement agencies, crime victims, and the citizens of Knox County. This type of model helps prosecution teams to specialize in specific types of crime and focus on the unique needs of crime victims. The majority of the units established by District Attorney General Charme Allen utilize a vertical prosecution model. By using a vertical approach to prosecution, victims are assigned a prosecutor and victim/witness coordinator to help guide them through the process of seeking justice.

CAREER CRIMINAL/ GANG UNIT

In 2020, 175 defendants were identified as gang members. The majority of these cases were assigned to the Career Criminal/Gang Unit to remove dangerous criminals from our neighborhoods.



CHILD ABUSE UNIT

With the Child Abuse Protection Investigative Team, the unit reviewed more than 1,115 reports of child abuse in Knox County in 2020. Through expertise in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases, the Child Abuse Unit can stop and punish predators found in our community and help minimize secondary trauma to victims.

REPORT ABUSE



CRIMINAL COURTS UNIT

The Criminal Courts Unit is assigned cases that do not fall under the parameters of the other specialized prosecution units. The unit prosecutors are also available to assist other specialized units for hearings and trials, as needed.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

This unit handles the highest volume of cases out of the special prosecution units. In 2020, the unit's prosecutors and victim/witness coordinators helped more than 1,700 domestic violence victims.



DUI UNIT

Through a joint effort with law enforcement, the unit seeks to reduce the number of DUI-related fatalities and injuries in Knox County. The Office seeks to hold impaired drivers accountable for their crimes. The Unit prosecuted more than 1,150 cases in the Federal fiscal year of 2020.



ELDER ABUSE UNIT



After the Tennessee legislature established the Vulnerable Adult Protection Investigative Team (VAPIT), which brings together prosecution, law enforcement, and Adult Protective Services, the Knox County District Attorney General's Office created the first specialized prosecution unit for elder abuse in Tennessee. In 2020, the team reviewed more than 1,000 reports of elder abuse.

FELONY DRUG UNIT

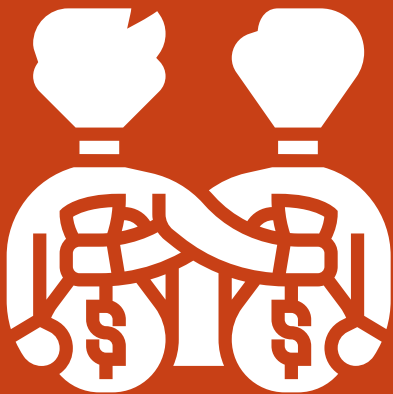
The Felony Drug Unit was assigned approximately 660 cases in 2020. This unit prosecutes drug traffickers, drug trafficking organizations, and drug distribution cases involving overdose death victims.

FELONY SESSIONS

Prosecutors in this unit are tasked with dispensing justice for misdemeanors and felonies. Felony cases are classed as more serious criminal offenses, and they have a minimum punishment of at least one year. Examples of the types of crimes include aggravated assault, aggravated burglary, or vandalism over \$1,000. In 2020, the unit was assigned 32% of the total warrants with the remaining warrants assigned to other units.

MAJOR CRIMES UNIT

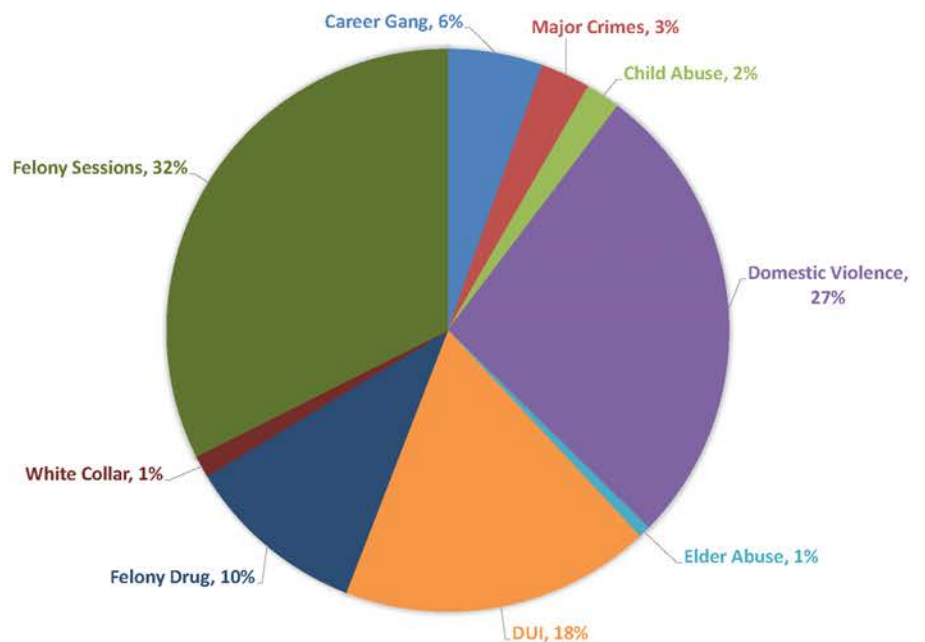
This unit is assigned crimes involving violent Class A & Class B Felonies, such as murder, rape, robbery, and arson cases. In 2020, the unit was assigned more than 180 cases. As a result, unit members walked hundreds of victims impacted by violence and/or families who have lost loved ones to violence through the criminal justice system.



WHITE COLLAR UNIT

The White Collar Unit handles financial crimes and cases involving public corruption. More than \$1,412,704.88 total restitution was ordered for financial crimes in 2020.

WARRANTS ASSIGNED BY UNIT



JUVENILE JUSTICE

Juvenile Court is a court of exclusive jurisdiction over children under the age of eighteen who violate state or municipal law or who are unruly, abused, neglected, or dependent. Juvenile Court utilizes rehabilitative efforts to address criminal behavior and to reunify families whenever possible. The District Attorney's Office works with Juvenile Court to prosecute serious offenders and to seek transfer of the most serious cases. Of the approximate 9,000 cases filed each year in Knox County Juvenile Court, about 1,000 of them involve allegations of criminal behavior by juvenile offenders. The Knox County District Attorney General's Office is involved in the prosecution of those matters.

The District Attorney's Office also works collaboratively with the Court and the Knox County School System in an effort to identify and address children who are truant as well as parents who fail to send their children to school. The office employs a Truancy Coordinator and administers a Truancy Reduction Bike Reward Program for schools experiencing chronic absenteeism. Reducing truancy is a vitally important step in preventing Knox County youth from becoming involved with the justice system, as children or adults. Research shows that children who are truant have lower grades, have higher rates of expulsion, and have lower rates of high school graduation. Research also tells us that children who habitually miss school are at risk of substance abuse, gang activity, criminal behavior, suicide, and early sexual activity, making truancy a community issue, not just an education issue.



VICTIM/WITNESS SERVICES

Victim/Witness Coordinators are employed by the District Attorney’s Office to help victims and witnesses of crimes understand their rights and answer their questions about the prosecution process. Their mission is to enhance prosecution efforts by delivering the highest quality of services to victims and witnesses through proactive and responsive assistance. **In 2020, the office assisted more than 4,100 crime victims.**

Victim/Witness Assistance Program Services

- Restitution and property return assistance
- Offender release notification registration
- Emotional support and crisis intervention
- Accompaniment to meetings and proceedings
- Safety planning and secure witness areas
- Parking and building accessibility assistance
- Assistance w/ school/work regarding court dates
- Notification of court dates and continuances
- Case status updates
- Assistance with victim impact statements
- Trial travel reimbursement (Criminal Court)
- Referrals to victim assistance agencies/resources

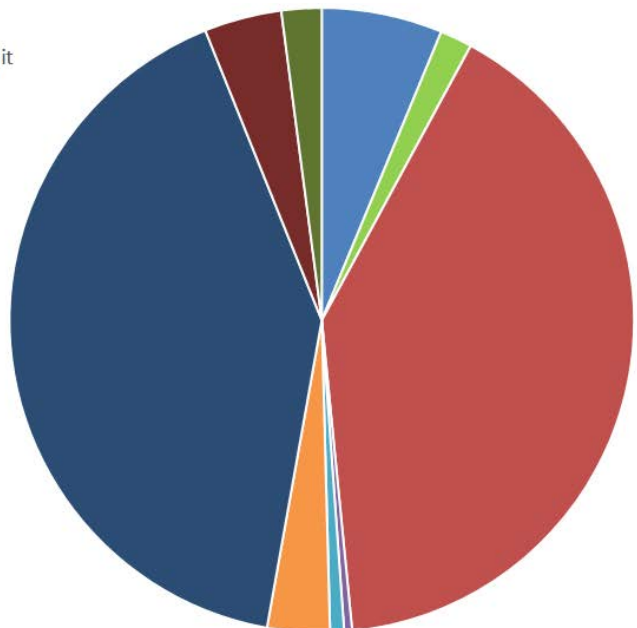
Victim & Witness Protection

No Contact Orders prohibit the accused person from some or all contact with you. These orders are often requested by victims of stalking or domestic violence, but can be used in other crimes as well.

Separate Waiting Areas are available, in certain cases, for victims and witnesses who require privacy and protections from intimidation.

CRIME VICTIMS SERVED BY UNIT

- Career Criminal/Gang Unit
- Child Abuse Unit
- Domestic Violence Unit
- DUI Unit
- Elder Abuse Unit
- Felony Drug Unit
- Felony Sessions Unit
- Major Crimes Unit
- White Collar Unit



COVID RESPONSE

Instantaneously with Tennessee declaring a State of Emergency on March 12, the Knox County District Attorney General's Office initiated the first of many steps to ensure public safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Together with stakeholders, the office began utilizing technology and creating new procedures so that the system could continue to operate as safely and efficiently as possible.

March 13

On March 13, the Tennessee Supreme Court issued its first order suspending all in-person proceedings with a few exceptions. Those exceptions included proceedings necessary to protect the constitutional rights of criminal defendants, which meant Assistant District Attorneys and victim/witness personnel were still physically required to go court.

March 20

One week after the Tennessee Supreme Court Order, the Office adapted to not only efficiently continue its work and serve crime victims but also protect its staff by deploying nearly 40 computers for use while working from home. Teams alternated coming in every other week and around the clock.

March 23

Attorneys and victim/witness coordinators still had to physically appear in Sessions Courtrooms, which were crowded with inmates and court personnel, so the Office spearheaded the work of Knox County Government IT, Public Building Authority, the court system, and the detention facility to assemble the first of many technology "carts." These carts evolved to include the equipment necessary to allow all parties required for court proceedings to appear virtually. The first "cart" allowed pleas to be taken from the jail by video, thereby decreasing the number of inmates transported into the courtroom each day. The "cart" was presented to the Sessions Judges who adopted the concept and the first pleas were accepted in Knox County Sessions Court by jail feed on March 23.





COVID RESPONSE CONTINUED

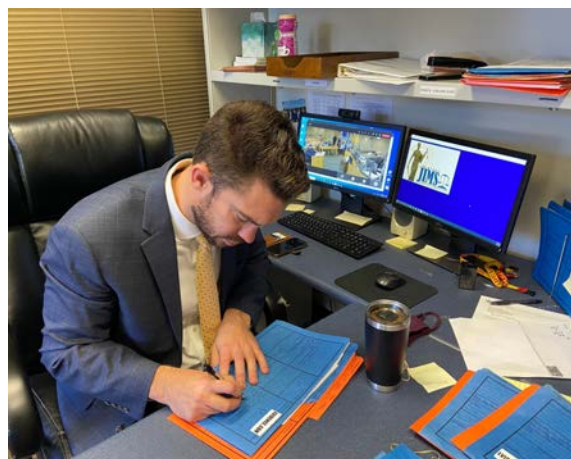
May 26

As new Tennessee Supreme Court Orders continued to implement changes throughout the year, the Office continued to adjust its staffing plans. On May 26, the Tennessee Supreme Court issued an Order lifting the ban on jury trials, effective July 6. On November 17, the ban was reinstated, effective November 23. During the July to November jury trial window, the Office returned to a full but staggered staffing pattern with safety measures in place and successfully completed nine jury trials. One of those trials was for Joel Guy, Jr. who was convicted for the heinous murder of both his mother and father. The Victim/Witness Coordinators safely coordinated the logistics for more than 50 witnesses and numerous family members from around the country.

The same May 26 Order that allowed jury trials to start back up also caused the Felony Sessions courtroom to become overly crowded with court personnel, defendants, and defense bar. In response, General Allen reached out to County IT, PBA, Don Fuller & Associates, and Sessions Court to equip the Felony Sessions Courtroom with technology to allow staff to appear virtually over Microsoft Teams. This technology created the opportunity for all staff to remain in the safety of their individual offices while still being able to appear for all cases on the felony docket.

December 21

When the Tennessee Supreme Court Order came down in December, once again suspending in-person hearings, technology was in place and was ready to be used in all jail cases set for a status other than a preliminary hearing.



INITIATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

PROSECUTOR APPOINTED TO MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE



District Attorney General Charme Allen is committed to upholding a safe community for all citizens. Starting in January of 2020, ADA Justin Pruitt was appointed as the special prosecutor for cases involving individuals experiencing serious mental illness.

These types of cases require special attention in order to ensure justice for all. It is General Allen's hope that this appointment grows to include a comprehensive approach to respond to the rise in the prevalence of cases involving individuals with serious mental illness within the criminal justice system and help address mental health needs in our community.

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK

The Knox County District Attorney General's Office planned a kick-off ceremony for the 2020 National Crime Victims' Rights Week to raise awareness about victims' rights and to recognize partner agencies who help uphold and protect victims' rights. Due to COVID-19 and the call to observe social distancing, the Office canceled the event and created a video to commemorate the week and to show its support for crime victims.

FENTANYL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Gen. Allen along with district attorneys across the state, focused on educating Tennesseans on the extreme dangers of fentanyl, the most prevalent synthetic opioid in the United States. The Knox County District Attorney's Office conducted a focus group with a diverse group of high students to determine the awareness level of fentanyl and its dangers. Findings from this focus group and focus groups conducted across the state shaped the approach for the awareness effort, which is primarily directed toward 13- to 18-year-old Tennesseans.



FENTANYL
THE DEADLIEST HIGH

FATAL OVERDOSE DEATH VICTIMS REPORT

The Office released its 2019 Fatal Overdose Victims and the Criminal Justice System Report on Overdose Awareness Day. At the time of the report's release, District Attorney General Charme Allen hosted a virtual conversation with community partners who are on the front lines and use the report's findings to prevent overdose deaths. Participating partners included All4Knox (A joint City of Knoxville/Knox County Initiative), Knox County Sheriff's Office, and Metro Drug Coalition.

2019 Overdose Death Victims
& the Criminal Justice System Report

VIRTUAL



RELEASE

& Conversation with Community Partners



BIKE REWARD PROGRAM

Despite a national bike shortage, District Attorney General Charme Allen presented a brand-new bike to nearly 90 West Hills Elementary School students who achieved perfect attendance during the 2019-2020 School Year. A grant from the Rotary Club of Knoxville funded this year's program. Additionally, Epilepsy Foundation of East Tennessee provided a helmet with each bike.

Each year since taking office, General Allen has partnered with a Knox County elementary school to reward students who achieve perfect attendance with a new bike. As part of General Allen's Truancy Reduction Initiative, she created the Bike Reward Program to encourage positive habits early on. The purpose of the program is to reward students for achieving perfect attendance, raise awareness for the importance of school attendance, and celebrate increases in attendance rates. Since the program's inception, Gen. Allen has partnered with six schools and awarded nearly 300 bikes.

"My primary job as the District Attorney is to seek justice and to help maintain public safety; however, there are a myriad of ways my office can partner with the community to prevent youth from becoming involved in the criminal justice system, either as victims or offenders," shared General Allen. "Encouraging school attendance helps build a solid foundation for our community's next generation."



