
The St. Louis County Reform COALITION

Dear Prosecutor Bell,

Congratulations on your recent election and inauguration. As members of the Reform Coalition, a broad alliance of advocacy organizations throughout St. Louis County, we stand committed to ushering in the New Year with a spirit of reform, openness to change, and passion for righting our region's numerous injustices.

We hold dear your campaign promises to seek justice by abolishing cash bail, engaging with the community in a transparent fashion, never seeking a death sentence, holding law enforcement accountable for wrongdoing, and properly running and funding a conviction integrity unit. These are the steps towards a new St. Louis County, built on trust and forged with the enthusiastic reception of St. Louis County voters. Our coalition is a watchdog organization: we will collaborate to foster change and we will speak out if resistance to reform develops.

In your first 100 days, we ask that you follow through on the following three pledges to your community. As you work to fulfill your pledges, we will affirm our own commitment to reform. Together, we seek a fundamental change in the culture of the St. Louis County prosecutor's office.

First, we ask you to uphold your pledge to ensure that the office of the St. Louis County Prosecutor becomes transparent to the people it serves. Elected prosecutors should maintain and publicly report accurate statistics of their office's actions including reductions in case acceptance rates, bail reform practices, use of alternatives to incarceration, Brady violations, charging decisions, and jury pool composition. We ask you to commit to an internal assessment of your office's data within the first 100 days and release your assessment as soon as feasible. We ask that in this 100 days you meet with coalition members and members of the St. Louis County community monthly and affirmatively disclose the steps you have taken to achieve transparency.

For our part, we will gather and publish data to assess current challenges and set benchmarks for improvement. We will create a court monitoring program, designed to ensure that reform policies are not just paper platitudes but constitute real shifts in courtroom and prosecutorial behavior and encourage all prosecutors within your office to use their power for justice.

Second, we ask you to honor your commitment to establish a conviction integrity unit. For 28 years, St. Louis County has suffered the consequences of the failed War on Drugs, criminalization of poverty, and racially charged decision-making. These policies and decisions left us with countless cases in need of review. Any proposed conviction integrity unit should function independently, possess adequate resources, be staffed by someone with a background in defense litigation, and should be modeled after conviction integrity units around the country with measurable successes. Within your first 100 days, we seek public opportunities to vet potential policies for your proposed conviction integrity unit. We ask that you share a concrete timeline with metrics to measure success for the rollout of your conviction integrity unit. We ask that those metrics include estimates on the number of cases your office will have the capacity to review monthly, the types of cases under review and how you will measure progress.

We pledge to support forums and provide analysis as needed. We will help to research national

examples like the conviction integrity unit in Harris County, Texas that produced over 138 drug exonerations in the space of several years and the one in Cook County, Illinois which has produced 33 exonerations since 2012.

Thirdly, we ask you to stand firm in your commitment to end cash bail and drastically reduce pretrial detention. Unjust cash bail policies contribute to the mass incarceration of poor people and people of color by keeping them in jail because they are too poor to pay bail. We will look to you to reform our bail system both by speaking out in Saint Louis County and in our state capitol. We expect you to develop a plan to replace bail with proven tactics to ensure individuals appear in court without deprivation of their civil liberties. Those alternatives include electronic reminders of court dates, outreach, and the speedy resolution of trials. They do not include for-profit electronic monitoring services and racially-biased risk-assessment algorithms. Within your first 100 days, we urge you to set specific benchmarks for how you will end the use of cash bail and stop pre-trial detention, and to share those with community members directly.

We will continue to research examples and alternatives to cash bail and provide you with real life examples of why the system must change and how it can. We will watch in the courtrooms and listen to residents of St. Louis County to ensure that this injustice ends.

Our coalition stands firm in its desire to hold your office accountable while working with you to make systemic changes-- changes that have been long desired, fought for, and, at last, voted for. You carry the hopes of many with you in every policy you craft and every defendant and victim that will come before you. We look forward to turning those hopes into a justice system that works for all of our residents.

In solidarity,

Action St. Louis
American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri
ArchCity Defenders
Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression
Color of Change
Missouri Faith Voices
Missourians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty
Organization for Black Struggle