

My Name is Maurine Laney, retired Magistrate Judge of the Division 1 Court in Grant County. In 2022 I retired from a 30 year career in the court, the last 12 years of which were on the bench. One thing I've learned from this experience is that, if we are concerned about the safety of our community, there is not a single more important election than that of the District Attorney.

Under New Mexico law, virtually every step of a criminal case is driven by a prosecutor. A judge cannot, for example, hold a dangerous defendant in jail without bail pending trial unless a prosecutor files a petition and presents clear and convincing evidence of that person's dangerousness in an expedited hearing. Absent a Guilty or No Contest Plea, a judge cannot find someone guilty of a crime (thank goodness), unless a prosecutor presents evidence equating to proof beyond a reasonable doubt in trial. Despite public opinion, a judge cannot summarily find a person in violation of their conditions of release or conditions of probation without a prosecutor presenting substantial evidence of the violation at a hearing. A judge with every intention of holding people accountable for their actions and imposing consequences that will deter crime and promote positive change in outcomes, simply has their hands tied unless a competent, prepared, prosecutor does their job. Believe me, I know this from experience.

The District Attorney sets the priorities for the prosecuting attorneys to follow throughout the entire district. This position requires a unique set of skills to include: being well versed in the law, understanding of the rules and time standards involved in prosecuting cases, knowing and understanding the needs of the community and any unique challenges that a particular community may have, the ability to hire and maintain a competent staff utilizing professional administrative techniques, promote a strong relationship with law enforcement officers and deputies to ensure that they have the tools they need to investigate cases properly. The District Attorney must have the heart of a public servant and have the ability to separate politics from the job at hand.

After retiring from the bench in 2022, I realized that our district needs a change in our District Attorney. Our community no longer feels safe. We have a crime problem, drug problem, and mental health crisis that requires urgent action. Over the last several years, I've watched as many excellent attorneys left our District Attorney's office. The local office in Grant County has been chronically understaffed and the remaining attorneys, while perfectly capable and well intentioned, are left with overwhelming caseloads to try to manage on their own. When an attorney is given too many cases, it becomes impossible for them to keep up with all of the necessary requirements to be able to present a strong case. As a result, people fall through the cracks and the community suffers. I do not proclaim to know the details that have lead to what seems like a mass exodus of attorneys, I can only assume that it has to do with the leadership that is currently in place.

This lack of leadership by the current District Attorney has become further evident by observing the complete breakdown of communication between the Office of the District Attorney and law enforcement. As the "Chief Law Enforcement Officer of the District", the District Attorney has an obligation to maintain and promote good communication with law enforcement officers and deputies. It is critical that the agencies work together in order to produce strong cases before the court. Under the current District Attorney, this relationship has been degraded to the point of non-existence and the results have shown greatly in outcomes at trial.

It is for these reasons that I am proud to give my full endorsement to Norman Wheeler for the Office of 6<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney. Mr. Wheeler is not a politician. He is a highly experienced prosecutor who possesses all of the desirable qualities for the position. I have every confidence in his ability to turn things around for our district. He will work with the existing staff and prosecuting attorneys to set a new tone and establish priorities that promote public safety. He will hire additional staff and ensure longevity by maintaining a high standard of professionalism within the office. Mr. Wheeler will rebuild and foster strong relationships with law enforcement and provide training as may be needed to help them improve their investigative techniques and evidence gathering. He will make himself available to members of the community and listen to their concerns. Finally, Mr. Wheeler will continue to serve the community with integrity, a strong sense of ethics, and the heart of a servant.

In 2023, I personally asked Mr. Wheeler to take on this challenge and run for District Attorney, because I know that he is the right person for the job. Now, I'm asking you, citizens of Grant, Luna, and Hidalgo counties, to get out and vote for the candidate of much needed change, Norman Wheeler for 6<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney.

Sincerely,  
Maurine Laney  
Magistrate Judge Grant Division 1, Retired