



JUSTICE *in* FOCUS

Q&A with State's Attorney Bob Berlin

Hinsdale Magazine Group last caught up with DuPage County State's Attorney Bob Berlin in January 2022. In this issue, we revisit Berlin in a wide-ranging discussion on how his office works daily to protect local residents.

Hinsdale Magazine Group (HMG):

What are the most pressing school safety concerns facing DuPage County today, and how does your office collaborate with schools and law enforcement?

Bob Berlin (Berlin): My office spearheaded efforts to create a

resource-sharing agreement among our school districts. In May 2023, we announced DuSmart, a mutual aid agreement between DuPage School Districts and Special Education Cooperatives to assist each other during catastrophic events exceeding the capacity of an individual school district. To my knowledge, this is the first agreement of its kind in Illinois.

The DuPage County School Safety Task Force, of which I'm a member, has met regularly since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. The Task Force includes superintendents, principals, school resource officers, social workers, law enforcement, fire personnel, and the

Regional Office of Education. One major focus is identifying students in crisis—those experiencing stress, bullying, or mental health issues—and getting them help before violence occurs. In many school shootings, warning signs like “leakage” occur—statements or behaviors that indicate intent to commit violence. Our Task Force has helped develop threat assessment teams in schools to address these signs. We know we can't afford even one mistake.

We prosecute all school threat cases, most often in Juvenile Court, allowing for family-involved intervention and services to address the root causes of the behavior. The goal is prevention.

HMG: Regarding violent crimes, what prevention strategies are working locally?

Berlin: DuPage County is tough on violent crime, but we're also smart on crime. We support proven programs that reduce crime, prosecute offenders, and hold them accountable. I serve on the Executive Board of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, which supports programs like early childhood education and home visiting. These initiatives improve academic and behavioral outcomes and reduce future criminal activity.

Last year, advocacy led to the Illinois General Assembly approving a \$75 million increase to preschool and birth-to-3 programs, 5,000 new PreK slots, and \$36.5 million to bolster the Child Care Assistance Program.

Our approach has helped reduce violent crime. In 2024, Unlawful Use of a Weapon by Felon cases were down 19%, Fleeing/Eluding down 7%, Aggravated Battery down 19.5%, and Domestic Violence down 5.7%. Holding violent criminals accountable deters others and keeps our streets safer. Our law enforcement agencies are exceptional, and offenders know we'll hold them accountable.

HMG: What efforts are underway to reduce repeat offenses, especially among non-violent offenders?

Berlin: Research shows problem-solving courts are effective for offenders whose crimes stem from addiction or mental illness. These courts rely on collaboration between the judicial and treatment communities to ensure both accountability and services to reduce substance abuse and recidivism.

DuPage County's Drug Court, active since 2002, focuses on breaking addiction cycles. So far, 497 defendants have graduated. The Mental Illness Court Alternative Program (MICAP) redirects offenders whose

crimes were influenced by a mental health diagnosis, providing an alternative to traditional prosecution through integrated treatment.

Our FOCUS Courtroom handles first-time drug possession cases. A specialized probation unit conducts assessments, coordinates treatment, performs visits, and files regular reports. There are over 800 cases in this courtroom.

The Veterans Court offers a second chance for veterans suffering from PTSD, brain injuries, and substance abuse. Our Diversion Program allows first-time, non-violent offenders to

"DuPage County is tough on violent crime, but we're also smart on crime."

- DUPAGE COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY
BOB BERLIN

avoid a conviction if they accept responsibility and successfully complete the program.

All these programs have strong records. Diversion programs are especially effective at preventing recidivism, positively impacting public safety.

HMG: Has the nature of financial crimes evolved with technology, and how is your office responding?

Berlin: Financial crimes have become more complex and common. To meet these challenges, I added a Supervisor and First Chair to the Public Integrity/Financial Crimes Unit, now totaling four attorneys. Our team works directly with local law enforcement to secure Grand Jury subpoenas for financial records and IP information.

We've also invested in Cellebrite software, which helps collect and analyze digital data from phones under court authorization. Additionally, we

utilize Sheriff Mendrick's Digital Forensic Investigations Unit, which conducts digital evidence extractions for DuPage and surrounding areas. These cases are labor intensive, but we're committed to prosecuting financial crimes, which often result in prison sentences.

HMG: What are the challenges in enforcing child support orders, and what resources are available?

Berlin: One major challenge is collecting support from the self-employed or gig economy workers. The easiest method is income withholding, where employers deduct support from paychecks and send it to the State Disbursement Unit. This works well for W-2 employees but is harder to enforce for 1099 earners or business owners who manage their own payroll. In these cases, compliance relies heavily on the individual's willingness to follow the court order.

A valuable resource for these situations is the Title IV-D child support program, administered by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. It uses administrative tools like driver's license suspensions, tax intercepts, and bank liens when income withholding fails. A recent amendment to the Income Withholding Act now requires employers to report newly hired 1099 employees to the department—a step forward in enforcement.

The IV-D program also partners with the Illinois Attorney General and some State's Attorneys, including DuPage County, to pursue judicial enforcement via contempt proceedings. These are reserved for extreme cases where individuals have the means but refuse to pay.

Despite the difficulties, our Child Support Division collects over \$35 million annually in unpaid support. This not only helps struggling parents but also strengthens our community. ■