

Listening Tour Recap



This September, I was thrilled to be joined on a criminal justice listening tour by Chief Judge Carol Kuhnke of the Washtenaw County Trial Court, Chief Public Defender Delphia Simpson, and Circuit Court Judge Pat Conlin--who will be taking over a criminal docket in 2021. Together, we were able to listen to community concerns about the institutions in our criminal justice system, and create plans for how our offices will continue to collaborate on reforms going forward.

The goal of the listening tour was to engage the community, and to hear from people about their experiences, ideas, and hopes for our justice system in Washtenaw County. While the focus of each of our listening tour events certainly differed by community, a number of common themes appeared between events:

- Diversion/deflection for juveniles
- Ensuring the safety of domestic violence survivors
- Conditions of probation
- Racial disparities in sentencing and charging
- Racial profiling by law enforcement
- Data and transparency

- Treatment courts
- Re-entry for returning citizens
- Cash bail system
- Coercive plea bargaining

Our offices are in the process of creating policies around these concerns, and we will continue to share updates as they are finalized. In particular, we are working to address the striking racial disparities highlighted in the Citizens for Racial Equity in Washtenaw (“CREW”) report. In late August, CREW released a report detailing stark racial disparities in the Washtenaw County Criminal Legal System. In particular, the report highlighted serious disparities in charging and sentencing outcomes.. The report also highlighted the need for further research - our offices need to examine our data to identify the points in the system these disparities are most pronounced.

One of my campaign promises was to bring a third party evaluator into the prosecutor’s office, and I fully intend to follow through on that promise. Our draft scope of work of third-party evaluation, created in partnership with some of the leading empirical criminal justice scholars in the country, seeks to pinpoint exactly where disparities in our justice system are occurring. Longer term, I plan to build out systems to track important metrics and populate the prosecutor’s website with a data dashboard so that citizens can track our county’s progress on these issues.

Judge Kuhnke shared that she has been working with the court’s case management system so that the courts can begin to systematically track some of the metrics that the CREW report recommends. That will help them be able to more easily identify and address disparities going forward. More immediately, she is also working on implementing implicit bias training for circuit court judges and court employees.

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Thank you to everyone who was able to join us at one of our events in Ypsilanti City, Ypsilanti Township, Saline, Chelsea, Ann Arbor, or on Zoom. I plan to engage in additional listening tours once I'm in office.

In the meanwhile, if you would like to stay up to date on my transition team and upcoming events, I encourage you to subscribe to updates on my transition website.

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