

Department of the Prosecuting Attorney
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INAUGURATION REMARKS
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Today's inauguration is an opportunity to inform the public of the initiatives of the Prosecuting Attorney's Office. Initiatives of the programs and priorities that we have begun and new initiatives that we will embark upon.

First, let me review some of the initiatives that we have begun and will continue.

We will continue to advocate for victims and be their voice in the criminal justice system. The elders, the children, and of course, the animals need to be protected in our system of justice.

This year, we opened the Honolulu Family Justice Center that will provide secured housing and services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Victims will now have a safe place to go where they would not have to be concerned about rent and living expenses, as well as being threatened or harmed further. Many thanks go to Council Chair Ernie Martin and Budget Chair Ann Kobayashi, as well as Mayor Kirk Caldwell and his Administration for believing in this initiative.

Honolulu was one of seven offices throughout the U.S. that received a 2-year federal grant to prosecute difficult sex assault cases. These are cases where victims were intoxicated and were exploited. This funding will add two additional prosecutors to specialize in sex assault cases.

With the help of the State Legislature we received funding for 5 additional prosecutors to focus on the career criminals on Oahu. Thanks go to the Legislature for this much needed state funding. We are seeing many more crimes being committed by repeat offenders who were on probation or released from prison.

We will continue to aggressively prosecute people who profit from sex trafficking. We recently initiated contacts with prosecutors from Asian countries to collaborate with them on sex trafficking cases where victims or criminals originate from those countries. We have already closed down three massage parlors and have indicted the owners. With deputy prosecutors, Dwight Nadamoto and Lynn Matsuoka, we are working with the Dept. of Homeland Security on additional investigations.

Now let's look at the new initiatives that we will focus on:

With tourism being one of our top industries in this State, there's an urgent need to protect our tourists. They need to know that Hawaii is a safe place. We have seen certain criminals targeting tourists. So, we will be focusing on these criminals who target tourists. We will establish units that will work closely with the police, businesses, and community groups in Waikiki and Windward Oahu where a lot of these crimes are occurring. It will not matter whether these crimes are misdemeanors because we will return the victims to Hawaii to testify at trial. Deputy Prosecutor Jan Futa will be supervising this initiative

This tourism prosecution project will be a start of an Intelligence Based Prosecution strategy where we will use all the data that we have and prosecute the major criminals in each district of this island. This initiative is done in New York City and has been proven to be very effective. Deputy Prosecutor Katherine Kealoha will supervise this initiative.

To further strengthen the skills of our attorneys, we will begin extensive training of our deputies to screen and charge cases. Armina Ching, our most experienced deputy in screening, will conduct this training so more deputies can prosecute cases from beginning to end.

Of course to make room in our court system to prosecute these dangerous criminals, we need to alleviate the courts of its tremendous congestion of minor cases. We will work with State Senator Jill Tokuda, Representative Gregg Takayama, Public Defender Jack Tonaki and the courts on legislation to establish a Community Court on Oahu. Many of the homeless violations will be converted to community service instead of jail and fines and thus many cases will be taken off the court calendar. Services will be provided to those in need. Deputy Prosecutor, Jeen Pang will spearhead this initiative.

These are just some of the initiatives that we will be continuing or starting.

At this time I would like to talk about public perception about law enforcement and the criminal justice system. As they say perception is reality. But that is not true in Hawaii today. Perception about law enforcement in Hawaii should not be based on what is happening on the mainland with police where there is divisiveness within the community. In Hawaii, the police are a vital part of the community. They come from the community. Our police do a good job in protecting the public. And respect for law and order is vital to a safe community. Perception is based on the public media because that is the only way the public gets information. Inaccurate or incomplete reporting should not shape perception. We must make sure that the information that the public gets from the media is accurate and complete. Sometimes, because of

our ethical rules as prosecutors we are prohibited from discussing on-going cases. Thus, the media will only present one view of the prosecution—the defense’s version. We need to assure that misperception does not occur.

There are also laws that prevent our public discussion of cases. An example is anything happening in Family Court is confidential by law. Not discussing what is proceeding in Family Court does not mean nothing is proceeding in Family Court. Public perception is important to your work. Jury perception will impact jury verdicts. We need to educate the public about the cycle of violence and why victims of domestic violence act the way they do. We need to educate the public that protection of the abuser by the victim does not mean it is okay to not hold the abuser accountable. Also, being intoxicated does not mean the victim consented to sex. Family, friends, and supporters of our prosecutors can help us educate the public and correct misinformation when it occurs.

It is our job to ensure that there is justice for victims as well as defendants

Being a prosecutor is a noble profession. All of you have a tremendous duty and obligation to uphold. We are not the “bad guys”; we are the “good guys”.

Just ask:

1. Chris Van Marter, who has been a prosecutor for 24 years prosecuting the complex white collar cases;
2. Mark Yuen, prosecutor for 20 years, supervising deputies;
3. Donn Fudo, prosecutor for 27 years, appellate expert.
4. Lahoma-Fernandes-Nakata, prosecutor for 34 years.

Or those prosecutors who left to go to private practice and returned because of the meaningful work that they missed; ask:

1. Rodney Veary
2. Dean Young
3. Kristine Nakamatsu

To the deputy prosecutors, we have many challenges ahead of us so let us go forward and continue to keep Honolulu a safe place to live.

To all of you, thank you so much for allowing us the opportunity to serve the public and to fight for public safety.

Have a Happy New Year!