



LETTER FROM YOUR

# District Attorney

#### **Dear Citizens, Neighbors and Friends,**

As I sit down to pen this report, it is so hard to believe that a full year has already passed. When we took office in January 2021, we hoped that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic would soon be fully behind us, but as we braced ourselves against the onslaught of the Delta variant followed by the Omicron strain, it became clear that Covid was a formidable opponent and that its impact on the inner workings of our criminal justice system would be far-reaching and long-lasting.

In spite of this, through hard work, innovation and resilience, this office made great strides in 2021. I am exceedingly glad to share these accomplishments with you in the pages of our first Annual Report. I am fully aware that these accomplishments would not have been possible without the dedicated and talented prosecutors, investigators, paralegals, advocates, and support staff who stood with us through a leadership transition, a court reorganization, policy and structural changes, Covid setbacks and technological issues, and still reported to work every day to answer the call of duty. Thank you! Likewise, I extend thanks to our judicial partners, clerks of court, elected officials, law enforcement agencies, the Sheriff's Department, and county management who have partnered with us to find ways to address long-standing case backlogs. We are most grateful to the citizens of Chatham County who showed up for jury service consistently and who have trusted me to serve as the District Attorney for such a time as this.

As I see it, my greatest obligation is to do what you sent me to this office to do, and that is to ensure that the prosecution of criminal cases is swift and fair, to preserve public safety, and to advocate for our most vulnerable victims and survivors of violent crime. In the pages that follow, I hope you will agree that we have delivered on those promises. Though our mission is far from over, I look forward to working with you in the coming years to ensure that our County continues to be a safe and enjoyable place to live and that we continue to observe the mandate of Justice for All.

Sincerely,

Your DA

Shalena Cook Jones

#### WHAT WE DO

### Mission Statement

We are a diverse team of legal professionals pursuing justice for the citizens of Chatham County through efficient, equitable and effective prosecution, rigorous victim advocacy, and community-based strategies aimed at the prevention and reduction of crime.

#### **HOW WE DO IT**

### Vision Statement

We believe that the criminal court process must be rooted in the constitutional guarantee of Justice for All. Justice is best achieved when criminal prosecution is conducted in a manner that is **Efficient**, **Equitable** and **Effective**.



# Efficient—

Efficiency ensures that criminal cases are prosecuted in a timely manner bringing closure for victims, the incarcerated and those accused of crime. Efficiency demands that we examine and eliminate outdated practices and ideologies that historically slow court dockets and clog the criminal court system.

1st in state

to resurrect the Grand Jury proceedings after Covid closure, increasing GJ sessions from once to twice per week.

1,430

Indictment of 1,430 serious violent felonies between February and December.

### Efficient

In 2021, here are just some of the things we did to make the justice system more *EFFICIENT*:

 $17^{\frac{1}{\text{of}}}20$ Secured convictions in 17 out of 20 serious violent felony cases tried in 2021.

- Implemented office-wide Covid-19 policies that brought the office staff back from non-reporting status to 100% attendance, thereby increasing work capacity and productivity.
- Provided free, on-site Covid testing and vaccinations to employees to ensure early detection, preserving the health and safety of the office without compromising productivity.
- Offered free weekly Covid testing and vaccinations to every Grand Jury Member to ensure health and safety without compromising or slowing the judicial process.

- Successfully conducted 20 jury trials in Superior Court between April 2021 and December 2021 with only two Covid-compliant courtrooms available.
- Created the Expedited Case Resolution Program ("ECR"), resolving hundreds of cases through Early Intervention Project.
- Resolved 1,600 cases through the ARPA sponsored Case Reduction Program, alleviating the burden on the criminal justice system.



# Equitable—

The concept of equity seeks to ensure that the process and outcome of every criminal case is reached in a way that is fair and impartial and that the ultimate result "speaks the truth." The prosecutor must use wisdom and discretion understanding that there is no "one size fits all" solution to every case but that each outcome must reflect the facts and circumstances presented, the redress for the victim, accountability of the accused and other factors to ensure that the punishment fits the crime.

### Equitable

In 2021, here are just some of the things we did to make the justice system more *EQUITABLE*:

- Implemented Cultural and Diversity
  Recognition in regular office updates for
  Black History Month, Women's History
  Month, Irish-American Heritage Month,
  Hispanic Heritage Month/Latinx
  Recognition Month, Pride Month and
  Veteran's Day Recognition, to raise
  awareness and heighten cultural sensitivity.
- Established a Conviction Integrity Unit and Public Integrity Unit to ensure the just review, investigation, declination or prosecution of cases involving public officials.
- Reviewed and withdrew death penalty notice on a wrongfully charged, multi defendant gang case.
- Eliminated "selective prosecution practices" for personal and political gain.
- Developed quality control measures to equalize sentences across the board and eliminate vast disparities in sentencing and punishment.

- Argued case before the Georgia Supreme Court to make the insanity defense available in juvenile court proceedings.
- Established partnerships with justice-minded organizations like the Vera Institute of Justice, Fair and Just Prosecution, the Deep Center and Fair Fight, Inc.
- Served in Ex-Officio or advisory capacity to various action groups and organizations (Savannah Citizens Accountability and Review of Services (CARES), Racial Equality and Leadership (REAL) Savannah Criminal Justice Subcommittee, Senior and Law Enforcement Together Council (SALT), SAFE Shelter, etc.)

#### 2021 HIRINGS

15 prosecutors

investigator

4 administrative professionals

Hirings increased and improved race, ethnic, cultural, gender and age diversity of the office.



# Effective—

An effective criminal justice system asks, "Does our criminal justice system produce the right outcomes?" In other words, "does it work?" A healthy criminal justice system looks beyond mere conviction rates and measures efficacy by evaluating community interactions, impact and participation, crime intervention, decreased recidivism, successful offender reentry, community-based partnerships, public trust and better infrastructure, qualitative feedback, data-based research and evidence-driven policy.

### Effective

In 2021, here are just some of the things we did to make the justice system more *EFFECTIVE*:

Created
DA ROCC Unit
("District Attorneys
Racketeering and
Organized Crime
Coalition") in
response to the
increase in local gun
and gang violence.

- Successfully intercepted at least one series of shootings in Chatham County.
- Established and maintained ongoing Leadership Training.
- Established District Attorney Townhall Event (DATE Night Live) to offer community education on relevant updates in criminal law.
- Revamped the expungement/record restriction process making it available online at no cost to the citizens.

- Partnered with several organizations and community stakeholders to build a successful reentry program for formerly incarcerated citizens.
- Participated in community outreach with local non-profit agencies.
- Secured grant funds to assist in the collection and analysis of performance data.
- Implemented in-house training on Gang Violence and Vehicular Homicide.

### Community Outreach

2021

































## Survivor's Spotlight



19CHM05365 Closed/DV Grant 05/05/2021

My name is Zharya Gore. I was a victim of an aggravated assault. On November 4, 2019, I was run over with a car. The defendant backed up and ran over me a second time. She was the mother of my boyfriend's children. I received several broken bones, a punctured lung and various other injuries. I remained in the hospital for weeks recovering and still recovering till this day.

I was contacted by the District Attorney's Office and Victim Witness to explain what would be happening with my case. I was so confused and so afraid. Once the office got involved, my hope was restored. My Advocate Daisy Figueroa was very supportive, and she contacted me through every step of each court proceeding. Daisy also provided support to my mother during this process. She was able to assist my mother in filling out victim's compensation.

My hospital bills were over \$100,000 due to my injuries. Georgia Crime Victims Compensation covered over \$16,000 towards my medical bills. Memorial Health Indigent Care fund assisted with the remainder. This lifted my financial burdens from me and my family.

During the court process there was a lot of terminology used that I did not understand but my ADA was patient with me and provided definitions and explained every step of the way. The ADA and Advocate was there and offered me reassurance that would be there to support me through the trial.

I don't know what I would have done without their support. They broke my scale! Which is passed the limit of my expectation of assistance for me.

Sincerely,

**Zharya Gore** 



### Vera Institute for Justice Motion for Justice Grant with Feed The Hungry's Empowerment Center

- 1 of 10 awarded nationwide
- Supporting the newly established Show Us Your Guns! diversion program

### Prosecuting Attorney Council Juvenile Court ADA for Children in Need of Services (CHINS) position

• 1 of 5 awarded statewide

### BJA Upholding the Rule of Law and Preventing Wrongful Convictions grant secured along with Georgia Innocence Project

- Total grant value of \$300,000
- \$147,450 to DAO to support the newly established Conviction Integrity Unit

#### **United States Secret Service TEOAF Joint Operations grant**

• \$4,000 to support the newly established Criminal Investigations
Division Cybercrime and Forensics Lab

### EMBARGOED grant with national research partner (embargo lifted mid-February)

- Total grant value of \$800,000
- 1 of 4 offices nationwide chosen to participate

Continuation of the Department of Justice's OVC Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant for the Victim Witness Assistance Program and its Violence Intervention and Youth Intercept programs

#### **ARPA funding for two ADAs**

For COVID-19 case backlog reduction project

Total dollar value of grants, awards, services and partnerships secured by the DA's Office this year is more than \$350,000.

# 2021 Partnerships

We have developed partnerships with numerous organizations throughout the county, state, and nationwide, some of whom are grant partners noted above. Others include local non-profit agencies like the Deep Center, which has invited the DAO to work on several of its projects addressing bail bond reform, jail churn reduction, restorative justice and other criminal justice reform initiatives. In 2021, the DAO and Deep Center, along with community partner Eugene Priester, presented (virtually) at

the national Life Paths Research
Center's annual Resilience Conference.
Life Paths Research Center, a resilience
focused research center and think tank
based at the University of Suwanee in
Tennessee, has become another partner,
requesting the Chief Assistant DA to
serve on its 2022 conference committee.
The DAO has worked on various projects
in conjunction with Chatham County
Safety Net, Step Up Savannah, The
Front Porch, Fair and Just Prosecution,
and many others.

# ARTNERS

- DEEP CENTER
- EUGENE PREISTER
- STEP UP SAVANNAH
- THE FRONT PORCH

- LIFE PATH'S RESEARCH CENTER
- CHATHAM COUNTY SAFETY NET
- FAIR & JUST PROSECUTION
- AND MORE!

# 2022 & Beyond

WHAT TO EXPECT

#### **Efficient**

- Continue caseload reduction efforts.
- Creating partnerships with researchers and social scientists (like Justice System Partners and Motion for Justice)
- Dismiss minor crimes (i.e. MJ less than oz., loitering and prowling, obstruction, etc.)
- Give ADA and other staff expanded training opportunities as they relate to growing criminal justice issues. (i.e. human trafficking, gang prosecution)

### Equitable

- Implement sensitivity training diversity, implicit bias, poverty simulation, etc.
- Assign ADAs to Neighborhood Associations Community Policing
- Expand internship opportunities beyond law students and criminal justice majors. Aim to include other social science disciplines (MSW, MPA, etc)

### **Effective**

- Implement community supervision programs in the juvenile court
- Develop Political and Legislative Action Committee
- Finalize District Attorney's Advisory Council
- Enhance Cold Case and Conviction Integrity Units and DA ROCC