

3:33:30 yeah, I gave up a part of my stipend so I could afford them. And I continue to do that because it was the only way I could put in enough to make it an attractive offer.

-ADA still left in less than a year

** solicitor general attorney vacancies pay?

SHORTAGE IMPACTING...

3:34:43 it's any officer that currently employs attorneys in the public sector.

R 3:34:53 Is the position what you expected?

3:34:55 Yes and no. And this happened to me as well when I was a state representative. Nobody really knows what it means until you're sitting in the seat making those decisions.

-restricted by what they can say about cases whereas public defenders can say whatever

3:36:23 the standard in the courtroom is beyond reasonable doubt.

-police probable cause

3:36:43 we have to review every single one of those to see, do we have enough evidence that we can prove this beyond a reasonable doubt.

-elected in 2020 during pandemic – walked in January 2021 to backlog

-she walked into 2400 cases on backlog, most years the carryover was about 300

**what's her carryover now?

R 3:39:45 right now as we sit here and talk how many prosecutors do you have for your circuit?

3:39:50 right now we have five prosecutors who are barred and we have two apprentices who are awaiting their bar results. And then we have our juvenile prosecutor who I count separately.

3:40:26 we have four superior court judges in our circuit.

R 3:40:36 so how many cases then does that mean you yourself are carrying?

3:40:48 my caseload last time pulling the list, culling the cases was 870 cases.

R 3:40:55 that's impossible.

3:40:56 yes, it's unsustainable.

-talking about the problem in September of last year.

3:41:14 because they could go 15, 20 miles down the road and get 15-20-30 thousand dollars more.

**get salary of everyone who left

3:41:35 the ones who are left are under so much stress and burden. How do you deal with an 870 case load?

3:42:35 it is unsustainable and this is what I've been bringing... I've brought it to the judges, I've brought it to our commissioners, I've brought it to the mayor over and over again.

-salary study

R 3:43:35 what's the timeline on that?

3:43:40 I don't know.

R 3:43:45 do you know if the process has even started?

3:43:46 I don't know?

R 3:44:23 is there any sense that there could be more than money? Is there a chance that management style could also play a role?

3:44:30 No I would not say that it's the management style. What I would say is we had a perfect storm. People left because they were offered more money. The ones who stayed were left with higher case loads that led to stress and they were able to get other positions. So if they were not thinking of moving, when the stress level got higher, now they had a reason to move on.

-some left to be able to work remotely

R 3:46:00 There are cases where the judges are calling out mistakes that have been made by your office. Do you fear that that could also hurt recruitment?

3:46:10 I think any kind of negativity about any department whether it's mine or any others can always hurt recruitment. Because there's one thing about rumors and one thing about reality. And people tend to want to believe the more negative instead of the more positive, or instead of what's happening in that office.

-open as candidate that she didn't have criminal prosecution experience

3:47:20 What I have always said is the DA position is more of an administrative role. And in the majority of DA's offices, the DA does not prosecute. The DA is the one who manages and leads the office.

R 3:48:30 so you prosecuted your first criminal case when?

3:48:33 in January

R 3:48:35 of this year (of this year) The DA's office really is a training ground for a lot of students (absolutely...)

R 3:49:19 Do you feel there is the experience necessary in your office right now and under your leadership to be offering that kind of criminal law training? (Yes, we do)

-hired two very experienced ADAs – 15 & 18 years experience – still in HR process

3:50:00 I can't just offer a particular salary the way they can do it in private practice. They have to go through a calculation depending on how many years of experience they have, what areas of the law they actually have that experience with, and then they make those calculations and they give me a number.

3:50:22 And then that's the number. I don't have any leeway.

R 3:50:37 wouldn't that problem have existed before you came into office?

3:50:41 Yes, but COVID didn't exist.

R 3:50:40 Right, but it's not like every county just shot up and raised their wages.

-the majority have, a lot of people have (audio, stepped over)

3:50:57 It starts with the money and then it led to the stress of having to many cases to deal with when you are one of the few left behind.

R 3:51:08 which has led to some of the procedural mistakes which has impacted cases?

3:51:14 which has led to the fact that we don't have enough time to dedicate to every single case to do what we would love to be able to do.

R 3:51:24 so when procedural mistakes impact a case, not evidence, what do you say to those victims?

3:51:30 we explained what happened. We also take those as our learning opportunities to go and say where did it fail?

-sometimes the mistake is law enforcement dealing with their own shortage and new employees

-discuss Quatravious case/push back from defense

3:52:39 I said let me go and check. I went and checked and we were able to get it. (45) One of the things is I rely on other people for information as well because obviously I don't have time to check every single thing personally for me. The last information I had was that it had not gotten in yet.

-expected it would be continued because she just got the case and talking with neighboring DA about using some of her prosecutors

3:53:56 A judge didn't have to agree to that.

R 3:53:58 I mean, that's a murder trial.

R 3:54:30 Whose responsibility is that then when you are lead on the case?

3:54:36 So it is my responsibility right, who ever is lead on the case. But again, when you have 870 cases, when you are doing not just the work of an ADA but.... Just to tell you, usually in our courtroom we would have two ADAs. Now we're down to one. So two ADAs, plus the DA.

-enough victim advocates, investigators and admin staff is fine

3:55:40 what people seem to forget is that we went through COVID and employee considerations about job pre-covid and post covid have changed drastically.

-TROUP/CLARKE COUNTY -PENDERGRAPH CASE

R 3:57:30 why the decision to drop those charges?

-ADA no longer here, can't respond on what they were thinking, but does know they did victims wishes
3:57:54 this is what they wanted. They did not want to go forward with he trial. They did not want to testify. They wanted a resolution to this trial. And so we took what they wanted very much to heart in this. We also knew that the Troup County resolution was going to have this person in jail for a long, long time.

R 3:58:09 According to the parole board he could get out in 7 years.

3:58:11 No, not necessarily.

R 3:58:17 Not necessarily, but he could. Whereas the rape and aggravated sodomy would have been a minimum sentence of 25 years.

3:58:25 Possibly. And I say that as possibly. I don't have, I have not gone back and looked at that particular case and everything that went in it.

3:58:40 But I do know when we did what we did, our victims were satisfied with that and the media that we have seen on this, it's always been Troup county victims, when they ask them about this when they ask them about this particular decision.

R 3:59:00 One of them actually wrote in a written statement to the parole board, "I feel very lied to and betrayed by the Athens DA." She says the plea deal in court was not what was explained to her by the ADA.

R 3:59:15 Concerns about communication?

3:59:17 Yeah, I would have liked her to of written that to me so I would have known.

R 3:59:51 One of the victims would not have been able to respond, because she was so traumatized by what happened, that she actually took her own life. Were you aware of that?

4:00:00 No I was not.

R 4:00:01 So she can't agree to this plea deal because she's not even alive.

R 4:00:27 The sentence is concurrent. Police officers spent hundreds of hours researching this case just to get a sentence that is being served at the same time as somebody else's case. Why do anything at all.

4:00:40 Because we have victims and we wanted to get justice for those victims.

** get more info on how this has changed their plea review process

4:01:37 there is no DA anywhere, as there is no CEO or manager who knows absolutely 100% every decision that gets made in their department.

4:01:53 again, it is very disingenuous the standards and the unrealistic expectations that are put forward on some of these issues.

R 4:02:08 So if there is a decision by an ADA to drop some pretty significant charges, does that not get discussed? Are you not looped in on that?

4:02:12 Sometimes they are, at that time I did have a chief ADA.

-WHAT HAS YOUR OFFICE DONE WELL IN THE PAST TWO YEARS?

4:04:10 What we have been able to do really well is understand our own power and authority and our responsibility to the community and be able to build a team, when before these changes and salary happened, we were a really solid team. Then salary changes happened.

-Had a chief who was going to train those with less experience. She didn't do that.

4:05:09 I think we've done very well in terms of looking at intervention, especially when we get young people in our juvenile courts and starting our restorative justice, I think was an excellent project we've been working on. (22) My belief is, if we can get prevent kids from getting in the system, intervene when they do get in it and then give them resources when they get out so they don't come back, then those the ways we're going to help in terms of public safety as they get older. So I think we do that very, very well.

4:05:37 When something happens that's a mistake or shouldn't have happened, we do very well at regrouping again and saying okay this is what happened, debriefing it. What is it that we can put in place. Is it more training that we need, is it a checklist that we need?

-listening sessions, first DA to do this in area in decades, second one. Wants to do each year, date set months ago

-won't step down

R 4:10:50 I'm having people reach out, calling this the Western Circuit Circus. What do you say to those critics who say this judicial circuit has become a joke?

4:11:03 Well, there's always going to be critics with anything that you do. What's considered a joke to them, may not be a joke to others. (10) From others I get comments, we love what you're doing, keep doing what you're doing.

4:11:23 without all of the facts and information there's plenty of things that people can just suppose and take out of the air and just say I see this, so x equals that.

4:11:40 if they are legitimate criticisms of things that we can do better, we will fix them and we have.

4:13:45 nobody is making an excuse that they should not have happened, absolutely, right.

-public defenders don't have time to visit every client in jail so don't talk to them until court, delays the whole day

-feels legislative bills are targeting you; shouldn't be any easier to recall a DA than any other elected official

4:15:30 they're coming from 30% of registered voters to 2%.

-170,000 voters in the circuit

R 4:16:40 is there a contradiction in taking the oath of office and saying you're going to uphold the laws of the state and then turning around in a memo and saying, we're not going to prosecute these types of cases?

4:16:55 not at all, because if you read the prelim of my memo it also says what? We will review every case one by one. Right?

-limited resources, must make decisions how to use those resources, what impacts safety most

4:18:48 everybody has a role to play in our society.

4:18:55 there's a reason why judges, prosecutors have a certain amount of discretion, and that we are elected officials by our community. It is the community elects us, and if the community has duly elected official, then it should not be for the legislature to come in and remove that official over the votes of that community. People call it the oversight, I say it is an overstep. Because they are going against the will of the people. And if that's the case, then just appoint everybody. Appoint every judge, appoint every prosecutor. Do away with this false mythology that these are elected officials.

R 4:20:35 Do you feel like, in part, these bills are targeting you?

4:20:40 Yes I do because my name keeps coming up. So it's kind of hard not to take it personal when they keep saying Deborah Gonzalez or the DA Athens, there's only one DA in Athens.

-says it's a partisan, dangerous effort to reduce democracy

-rape case UGA

Clip3 – not on cam – getting cutaways

:17 It makes a difference to people. You would be surprised.

:34 public defenders have been here for a very long time. They were with them pre-covid. (and they've stayed despite the low pay) because they've been there, they accepted it.

-all of old ADA's left within the first six months. New people hadn't been there pre-covid

R 1:46 and they're not facing the same kind of turnover. It's like it's an argument that only goes so many miles. (1:54) well first of all, just because I'm having an issue and they're not, doesn't mean that the issue isn't real (-nat mic might block sound quality?)

3:15 I'm a very controversial figure, people have certain ideas about me.
-says minority professional middle class doesn't exist in Athens