

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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As the county's chief prosecutor and law enforcement officer, the district attorney plays the most significant role in setting the agenda for the criminal legal system. The DA's office has wide latitude to decide which crimes to prosecute. It also has the power to divert people away from the legal system to alternative programs that may better serve both public safety and the defendant in question, such as treatment for substance use disorder or mental health care.



MATT DUGAN



STEVE ZAPPALA

BIOGRAPHY

Allegheny County Chief Public Defender. Moon Township resident and former school board member. Duquesne University Law School graduate. Campaign website touts his role in public defense initiatives to provide free expungements to eligible clients, have public defender representation at bail hearings, and help kids resolve school-based issues at magistrate level.

Allegheny County District Attorney since 1998. Fox Chapel resident. Duquesne University Law School alumnus. Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association board member. Campaign website includes no policy positions as of this writing. Led expansion of video surveillance network in city and county and touts his implementation of body cameras for police.

DIVERSION

Tells ProgressPA forum he wants to "invest in prevention" by diverting people away from the legal system at first point of contact. Tells *City Paper* he wants to "end [low-level] matters without the lifelong consequence of criminal conviction."

Created 11 special "problem-solving" courts for drugs, DUI, mental health, and related cases, but critics note participation often requires defendants to plead guilty and/or have a prior criminal record. Zappala prosecuted more than 1,700 low-level drug possession cases in 2017, according to an investigation by The Appeal.

SYSTEMIC RACISM

Tells *CP* every policy and initiative will be "looked at through the lens of how does this impact racial disparity in the system?" Wants to start a Conviction Integrity Unit to re-examine cases with alleged racial bias.

Tells WESA there is "no place for discrimination in the administration of justice" and that he's made that a priority. In 2021, ordered prosecutors not to make plea deals with a Black attorney who called the DA's office "systematically racist." Investigation by The Appeal found that in 2016-2017, Zappala disproportionately charged Black people with weed possession.

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Said during a ProgressPA forum that he addressed staffing issues in the Office of the Public Defender by investing in national recruiting for new attorneys and creating a position focused on providing more training to existing attorneys.

Unionized attorneys in his office successfully lobbied the county for significant raises in starting salary for assistant district attorneys and public defenders.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

Said during the same forum that half of homicides go uncharged because witnesses won't talk to the police or DA's office. Added that the DA must build trust within communities with high levels of gun violence.

Tells *TribLive* he supports a juvenile curfew. Tells WESA he doesn't think people charged with violent offenses should be offered bail.

Select Endorsements: Allegheny County Democratic Committee, Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, Working Families Party, Color of Change PAC, One PA, Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey and U.S. Rep. Summer Lee, singer-songwriter John Legend

Select Endorsements: Allegheny-Fayette County Central Labor Council, Pittsburgh Regional Building Trades Council, Steamfitters Local 449, Laborers District Council of Western PA, IBEW Local 5