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Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald Marks First 100 Days in Office, Announces New, Smart-on-Crime Policies

Key initiatives include Oakland County's first-ever hate crimes unit, a focus on human trafficking, and active participation in treatment courts.

PONTIAC, Mich. – Oakland County Prosecutor KAREN D. MCDONALD issued the following statement marking her first one hundred days in office:

“In the 100 days since I was sworn in, I have re-oriented my office’s priorities to focus on juvenile justice, reducing racial disparities, and alternatives to incarceration for low-level, non-violent crimes. I am committed to implementing smarter solutions to achieve safer, more just communities for everyone in Oakland County.”

Prosecutorial Discretion and Charging Reforms: In her first 100 days in office, Prosecutor McDonald directed assistant prosecutors to consider underlying factors of criminality, including mental health, addiction, abuse, and trauma, and to use discretion in charging decisions and plea negotiations. McDonald ended the automatic use of habitual offender notices, ended the practice of default charge-stacking, and instructed assistant prosecutors to stop automatically charging juveniles as adults.

Juvenile Lifers: Prosecutor McDonald issued resentencing notices for nearly two-dozen juvenile lifers in Oakland County, restoring their Constitutional right to be considered for parole.

Trafficking Unit: Prosecutor McDonald transformed Oakland County’s narcotics unit into a trafficking unit, shifting her office’s focus from the use and possession of drugs to the trafficking of people and drugs. The new Trafficking Unit successfully busted a major sex trafficking ring operating inside Oakland County.

Hate Crimes Unit: Prosecutor McDonald created a first-ever hate crimes unit, allocating crucial resources for the specific purpose of charging and prosecuting hate crimes and ethnic intimidation.

Bail Reform: Prosecutor McDonald directed assistant prosecutors not to request cash bond or oppose pretrial release in cases involving low-level, non-violent crimes. McDonald also worked to get assistant prosecutors at arraignments (traditionally not done in Oakland County) to actively participate in bond decisions.

Diversion and Treatment Courts: Prosecutor McDonald made the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office an active participant in over a dozen diversion programs and treatment courts, including mental health courts, addiction courts, veterans' courts, and a first-offender diversion program.

Addressing Racial Disparities: Prosecutor McDonald made racial equity a central focus of her office; she launched an internal Equity Team, established the first-ever Racial Justice Community Advisory Council, and formed a research partnership with the University of Michigan to assess the office's progress in confronting racial disparities in Oakland County. McDonald also appointed the first woman of color to a leadership role in the history of the Prosecutor's Office.

Conviction Integrity Unit: Prosecutor McDonald formed a team dedicated to establishing Oakland County's first-ever Conviction Integrity Unit, which will ensure claims of wrongful conviction are examined fairly and impartially. The team has drafted a proposal to be presented next month to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, which will hopefully grant the required funding to open the unit within McDonald's first year in office.

Internal Reform and Training: Prosecutor McDonald re-established relationships with local, state, and national organizations, including the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, where Prosecutor McDonald was elected to the executive board. For the first time in 12 years, the Prosecutor has made training and professional development opportunities available to all assistant prosecutors, who have already attended over 500 hours of advanced training.

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