

## **Holding soft-on-crime judges and DAs Accountable**

*By State Senator David Craig (R-Town of Vernon)*

Certain areas of the state's criminal justice system are failing the very citizens they are supposed to protect. Through irresponsible charging by some District Attorneys (DAs) and light sentencing by judges, hardened repeat offenders are emboldened to escalate their crimes. As a result, our police officers risk their lives arresting the same group of criminals who are continually released back onto the streets time and time again.

Our citizens deserve to feel safe and should expect better from their elected officials in the court system. The problem is, the public is often left in the dark about the majority of decisions made by judges and DAs. In a civilized society we need violent, repeat offenders off the streets. One way to help accomplish this to shine a light on those in the court system who value liberal policies over public safety.

My legislation, 'the Transparent Justice Act', would alter the current Consolidated Court Automation Programs (CCAP) into an enhanced transparency tool for the public to hold soft-on-crime officials responsible. My bill requires that CCAP make easily searchable: recommended charges from the arresting agency, charges filed by DAs, plea deals, and sentences issued by judges. Additionally, the database would provide easy drop-down menus to search by DA or judge so the public could see if one of their court officials is chronically undercharging or imposing weak sentences.

There is no doubt that many in the court system will oppose this idea of increased transparency and accountability. In fact, the Director of State Courts has already publicly testified against the legislation on behalf of the court system.

The safety of our communities is too important to let slip away. By not holding criminals accountable for their actions, soft-on-crime court officials continue to embolden repeat offenders which results in more victims of increasingly violent crimes. If court officials act irresponsibly in this duty, the public should at least be able to see their record and take action at the ballot box. The current criminal justice system is shrouded behind a muddled system that is both cumbersome and, in certain ways, devoid of usable information. I believe our citizens deserve better.

Simple transparency can cure many ills in government and I believe 'the Transparent Justice Act' would empower voters with better information to hold their elected officials accountable and ensure judges and DAs uphold the values of the community and the safety of our citizens. Wisconsinites need to be able to trust the justice system. But without more transparency, it will be difficult for our residents to continue to trust a justice system that continues to fail them.

Justice should be blind, but the public should not be kept blind to it.

*[\(Senator David Craig headshot\)](#)*