



Testimony before the Senate Majority Policy Committee and House
Republican Policy Committee on August 10, 2026, submitted by Michael
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Good morning, Senator Dave Argall, Chair of the Senate Majority Policy Committee, and Representative David Rowe, Chair of the House Republican Policy Committee Thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing focused on crime and policy issues that are critical to prosecutors, law enforcement and public safety. I appreciate the opportunity to offer remarks on behalf of the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association (PDAA) of which I am currently Vice President of the Executive Committee.

I have served as the District Attorney for Schuylkill County for the past 8 years. Before assuming this role, I was an assistant DA from 1992-2013 and a public defender from 2014-2017, giving me a well-rounded understanding of the criminal justice system. Today, I oversee an office dedicated to identifying, investigating, prosecuting, and preventing crime, supported by a team of assistant district attorneys, detectives, paralegals, and professional staff.

One of the most rewarding, and often most challenging, responsibilities of this work is standing up for victims who have been harmed and traumatized, frequently by acts of violence that require ongoing support, advocacy, and counseling. My office works closely with victims' advocates to support victims and their families, helping to minimize the trauma, fear, and disruption they experience throughout the court process. Federal VOCA funding has been decreasing and resulting in cuts that impact this work. We appreciate your commitment at the state level for continued support of victims.

Community safety depends on strong prosecutorial offices, yet many counties are struggling to fill vacancies, making recruitment and retention top priorities. Thank you for adopting [SR 94](#) and the [final report](#) of the Joint State Government Commission's study, which you authorized to more fully examine the challenges facing law enforcement, corrections, and prosecutors' offices as they work to maintain operations amid staff shortages and declining interest in public service among some law school graduates. Recommendations related to district attorneys' offices should be implemented, including state funding for a workload study and providing resources comparable to those dedicated to indigent defense.

As a member of PCCD's Indigent Defense Advisory Committee, I see firsthand how essential that funding is for public defenders' offices. However, it has also created disparities, and prosecutors' offices should receive equivalent support, as we handle 100 percent of the criminal cases in our counties, remain accessible 24/7 to police and the courts, serve on death review teams, and engage in community prevention task forces and response teams, often outside of regular work hours.

Technology advancements, such as body-camera footage and videos captured on cell phones, neighborhood cameras, and retail-security systems, have been monumental in solving crimes. However, they also require significantly more staff time to review hours of footage and respond to increasingly voluminous discovery requests that include video, cell-phone downloads, recorded interviews, and similar materials. This burden is especially challenging for offices already facing staff shortages and limited county resources for software tools that could help manage and process this growing volume of digital evidence. State funding is crucial to bridging this gap, ensuring that prosecutors' offices have the resources needed to manage the rapidly expanding volume of digital evidence and the significant time required to review it.

Prosecutors are facing challenges with the proliferation of Artificial intelligence and the many crimes occurring through the manipulation of sensitive material for ill purposes. It has complicated the identification of Child Sexual Assault Material (CSAM) victims, requiring substantial investigative resources to determine whether images are authentic or digitally fabricated. It is now alarmingly simple to superimpose a person's face onto altered images—often depicting intimate, nude, or simulated sexual scenarios—and disseminate them with the intent to harass, embarrass, intimidate, or extort. Minors are particularly vulnerable to these exploitative practices, which can lead to profound emotional trauma and distress.

Across our counties, law enforcement officials continue to encounter increasing numbers of individuals struggling with mental health challenges. District Attorneys work closely with behavioral health specialists to seek solutions to the mental health crisis in their communities.

Prosecutors support diversionary programs that provide a second chance for offenders who take accountability and demonstrate meaningful, positive change, helping reduce the likelihood that they will reenter the criminal justice system. Diversion extends to juveniles as well, as we recognize that adolescents sometimes make poor choices in today's world of rapid digital expansion and broad online accessibility. In Schuylkill County, I lead efforts to establish a Wellness Court offering mental health treatment programs, including a Veterans Track, and was the third DA in the state to launch the Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative (LETI) pre-arrest diversion program in collaboration with the PA Office of Attorney General in 2020.

Diversionary court programs, particularly those addressing mental health and substance use disorders require additional funding to ensure that individuals receive appropriate treatment and support rather than cycling repeatedly through the criminal justice system. Local resources are strained and sustained state support is essential to adequately meet the needs of victims, offenders and even staff, who often experience residual trauma and burnout while carrying out their critical work.

Today, I have focused my remarks on some key legislative priorities the PDAA has identified for 2026. However, I would be remiss if I did not also address the urgent need for legislative action on felony murder due to the *Commonwealth v. Lee* decision. I commend all of you for working under a tight 120-day deadline to develop a penalty structure and parole review process that is balanced, maintains accountability, and preserves an avenue for life without parole in cases where it is warranted.

Second-degree murder, also known as felony murder, is narrowly applied and charged only when a person is actively participating in the commission of burglary (including home invasions), arson, robbery, rape, kidnapping, or involuntary deviate sexual intercourse - offenses that Pennsylvania classifies as crimes of violence and where victims face a high likelihood of severe harm or death. I encourage you to continue collaborating, even with the deadline now passed, to ensure justice for victims and provide clear guidance for prosecutors as we work through the approximately 1,100 cases impacted by the decision.

Our laws need to match the realities we face. Prosecutors need the right tools to promote public safety and prevent violence, protect and support victims of all ages, keep illegal drugs off the

streets and away from our kids, and keep Pennsylvania families safe. More specifically, we ask for:

- Regulation for hemp products with high THC levels being sold under the guise of “legal” farm bill compliant substances and being marketed to minors
- Amendments to the Older Adult Protective Services Act to establish mandated reporting requirements for elder abuse and neglect, strengthen protections against financial exploitation and scams targeting older adults, and create mechanisms to ensure justice for victims who have been bilked out of their life’s savings.
- Continued funding for Child Advocacy Centers that are crucial for investigating child abuse in a multidisciplinary way that minimizes the trauma of children and provides treatment services for the child and family.
- Outlaw “swatting” which is the intentional act of making a false 911 call to provoke a police response. As witnessed in the recent Villanova University “swatting” incident alleging an armed gunman was on campus, these hoaxes put people’s lives at risk and waste valuable public safety resources.

PDAA hopes that identifying these issues is helpful and welcomes continued discussion with lawmakers as we work together to develop effective, practical solutions.