



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

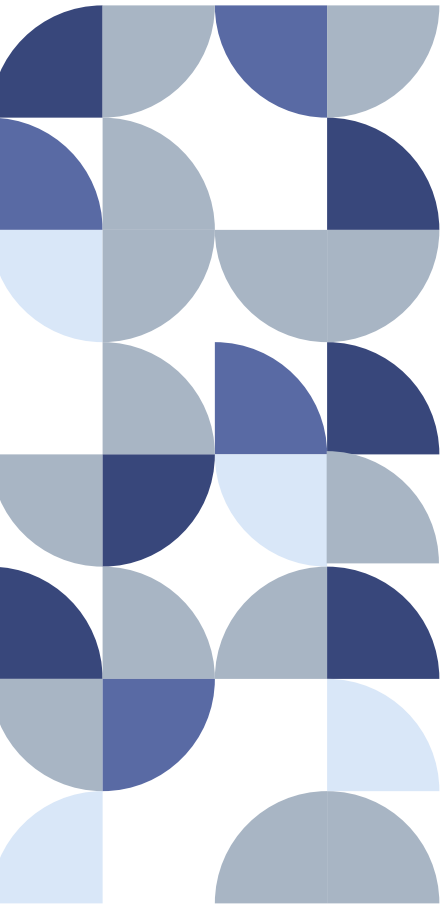


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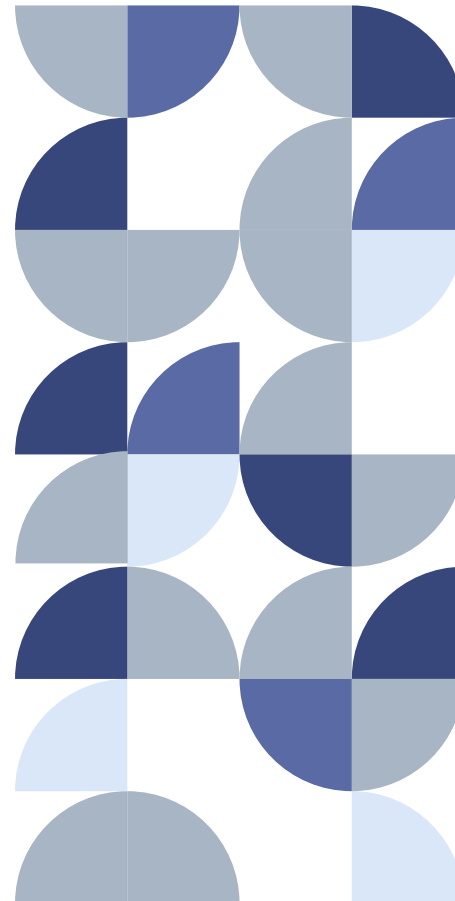
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LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

It's hard to believe this is our 3rd Annual Report! We started publishing our annual report in 2021 with the goal of keeping our community informed about their District Attorney's Office. Since that time we have handed out more than 500 printed reports and made digital copies available on our website. The feedback has been incredibly positive. I always love to hear "I didn't know that" from people who read the information in this report.

In 2023, we continued to focus on ways to improve the overall efficiency of the office, placing particular importance on resolving cases quickly and efficiently. Additionally, we continued to build and strengthen our in-house community support programs and initiatives. Most importantly, we explored ways our office could have a direct impact on reducing violent crime in our communities.

We recognize public safety begins with crime prevention. We believe that supporting local non-profits that directly or indirectly impact crime prevention is energy well spent. With that in mind, we strive to be involved with our community, helping to educate the public about domestic violence, literacy's impact on incarceration rates, addiction, elder abuse, teens and digital citizenship, and so much more. Our goals for 2024 are just as ambitious, and I look forward to sharing with you again next year. I am honored and grateful to serve as your District Attorney and proudly present our 2023 Annual Report.

Contact Us

Lee County District Attorney's Office
2311 Gateway Drive
Opelika, AL 36801
334-737-3446

www.leecountyda.org

Facebook: Lee County District Attorney's Office



Jessica V. Ventiere
Lee County District Attorney

MEET THE TEAM

Prosecution Team:

Jessica Ventiere, District Attorney
Clay Thomas, Chief Assistant District Attorney
Cathey Berardi, Senior Trial Assistant District Attorney
Jeremy Duerr, Senior Trial Assistant District Attorney
Margaret Mayfield, Child Support Assistant District Attorney
Madison Grantham, Assistant District Attorney
Courtney Davis, Assistant District Attorney
Luke Farmer, Assistant District Attorney
Marsa Aston, Assistant District Attorney

Investigations:

David Lane, Chief Investigator

Litigation Specialist Team:

Alex Wood, Litigation Specialist Coordinator
Evette Daniels, Grand Jury Coordinator
Kristen Mayes, Litigation Specialist
Lindsey Tamarkin, Litigation Specialist
Becky Mobley, Litigation Specialist

Operations Team:

Jeanette Hart, Office Manager
Kinleigh Thompson, Front Office Coordinator

Pretrial Diversion:

Cecilia Smoak, Coordinator

Restitution Recovery:

Ebony Askew, Coordinator

Child Support:

Shannon Franklin, Coordinator
Dana Crowe, Senior Child Support Specialist
Briana Martinez, Child Support Specialist
Yuri Chaney, Child Support Specialist
Harris Anne Walker, Child Support Specialist

Helping Families Initiative:

LeKeisha Presley, Director
Amanda Amat, Assistant Director

Canine Companions:

Josette
Logan
Chunk, Retired

WHAT WE DO

The United States Supreme Court said it best in *Berger v. United States*. The Prosecutor is "the servant of the law, the twofold aim of which is that guilt shall not escape or innocence suffer." Our duty will always be to seek justice for all.



The District Attorney is a locally elected official responsible for representing the people of the State of Alabama in the prosecution of criminal cases and various civil actions.

All felonies are processed through the District Attorney's office, as well as misdemeanor offenses that occurred during the commission of a felony offense. Also, we're responsible for all misdemeanor and traffic offenses committed in the county, prosecution of Juvenile offenders, and Child Support Enforcement.



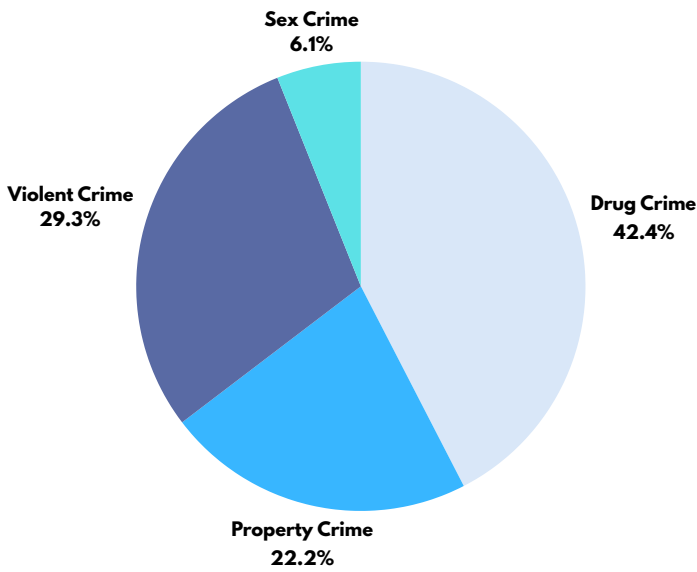
As an office, we want to highlight and support local nonprofits whose work positively impacts public safety and community well-being. These nonprofits address the needs of at-risk youth, food insecurity, education and literacy, child victims, and so much more.



2023 Crime Trends*

By The Numbers

- 4602 criminal charges filed in 2023*
- 9,601 traffic tickets issued
- 220 DUIs prosecuted
- 25 weeks of criminal jury terms.
- An average of 3-4 days to try one case.
- The majority of cases are resolved through plea agreements.
- Drug and Sex Crimes were down in 2023.
- Property and Violent Crimes were up in 2023
- 470 average caseload per Circuit Court prosecutor



Crime Trends: Approximately 4602 criminal charges were filed in Lee County in 2023. The numbers and percentages reflected are based on criminal charges rather than defendants. One defendant may have multiple charges.

*For the purposes of this chart the categories will have the following definitions:

Domestic Violence: all domestic or family-related offenses.

Drug Crimes: all drug-related offenses, including paraphernalia.

Sex Crimes: all sexually motivated offenses.

Property Crime: all crimes dealing with the loss of personal or real property.

Violent/Dangerous Offenses: all homicides and any other crime dangerous to the health of another person such as assault, robbery, and attempted murders.



NOTABLE CASES

January 2023

- Edward Seibold was convicted in 1967 for murdering an 18 year old woman, a 9 year old girl, and an 8 year old girl. Seibold was eligible for parole in 2023. District Attorney Jessica Ventiere and members of the Auburn Police Division personally attended the Parole hearing and objected to Seibold's release. The Parole Board denied Seibold's parole. His case will be up for review again in 2028.
- Baby Jane Doe was identified. The Opelika Police Department revealed Baby Jane Doe's true identity is Amore Joveah Wiggins. Amore's father, Lamar Vickerstaff, has been charged with Felony Murder-Child Abuse. Amore's stepmother, Ruth Vickerstaff has been charged with Failing to Report a Missing Child. Both are awaiting trial.

April 2023

- Terry Barnes was convicted of Rape 1st Degree and Domestic Violence 2nd Degree-Stalking.
- James McCluskey was convicted of two counts of Sodomy 1st Degree and one count of Sexual Abuse of a Child less than 12 years old.

May 2023

- Hunter Walls was convicted of Manslaughter

June 2023

- Walker Coleman Barkley was convicted of the Attempted Murder of a Police Officer.
- Tim Scott III was convicted of Sex Abuse of a Child less than 12 years old.

August 2023

- Jeremiah Wagner was convicted of the Rape and Sodomy of a 10 year old girl.
- Grady Wayne Wilkes was convicted of the Capital Murder of Auburn Police Officer William Buechner.

September 2023

- Taylor Rhae Sanders was convicted of Manslaughter.
- Tyler Crews was convicted of Rape 1st degree, Sodomy 1st degree, Sex Abuse of a Child less than 12 years old, production of child pornography, and sexual torture. The Victim was 6 years old.

October 2023

- Ronald Muzyka was convicted of Sex Abuse of a Child less than 12 years old.

November 2023

- Amber McCrory was convicted of two counts of Theft of Property 1st degree

| Fig 1 | Top 25 In-Custody Offenses | |
|-------|---|---------------|
| 1 | Murder | 3,535 |
| 2 | Robbery 1st | 2,993 |
| 3 | Rape 1st | 1,192 |
| 4 | Capital Murder | 967 |
| 5 | Distribution of a Controlled Substance | 896 |
| 6 | Manslaughter | 813 |
| 7 | Theft 1st | 757 |
| 8 | Burglary 1st | 693 |
| 9 | Trafficking Drugs | 583 |
| 10 | Sodomy 1st | 544 |
| 11 | Burglary 3rd | 519 |
| 12 | Attempted Murder | 455 |
| 13 | Sex Abuse of a child less than 12 years old | 443 |
| 14 | Possession of a Controlled Substance | 440 |
| 15 | Assault 1st | 434 |
| 16 | Robbery 3rd | 337 |
| 17 | Assault 2nd | 304 |
| 18 | Kidnapping 1st | 303 |
| 19 | Robbery 2nd | 295 |
| 20 | Manufacturing a Controlled Substance | 286 |
| 21 | Burglary 2nd | 276 |
| 22 | Sex Offender Registration Violation | 255 |
| 23 | Rape 2nd Degree | 232 |
| 24 | Receiving Stolen Property 1st Degree | 195 |
| 25 | Sexual Abuse | 187 |
| | Other Offenses | 2,912 |
| | Total In-Custody Population | 20,848 |

WHO IS IN ALABAMA'S PRISONS

- Individuals in Prison have been convicted beyond a reasonable doubt, pled guilty, or violated probation or parole.
- 80% of the current prison population are violent offenders.
- The Alabama Sentencing Commission publishes an annual report with state prison data on its website.

Most Frequent Drug Trafficking Convictions
 Fig. 2 Trafficking is based on how much weight a person possesses of a particular narcotic.

| Substance | FY2020 | FY2021 | FY2022 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| Trafficking-Methamphetamine | 57 | 59 | 93 |
| Trafficking- Illegal Drugs | 12 | 15 | 26 |
| Trafficking-Marijuana (more than 2.2 lbs) | 16 | 13 | 15 |
| Trafficking-Cocaine | 11 | 8 | 15 |
| Trafficking-Heroin | 2 | 7 | 14 |
| Trafficking-Opium | 6 | 4 | 12 |
| Trafficking-Morphine (includes Fentanyl mixtures) | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Other | 4 | 6 | 9 |

Source: Alabama Sentencing Commission 2024 Annual Report



HFI Mission

The Helping Families Initiative (HFI) works to assist children and their families by identifying and connecting them to the resources necessary to improve their child’s academic success, emotional well-being, and family stability. Through improvements in these specific areas, HFI seeks to decrease the child’s risk of substance abuse, suspensions, juvenile arrests, and student dropouts.

HFI Goal

The Helping Families Initiative is built on a collaborative relationship between the Lee County District Attorney’s Office, community partners, and the surrounding public school systems. HFI seeks to provide prevention and intervention services aimed at eliminating the barriers to a child’s emotional, behavioral, and academic success by creating a network of support and referrals to each child and family participating in the Helping Families Initiative.

HFI Referral Process

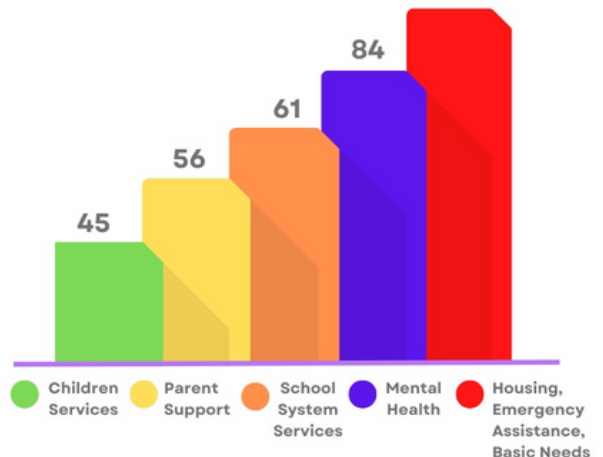
Families may complete a referral form on our website or by contacting the Lee County District Attorney’s Office at (334)737-3446. Schools may also make referrals. Following a referral, the family will be contacted and offered HFI services.

LEE COUNTY HELPING FAMILIES INITIATIVE

LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS, OPELIKA CITY SCHOOLS, & AUBURN CITY SCHOOLS



Lee County HFI COMMUNITY REFERRALS 2023





GRAND JURY

To meet the needs of our growing community, we increased the number of Grand Jury terms from 4 weeks per year to 7 weeks per year. Grand Juries met in March, April, June, August, October, and November. Two Thousand Five Hundred Thirty-four (2,534) cases were presented to Grand Juries in 2023. That is an average of 360 cases per Grand Jury term.

PRETRIAL DIVERSION

Our Pre-Trial Diversion (PTD) Program continues to work with nonviolent defendants, who have no prior criminal history, by diverting them from the traditional court system into an individualized and supervised restorative program.

Only those who are eligible and committed to successfully completing the program will be considered. Individuals in the program are required to work, further educational training, perform community service, participate in counseling, report to the PTD Office, pay restitution if applicable, and any other efforts that will further their rehabilitation.

All individuals who enter the PTD Program with a DUI are required to have an ignition interlock alcohol monitoring device installed in their vehicle or they will lose their driver's license during the duration of their time in the program. All individuals with a DUI keep the device installed in their vehicle for a minimum of six months.

In 2023, 137 individuals were accepted into the program.

INTERNSHIPS

Our internship program offers an insider's view of the criminal justice system. We have intern opportunities for high school juniors and seniors, college students, and law students.

While interning in our office, students will rotate through the different departments, observe court proceedings, learn about the legal system, and develop basic business skills.

Students interested in an internship can email us at info@leecountyda.org.

2023 WCU Collections

The Worthless Check Unit (WCU) was formed to collect restitution for victims of worthless checks. The unit assists businesses and individuals who receive insufficient funds and account-closed checks.

The Worthless Check Unit is a self-funded service of the District Attorney's Office. There is no charge to victims to use our service. When the bad check writer fails to pay through our office, we assist with the prosecution.

\$15,585.66 in lost revenue was collected and returned to various businesses and victims in 2023 by our WCU.

RESTITUTION RECOVERY

Our Restitution Recovery Unit monitors, tracks, and collects delinquent restitution and court costs owed in criminal cases. The Restitution Recovery Program enforces the court's order with several different methods including restitution dockets, contempt hearings, and restitution agreements.

Currently, there are over 2,000 individuals that have cases turned over to our Restitution Recovery Program for collection. Individuals may perform community service to satisfy court costs and fees; however, victims must be reimbursed monetarily for their loss.

2024 Collections: \$264,562.00

Child Support

The Lee County District Attorney's Child Support Unit acts as the legal counsel for the Lee County Department of Human Resources in court actions for paternity establishment and enforcement of child support orders.

The office only handles cases where the Lee County Department of Human Resources is a party and have been referred to the District Attorney's Office.

For Information regarding child support services visit our website.

FY22-23 Collections: \$10,444,154.23

Caseload Count: 5354

RAPID RESOLUTION

Rapid Resolution Docket (RRD) is a plea docket for individuals who want to plead guilty to their charges prior to being indicted by a Grand Jury. The goal of the RRD is to reduce the number of cases being presented to a Grand Jury. By doing so, the RRD saves the time of Grand Jurors, conserves valuable prosecutorial and judicial resources, and allows our prosecutors and the court to concentrate on other cases which will proceed to trial.

RRD 2023

107 individuals pled guilty through Rapid Resolution.

213 cases were resolved through Rapid Resolution.

VICTIM SERVICES

Every case is important, and our office strives to make contact with crime victims as soon as possible. To that end, letters with general information and our contact information are sent within 30 days of the criminal event.

Additionally, we want to equip victims and survivors with the tools they need to recover by providing a victim's resource guide, answering questions about the criminal justice system, and helping them every step of the way.

In 2023, our Victim Service Officers helped victims and survivors recover \$55,089.32 in benefits from Alabama Crime Victims' Compensation. These monies are paid to the victims to help cover medical bills and funeral expenses.

VICTIMS' ASSISTANCE FUND

Established in 2021, the Victims' Assistance Fund helps victim service organizations and individuals meet needs that arise as a result of a crime. These funds are provided through public and private donations.

AWARDS

In May, Leadership Lee County awarded District Attorney Jessica Ventiere the inaugural 2023 Community Service and Impact Award.



Josette

Josette (“Jo”) has been working full time in the criminal justice system since May 10, 2019, when she graduated with her handler as a certified facility dog from Canine Companions. Canine Companions trained Jo in over 40 commands that she uses to serve crime survivors and witnesses as they navigate the judicial process.

Prior to being placed as a certified facility dog, Jo was required to pass a public access test with her handler demonstrating that she has the appropriate temperament and demeanor to work in a public setting. Jo is required to recertify with her handler periodically.

Jo’s primary duty is to reduce the stress of crime survivors and witnesses when they testify in criminal proceedings, thereby enhancing the ability of the court to obtain full and accurate testimony. She does this by lying quietly and unseen at the witness’s feet while he or she testifies. Jo also serves survivors and witnesses outside the courtroom by attending meetings with them and waiting with them prior to and after testimony.

When not in the courtroom, Jo is able to use her skills to engage with survivors and witnesses by playing games, reading books, and taking walks. When Jo is not working, she loves to chase the ball and have her teeth brushed.

CANINE COMPANIONS



Logan

Logan is a facility dog that works alongside The Helping Families Initiative team at the Lee County District Attorney’s Office. Logan is a five-year-old Labrador Retriever who is always available to lend a paw to the children in our community. Logan was specifically bred and trained by Canine Companions , a certified assistance dog organization that is a member of Assistance Dogs International.

Many of the children who are referred to the Helping Families Initiative have commonly experienced trauma, mental health diagnoses, learning disabilities, poverty, abuse, and other problematic behaviors that are preventing them from attending school or behaving in school properly. Logan uses his knowledge of over forty commands to specialize in assisting children by providing reassurance during times of stress or trauma, motivation to reduce negative behaviors, and inspiration to achieve their academic and social emotional goals.

As a facility dog Logan provides unconditional love and a feeling of security. Logan assists in being a key resource to children as they begin preventative services through The Helping Families Initiative in hopes of ultimately reducing the number of children at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In 2023, we remained true to our goal of promoting public safety through support of local nonprofits, as well as our own programs. We hosted our first Family Fun Day, walked in support of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, collected school supplies, attended National Night Out, hosted two Second Chance Job Fairs, attended Career Days, read to students, spoke to numerous civic groups, and so much more! Public safety through community service!



CONTACT US



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Lee County, Alabama District Attorney's Office