

*“If Eric Richey is so good, why hasn’t he been able to make change happen while he’s been in the Prosecutor’s office?”*

This is by far the #1 question I and my campaign team get. And this question is exactly why I’m running! It is time for a new direction in my office and for our community.

Two things:

1. I have made change happen and I’m glad to share a list of examples of things I’ve done below.
2. The only person who sets policy for the Prosecutor’s office is the elected Prosecutor, Dave McEachran.

This question also reinforces for me the importance of transparency, direct and open communication, and accountability to our community and highlights a major opportunity for our office to get better at these things. We haven’t done a good job of communicating and few know how the office works and what we do. I look forward to being able to communicate widely through our website, Facebook, and at the Taskforce and other community tables about how our office is performing and the progress we are making on community priorities.

I think to really answer this question, we need to start with this: The only person who sets policy for the Prosecutor’s office is the **elected** Prosecutor. Dave McEachran has been our Prosecutor for a long time. From him I’ve learned much about how to support victims and to prosecute serious crimes so that our community stays safe. My job is to prosecute serious crimes like sexual assault, murder, animal abuse and to oversee the attorneys who do that work. We do that well and we will continue to do that well. But after many years and thousands of cases, I know where our system falls short and I have ideas about how to make it better. Here’s where I have significant differences with McEachran and what I will change:

- **The war on drugs is over.** Our actions in the criminal justice system need to reflect a new approach. I believe that **drug use is a health issue, not a criminal justice issue.** Jailing people for a public health issue has been a costly failure. I will reduce felony possession of personal use drugs to gross misdemeanors and ask for treatment and probation, not jail.
- I believe for many people, **the best outcomes happen outside of the criminal justice system.** That is why I will work with police and deputies to implement a true diversion program like LEAD, meaning we can hold charges from being filed on the condition that an individual seeks treatment. I have worked hard to build a trusting relationship with law enforcement over the years and know that together, **we can successfully divert people from jail into treatment where possible.** There are good, compelling statistics for diversion - recidivism goes down and rehabilitation goes up, which ultimately leads to a safer community, which we all want.
- I believe in **only holding those who are dangerous and a true flight risk**, others should be released on personal recognizance so they aren’t sitting in jail because they

can't afford bail. It is important to understand that bail decisions are made by judges. I will work with our judges to immediately make these changes.

- Diversion to treatment is always best when possible, but for those who are convicted and in the criminal justice system, I fully support our therapeutic courts such as drug and mental health court, and I'd like to see a **Veteran's Court and a Trauma-Informed Court** added as well. These models are proven to work for convicted offenders.

I understand it may not be enough to share my plans with you when answering this question, so I'd also like to share some examples of changes I have been able to make:

**Therapeutic Courts:** Under my leadership, our office has collaboratively supported establishing a mental health court, continues to support a successful drug court, and participates in a weekly domestic violence and sexual assault prevention meeting designed to encourage effective communication to ensure the safety of victims caught up in the cycle of violence.

**District Court Bail Practices:** I have supported meaningful changes in our district court policies, including in most cases not seeking bail, considering misdemeanant offenders are in many cases the least risk to public safety or not a risk to not show up for court.

**Considering collateral consequences:** We are resolving more felony cases as misdemeanors because we can more effectively ensure public safety by using the probation offered in District Court (where nearly all misdemeanors are filed). This has the added benefit of saddling fewer people with felony convictions so they are not burdened with that stigma and the other collateral consequences of a felony conviction (housing and job hindrance, among others).

**Sentencing Alternatives:** On a statewide level, as a member of the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys I supported lobbying the legislature to expand the sentencing alternatives (DOSAs) available - meaning jail time is reduced to incentivize treatment. Under my direction, my team of attorneys will seek to liberally offer DOSAs, keeping more people out of prison, reducing jail stays while affected persons can get needed treatment.

**Treatment over incarceration:** I am also working towards implementing a new policy that would reduce drug related felonies to misdemeanors, meaning we can again, redirect our focus on treatment, rather than jail.

**Better outcomes and focus on rehabilitation:** My goal, when the public's safety is not at stake, is to promote rehabilitation which includes not only treatment-based options but the vacation of criminal convictions and sealing of records. This step enables people to seek employment and housing without the condemnation of a criminal record, ultimately giving them a better chance at re-entering the community and leading successful lives.

**Culture matters.** It sets the tone for how we conduct ourselves and treat others. Because of that, I have and will continue to counsel my deputy prosecutor's to not be unnecessarily heavy

handed in their approach - sometimes it only takes a nudge from the courts rather than a hammer to get a person to refrain from committing another crime. I encourage and support all staff, including attorneys, to attend Drug Court graduations to support the program and the participants.

**Relationship with Law Enforcement:** Part of the job of prosecutor is to work closely and credibly with our law enforcement partners. I assigned prosecutor liaisons to small city police agencies to ensure solid communication and continuity in cases. I send deputies to trainings such as the Parenting Sentencing Alternative training and Special Considerations for Transgender Victims of Domestic Violence training. We are actively working to increase community involvement and seek alternatives to jail.

**Importance of Team:** The above outlines the things we've already been able to do. My leadership is not the sole reason for these changes but without, many of these things would not have occurred. My outstanding team believes in rehabilitation over incarceration, treatment over punishment, and community safety for all. I look forward to being in a position where I will be able to influence and enact even more significant change.

As always, please reach out if you have any further questions. My email is [ericrichey2018@gmail.com](mailto:ericrichey2018@gmail.com)!