

II. Victim/Witness Assistance

The County Attorney provides assistance and support to victims and witnesses who play a vital role in the criminal justice system. The Dakota County Attorney's Office was a leader in this area, having established a nationally recognized Victim/Witness Program in 1977. The staff in the Victim/Witness Program:

- Ensure that victims of crime receive written notice of their legal rights and help in exercising these rights;
- Strive to keep crime victims fully informed of all important developments in their cases;
- Afford victims and witnesses the opportunity to express their concerns and have their questions answered;
- Seek restitution and reparation for losses suffered by crime victims;
- Provide emergency funds for loss of necessary property or home security needs of victims;
- Help victims and witnesses understand and participate in the prosecution and criminal justice system;
- Accompany victims to court;
- Provide information on community resources and referrals to other agencies or organizations.

III. Assistant County Attorneys

The County Attorney could not perform the many duties required without Assistant County Attorneys. This is especially true in the metropolitan area. The County Attorney supervises these assistants, establishes policy and guidelines to be used by them, and performs necessary administration to ensure that the duties and responsibilities of the office are properly carried out.

IV. Pursuing Improvement and Prevention

The Dakota County Attorney has been a leader in working toward the enactment of new laws and programs to strengthen law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection, victims' rights and crime prevention. The Dakota County Attorney has also been active in chemical abuse and violence prevention efforts in Dakota County, and has initiated several prevention programs within the County Attorney's Office. The County Attorney also supports accountability programs for first-time offenders. Brochures and other information are available online at www.co.dakota.mn.us/attorney.



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*The mission of the
Dakota County Attorney's Office:*

To promote justice, public safety and effective government by prosecuting crime, protecting those in need, and representing Dakota County.

Your County Attorney At Work



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In each of Minnesota's 87 counties, a County Attorney is elected to handle numerous criminal and civil legal responsibilities.

This brochure briefly describes the duties and responsibilities of Minnesota County Attorneys, with specific emphasis on the organization, structure and efforts of the Dakota County Attorney's Office. The Dakota County Attorney's Office has four divisions: Criminal, Civil, Juvenile and Protective Services, and Child Support Enforcement. The Dakota County Attorney's Office strives to provide the highest quality legal services possible to serve the citizens of Dakota County.

I. Duties and Responsibilities of the County Attorney

A. CRIMINAL LAW

The County Attorney is the chief prosecutor for crimes committed by adults which occur within a county.

- Felonies are the most serious crimes which occur, carrying a penalty of more than one year in prison. The County Attorney prosecutes all adult felony offenses that occur in Dakota County;
- The Dakota County Attorney prosecutes adult misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors, defined by the Legislature as less serious crimes, which occur in unincorporated portions of the County;
- The Dakota County Attorney's Office does prosecute all crimes associated with the neglect and abuse of children.

B. CIVIL LAW

The County Attorney is the legal advisor for the County Board of Commissioners, other County officials, and County departments. The County Attorney:

- Provides legal advice to County officials in areas including contracts, labor law, environmental law, real estate acquisition and data privacy;

- Represents the County in all civil litigation in which the County is involved, including defending the County in lawsuits and real estate tax challenges, and representing the County in welfare and licensing appeals;
- Initiates litigation on behalf of the County for purposes of acquiring land for road improvements;
- Protects the environment through enforcement of County solid and hazardous waste ordinances;
- Obtains civil judgments for welfare fraud;
- Forfeits property used in connection with criminal activity; and
- Generally, the County Attorney is not permitted to represent or provide legal advice to private citizens.

C. JUVENILE AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Under this area of responsibility, the County Attorney:

- Prosecutes all juvenile delinquency matters involving juveniles accused of committing crimes within the County;
- Initiates CHIPS (Children in Need of Protection or Services) Petitions to protect abused or neglected children in the County;

- Starts legal proceedings to protect the health and safety of vulnerable adults within the County; and
- Files involuntary commitment actions to provide necessary treatment for individuals who are mentally ill, mentally handicapped, chemically dependent or a sexually dangerous person/sexual psychopath.

D. CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Child support includes financial support, provision of medical and/or dental insurance, division of uninsured medical and/or dental costs, and contribution toward child care costs. Under this area of responsibility, the County Attorney:

- Represents Dakota County in all paternity and child support matters in which the County is involved;
- Brings actions to obtain or enforce child support obligations, or establish the paternity of a child, whenever federal welfare benefits are paid out. Parents not receiving federal welfare benefits may also apply for and receive these child support enforcement and paternity establishment services from the County Attorney upon application;
- Provides legal advice to Dakota County officials regarding paternity and child support matters.