



**DANE COUNTY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ISMAEL R. OZANNE**



**PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release**

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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY RESPONSE TO CHIEF
KOVAL'S BLOG REGARDING THE
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

Several media outlets have asked me to comment on statements made on October 16, 2018, by City of Madison Police Department Chief Mike Koval about Dane County's juvenile justice system. Chief Koval writes in his blog, "It is time to address juvenile behaviors that not only embrace what's in the best interests of the child, but acknowledges and acts upon ensuring the safety of our community as well." I disagree: the juvenile's best interests and the safety of our community are linked and it is past time we acknowledged this.

In an article published in today's *Wisconsin State Journal*, the department's spokesperson says that there are about 30 juveniles responsible for the a disproportionate share of the serious juvenile crimes in Madison and that this core group has little fear that police or the courts will do anything to stop them. This begs some questions including what is a proportionate amount of serious crime for 30 juveniles to commit? Is that our goal, to increase the share of crime being committed by other juveniles? Is creating fear of governmental institutions really our second goal? I think not.

What Chief Koval and the police get right is that we people who live, work, or just pass through Madison and Dane County should feel safe. They should not live in fear. This means that when someone walks out of work or sleeps in their house, they should not wonder if a mugger – juvenile or otherwise – lurks in the darkness or a burglar – young or old – is about to invade their family's safe place. They should not go to sleep wondering if the car they worked and saved to afford, that gets them to work, their kids to school and to the doctor, is going to be there when the sun comes up. And, if they are a victim of a crime, they should expect police, prosecutors, and judges to treat them with respect and compassion, and that all these system actors will try to deliver an outcome that holds the offender – juvenile or adult – accountable, protects the public, and tries to stop that offender from doing it again.

In the context of some juvenile offenders, this is going to mean confinement in Dane County's Juvenile Reception Center pending disposition or being sent to a group home

or state or regional facility following an adjudication of guilt. For some offenders, it is going to mean that my office seeks to move them to adult court to face the same penalties that an adult might face because the crime is too serious for the juvenile justice system. These are necessary outcomes but they are short term solutions that temporarily incapacitate an offender in the hopes he or she may experience rehabilitation and in knowledge of the certainty that at least for a while he or she will not victimize someone else in Dane County. But as a county, we cannot and should not want to simply incarcerate our way out of our juvenile justice problems. Almost all of these kids are going to return to our county and instead of saying how long we want them gone and what we hope will happen while they are away, we should be talking about how we limit the number of kids who reach the point that we need to embrace these types of severe correctional experiences because each kid who goes represents a failure. A failure in the form of a victim who did not have to be a victim, and all the ripple effects that the victimization produces to victims' families, friends, and communities. And a failure because our county does not do enough to address the root causes that address the lurch towards delinquency.

Multiple studies have concluded that early childhood intervention to ameliorate childhood risks such as exposure to abuse and neglect can reduce the likelihood that a child will enter the juvenile justice system.¹ More importantly, longitudinal research in another country of a cohort of approximately 1000 children over four decades of their lives suggests that such early interventions can reduce not only long-term negative outcomes for children but also the economic strain that abused and neglected children can place on society by after they reach adulthood by reducing insurance claims, hospital visits, tobacco use, criminal convictions, prescription drug use, and the need for welfare benefits.² Applied to our own county, this means that early intervention will help starve our courts of both offenders and victims, and remove the impediments that prevent children from reaching their full potential.

As it relates to juvenile justice, for now, my office will use the tools we have to help keep our county safe. But I implore the people of this county to resist the urge to turn towards more severe and harsher punishments and instead ask them to join me in demanding and creating change. In demanding and creating a better approach to early childhood interventions to prevent abuse and neglect; in reducing the level of violence in our homes and on our streets; in providing support to keep families in decent housing and with access to nutritious foods and necessary healthcare, in providing safe and appropriate daycare, and in keeping our public schools safe and excellent. These decisions are in the best interest of our children and in the best interest of our community.

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¹ Jonson-Reid, M. (2000) From Maltreatment Report to Juvenile Incarceration: The Role of Child Welfare Services, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(4), 505-520.

² Caspi, A. *et al.*, (2016) Childhood forecasting of a small segment of the population with a large economic burden, *Nat. Hum. Behav.*, 1, 0005.