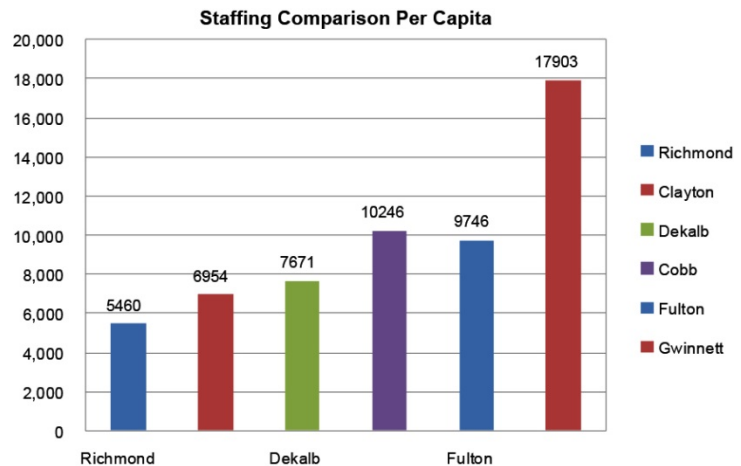


FOCUS ON

Gwinnett's Solicitor: Doing the right thing every time

– December 7, 2015

In general, the word “solicitor” may make you think of door-to-door salesmen, but in the Gwinnett Solicitor’s office, it’s more like a “government lawyer.” With only 51 staff members, the Gwinnett Solicitor’s Office prosecutes about 10,000 misdemeanor crimes in State Court every year plus more than 100,000 county ordinance violations in Recorder’s Court. Compared to other metro counties, notably Cobb and DeKalb, this team is a bargain, serving a larger population with a much smaller staff.



“Helping people correct life choices gone wrong ultimately serves the highest and best purpose of the justice system and the community,” said Gwinnett Solicitor **Rosanna Szabo**. “While defense attorneys zealously pursue the singular best interest of their client, prosecutors pursue the public interest: to serve justice. As prosecutors, we get to do the right thing every time.”

Misdemeanor crimes are punishable by a year in jail or less, including many traffic crimes, crimes against persons, property crimes, drug offenses, and crimes against public order, health, and morals.

In Gwinnett, many such cases are resolved in Recorder’s Court, which reduces the caseload on State Court. Because the same prosecutors serve both courts and State Court judges appoint Recorder’s Court judges, there is an efficiency and common purpose that other metro counties lack.

Gwinnett also has a fully operational courtroom at the jail that hears custody cases daily. More than 20 percent of the Solicitor’s Office’s overall caseload is opened at the jail and more than a third of those cases are resolved at the jail.

Another 20 percent is resolved by a pre-trial diversion program where the defense and prosecution agree—without going to court—on a punishment that can include paying restitution and costs, community service, counseling, and probation.

Solicitor’s Office staff also operates a state-certified Crime Victim Assistance Program that seeks to provide the highest quality services to crime victims, ensuring that they are informed of their rights under the Crime Victim’s Bill of Rights, assisting victims with obtaining temporary protective orders, advising victims of resources available for other assistance, and assisting with victim compensation for injuries and expenses caused as the result of a crime.

As part of the Victim Assistance Program, the Solicitor’s Office also operates several community education programs such as Teen Victim Impact Panel, which exists to educate teen drivers of the potentially fatal consequences of dangerous driving. The panel’s goals are to eliminate the it-won’t-happen-to-me mindset to encourage seat belt use, emphasize the dangers of cell phone use while operating a motor vehicle, and educate about the consequences of speeding.

For younger children, they offer a program called *Hands Are Not For Hitting*. This is presented in partnership with the Gwinnett Retired Educators Association to teach non-violent conflict resolution skills. It is offered as an interactive puppet show or in the form of activity books geared toward children in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade.



Victim Assistance Program Director Kelly Stone says, “Our goal with these programs is to help protect victims and to stop the cycle of crime and violence.”

Dealing with steadily increasing caseloads as well as more multicultural and non-English speaking constituents and working to reduce traffic fatalities and domestic violence homicides are all part of the job for those who work in the Solicitor’s Office.

With more than 200 cases a week from 10 different law enforcement agencies and about 90,000 subpoenas and notices a year, it may sound like something straight out of a Charles Dickens novel, but in Gwinnett and 10 other states, it’s the local solicitor who pursues justice for “We the People.”

Learn more about the Gwinnett County Solicitor’s Office under *Departments* at www.gwinnettcounty.com.

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