

Kara Krothe, Democratic Candidate for Monroe County Circuit Court Division 8
Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
For the Nov. 3, 2020 General Election

1. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the way that the court system is handling its work. In some ways, the period offers an opportunity to reset. Are there any changes to the circuit court system that you'd support post-pandemic? How would you advocate to implement those changes?

The court system needs to do much more with technology to prepare for future such emergencies. In the criminal courts we have been able to do hearings with jail inmates over a screen but it is not set up to provide private consultation between attorney and client and it is a process that would need a lot of adjustments if it was going to be used on a daily basis.

For several years we have had a teleconference system set up between the public defender's office and the jail so that we can meet with clients without physically going to the jail which saves valuable time. Unfortunately the technology is often not working correctly and takes weeks or even months to fix. I also believe the county would save a lot of money and run more efficiently by converting to paperless secure document sharing.

If elected I would set up a committee to review possible technological improvements and I would also ask for guidance from the Indiana Judicial Center on how we could conduct hearings using technology if necessary.

2. Monroe County government has undertaken a criminal justice study. What changes to the current system do you support, and why?

Working as a public defender for 16 years now, one problem we consistently have is jail overcrowding. The criminal justice study is looking at how we can address this problem without building a new jail and making the best use of taxpayer money.

I volunteered to be a representative from my office on the Problem Solving Court team for seven years. Problem solving courts work on the premise that particular groups are coming into the criminal justice system because they have a problem that is currently not being addressed. For example Drug Treatment Court is for people with a substance use disorder, Mental Health Court is for people with untreated mental illness, Veteran Treatment Court is for military veterans who need treatment and Re-entry court is for individuals coming back to our community from prison or jail. Problem solving courts help individuals get the treatment they need and live a substance free lifestyle. This model has better success rates at reducing recidivism compared to traditional probation.

Reducing recidivism helps the community because people will be working and paying taxes and the jail will be less crowded. We need to keep problem solving courts and expand on them. I would advocate for looking into options for bringing a problem solving court here that relies on restorative justice principles. There is a Chicago court that received a two year federal grant to establish a court focusing on participants in the 18-25 year range. The idea being that you can intervene early to keep some of our citizens from having a felony conviction.

3. What are the top challenges facing Monroe County Circuit Court, and how do you propose addressing those challenges?

Court efficiency and jail overcrowding are consistent problems. As a judge I would support programs that decrease jail overcrowding such as problem solving courts and the pilot project we are doing here called pretrial release which eliminates the need for most people to post monetary bond.

Jail is not a place for rehabilitation and we can do more to find alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders but at the same time making sure that victims of crime feel heard and their needs addressed.

When our courts fail to run on an efficient timeline it is damaging to participants who have to leave work to come to court or who have to pay for childcare so they can attend. As a public defender I have efficiently managed a very busy court schedule without sacrificing my clients' right to be heard. I would make it a priority to revisit the master calendar to limit conflicts that attorneys have on a daily basis.