

Kara Krothe, Democratic Candidate for Monroe County Circuit Court
Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
For the June 2, 2020 Primary 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?

As this pandemic illustrates it is crucial to have a plan in place for such emergencies. The court system needs to do much more with technology to prepare for future such emergencies. Currently we are only doing emergency hearings and we have not been informed of what the plan is going forward. In the criminal courts we have been able to do hearings with jail inmates over a screen but it isn't 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. If hearings could be conducted by Zoom or some other technology there would have to be a place where clients who did not have access to technology could go to use a computer to participate in the hearing.

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 takes up valuable time that could be better spent. 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?

I have been an attorney for the Monroe County Public Defender's office for 16 years now and one problem we consistently have in our county is jail overcrowding. It is my

understanding that 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.

As part of my job, I volunteered to be the representative from my office on the Drug Treatment Court team for seven years. Drug Treatment Court is a problem solving court that uses evidence based practices to obtain better results than traditional probation for its participants which translates to better results for our community. When I started as a team member we only had Drug Treatment Court but we have since expanded to four problem solving courts . The idea of problem solving courts is that people in a particular group are coming into the criminal justice system because they have a problem that is currently not being addressed and if that problem is addressed they will be unlikely to come back into the system. 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 in a substance free lifestyle. This model reduces recidivism versus traditional probation.

When we reduce recidivism it helps the community because people will be working and paying taxes and it helps reduce jail overcrowding. We need to keep problem solving courts and expand on them. I would advocate for looking into options for bringing a problem solving court to Monroe County that relies on restorative justice principles. There is a Chicago court that received a two year federal grant to start such 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 and steer them onto a more productive path.

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

Court efficiency is one of the major challenges all court systems face. When our courts don't run on an efficient timeline it can be damaging to participants who have to take time out of work to come to court or who may have to pay someone for childcare while they come to court. As a public defender I have efficiently managed a very busy court schedule while still making my clients feel like I am listening to them and that they are not just a number on a piece of paper. Judges also have very busy court dockets and it

is imperative that they know how to efficiently manage it. Failure to do so can lead to cases not being heard in a timely manner which is very important to the litigants.

Several years ago the judges came up with a master calendar which was to assign certain courts to do certain kinds of cases on specific days therefore limiting the conflicts that prosecutors and public defenders and other litigants would have on a daily basis. In the years that have followed judges have strayed from that calendar leading to several conflicts a day between courts that public defenders and prosecutors need to be in. As a judge I would make it my priority to address this issue again.

As I stated above jail overcrowding is a consistent problem here in Monroe County. 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 people to post monetary bond in most of the cases that come before the court.

Jail is not a place for rehabilitation and I believe there are more things we can do 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 are addressed.