

# Position Paper



## Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce

# BOARD POSITION

Action: APPROVED

Date: September 28, 2017

### **Chamber Supports Request by Bernalillo County District Attorney's Office to Increase FY19 Base Operating Budget and Crime Strategies Unit**

#### **Position**

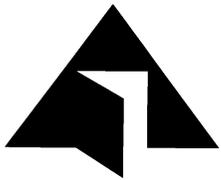
The Board of Directors of the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce supports the request by the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office to increase its fiscal year base operating budget by \$6.5 million and also supports a Crime Strategies Unit to be funded at an appropriate level for the DA's office.

With regard to the request for a budget increase, the Chamber believes the District Attorney's Office is critically underfunded. Currently the Office has nearly three dozen important positions vacant. Unfortunately, for the DA's Office to simply meet its FY18 budget, these positions must remain vacant; this is to the detriment of the Office as well as the public at-large given the important service the Office provides to the citizens of Bernalillo County.

Crime continues to rise at an astonishing rate and the public's safety is at continued risk unless swift and meaningful action is taken by those charged with prosecuting these serious offenders. From 2014-2016 the City of Albuquerque experienced significant increases in several major crime categories—robberies (42% increase), assaults (84% increase) and motor vehicle thefts (117%). In 2016 there were 61 homicides and in the first eight months of 2017 there were 50 homicides. Albuquerque is currently on track to surpass the all-time homicide record for a single year.

The Chamber believes that it is imperative that the District Attorney's Office has the operational funding it needs to: 1.) fill critical vacant positions, 2.) meet the strict requirements of the Court Management Order (CMO), 3.) tackle the backlog of uncharged felony cases and rape kits in need of processing, 4.) contract with experienced attorneys to assist with critical needs, and 5.) hire expert witnesses, order transcripts or prepare exhibits to ensure the Office's effectiveness in prosecuting cases.

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Additional funding would also allow the District Attorney's Office to provide raises to many of its staff who are currently underpaid relative to other state employees. These staffers often endure rigorous work schedules on behalf of the Office, but often must also obtain secondary employment to make ends meet.

The District Attorney's Office has the incredible responsibility of representing the people of Bernalillo County in the prosecution of criminals and to do so adequately and successfully, the Chamber believes it must have the resources it needs to be successful in this endeavor.

The Chamber also supports the creation of a Crime Strategies Unit. The CSU is modeled after a similar successful effort by the San Francisco District Attorney's Office and combines crime analysts, investigators, and prosecutors in the same office, with access to an array of high-tech tools that help them more easily connect crimes and criminals to one another. A CSU will enable the District Attorney's Office to use data and technology to find the most serious criminals and build large cases against them and their associates in order to cripple crime networks and fight crime as efficiently as possible.

### Background

Public Safety is a major priority for the Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce at the state and local levels. It's a serious issue, especially in Albuquerque. High-risk offenders committing such crimes as armed robberies, auto theft, and violent crimes have a significant economic impact and the hardships these criminals create must be minimized if we are to create and preserve a healthy business climate with a safe, high quality of life for all residents. The fight against crime must employ a sustainable, data-driven approach which provides law enforcement and prosecutors the resources they need to take and keep repeat offenders off the streets.

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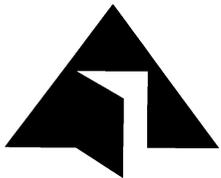
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The Second Judicial District Attorney's Office is given the authority and responsibility for enforcement and prosecution of the State's laws within Bernalillo County. The team evaluates 25,000 cases per year, bringing criminal cases on approximately 18,000 of the referrals per year—an astonishing volume given the limited resources of the Office.

The Chamber is currently working to provide support to the District Attorney's office to ensure these prosecutors have the resources needed to effectively prosecute offenders. The Chamber is also partnered with the District Attorney's Office, law enforcement, public defenders, the Bernalillo County Behavioral Health Initiative, and the Innovation Team to implement sustainable solutions to reduce the crime rate in our community and make it a safer place to live and do business.



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