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My Word

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In light of recent courthouse protests and media coverage concerning the conduct of the Humboldt County District Attorney's Office, I thought it might be a good time for some points of clarification about our Office and criminal justice in general.

1. The mission of the District Attorney's Office is to achieve justice and enhance public safety. That mission of course includes prosecuting anyone responsible for a homicide when a case can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.
2. In the evaluation of cases, the ethnicity, race, gender, social standing, employment status, or anything else someone might perceive about those involved has no bearing.
3. Case evaluation depends entirely on evidence. We can prosecute cases we believe we can prove beyond a reasonable doubt at trial. I recognize the power of narratives in public discourse and the media – but these can have no role in criminal prosecution.
4. The Humboldt County District Attorney's Office has considerable expertise in case evaluation: I have 29 years of experience as a prosecutor, our team of prosecutors includes many knowledgeable people with years of experience, and I have a statewide network of colleagues willing to serve as outside evaluators of cases. We know what makes a case and we know when it's necessary to clarify issues with additional information.
5. I find truth in the adage, "justice delayed is justice denied" - delays in cases must always be well-justified. In recognition of the importance of the pace of justice and through a lot of hard work, our Office has greatly reduced the backlog of cases and shortened their average age. We are only rarely responsible for slowing cases and we only do so out of necessity – for example to complete additional critical investigations.
6. Making a decision about a case when important information remains unexamined is a recipe for injustice. Demands for action based on anything other than evidence do not serve justice.
7. Publicity of cases before their conclusion is a challenging issue for justice and transparency. Our Office must minimize public comment on cases in progress because doing so can harm our mission to achieve justice. I have seen such comments affect the availability of evidence, the behavior of witnesses and the objectivity of prospective jurors. Unfortunately, our inability to comment increases the possible influence of comments by people with no experience as prosecutors who claim expertise and make misleading and sometimes self-serving statements.

I think it's important for the community to understand the role of the District Attorney's Office and to assess its performance. Fair assessment of our Office will be based on more than the coverage of any one case before its conclusion. Objective evaluators will see that we put everything we have into achieving justice in every case.