



Opening Argument



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Cutting District Attorneys' Budgets Will Hurt Public Safety

The proposed 7% reduction in the budgets of the City's five District Attorneys and Special Narcotics Prosecutor pose a potentially adverse public safety impact which City Hall must carefully consider as it tries to resolve a \$5 billion funding gap looming in Fiscal 2003.

The cuts in prosecutors' budgets that have been proposed would total \$16.2 million citywide and \$2.6 million in Queens County where we are already absorbing a \$1.0 million, 2.5% cut in this year's budget.

Hamper Our Ability

The proposed budget cut would seriously hamper our ability to continue to deliver the current level of criminal justice services which include arrests, arraignments, grand jury indictments, investigative initiatives, court hearings and trials.

The City's prosecutors recently told the City Council that while we are acutely aware of the City's fiscal dilemma and are prepared to do our fair share to help to close the gap, any action taken must recognize the important role that prosecutors play in maintaining public safety.

The decrease in the crime rate has been the keystone in our City's remarkable economic recovery. It must be recognized that large reductions in prosecutors' budgets will yield little to the City treasury, but will do much to hamper our ability to prosecute criminal activity and investigate criminal conduct and will undermine the City's commitment to ensuring public safety.

Criminal justice services can be likened to a "funnel" with police at the much wider upper end and prosecutors at the more narrow lower end. Police enforce laws and arrest law breakers. They bring the individuals whom they arrest to the District Attorneys for case processing and prosecution.

In Queens County our office prosecutes almost 60,000 cases each year.

Each case is ably and quickly processed by our staff of 600 employees, which includes 300 Assistant District Attorneys. Case processing speed is vital, because arresting officers must get back on duty during their shift to better protect public safety. The faster police officers process an arrest, the quicker they get back on patrol. We do this work very efficiently and effectively. In fact, we are the only county to ever break 17 hours (we do it in 16.88 hours) in arrest to arraignment time. The clock starts ticking when defendants are brought under arrest to a police station house and it runs until they are arraigned -- informed of the charges against them -- by a judge.

We also lead the City in complaint sworn time, 7.93 hours, the amount of time it takes to draft a criminal complaint, and in the percentage of cases arraigned within 24 hours, 88.86%. I am very proud of our record and of the efforts of our staff of dedicated and devoted professionals. Their hard work has been responsible for our success. Last year, Queens County benefitted from a 12.9% decrease in violent crime, the lowest number of homicides in 32 years -- 94 -- and an 80% reduction in auto crime since its height in the early 90s.

Consistent Cuts

We believe that any reductions in our budgets should be consistent with those given to other law enforcement agencies. We also feel that we should have an opportunity to substitute productivity initiatives and other cost saving measures to help close the budget gap.

It would be a serious mistake to view the progress that has been made in the fight against crime as the end of the fight and to abandon initiatives that have played a critical role in crime reduction. If we are to complete the job that we have so successfully begun, it is crucial that we maintain financial support for our anti-crime programs.