



## **Seth Williams' testimony before the City Council of Philadelphia**

February 11, 2009

I am proud to have this opportunity to testify today on a subject so significant to me personally - one that constitutes a key component of my campaign for District Attorney.

For ten years, I was an Assistant District Attorney. In that time, I was promoted often and was asked to create a Repeat Offenders Unit for the District Attorney's Office and serve as its Chief.

As Chief of the Repeat Offender's Unit, I saw firsthand how the same criminals were released again and again to wreak havoc on their own neighborhoods. Since early in 2005, I have strenuously advocated that the City of Philadelphia adopt a system of Community-Based Prosecution – a system that has proven effective in cities across the country.

Community-based prosecution is a grass-roots approach to criminal justice involving citizens, law enforcement, and other government agencies in problem-solving efforts to address safety, fairness and quality of life.

Prosecutors are presently assigned to courtrooms. Under a system of community-based prosecution, they will be assigned to neighborhoods. Community-based courts working in conjunction with those community-based prosecutors would be a highly effective tool not just for crime fighting, but also for crime prevention.

A day-to-day, firsthand knowledge of the community and its residents are important in distinguishing a hardened neighborhood predator from a kid in need of early intervention. The knowledge and experience of the community-based prosecutor working in a community-based court can determine when the interest of justice and safety is best served through a lengthy prison sentence or an early intervention alternative.

For some first time or nonviolent offenders, the cause of justice is better served through alternatives to incarceration. Young offenders, once exposed to the prison environment, are far more likely to become recidivists upon release, earning progressively longer sentences. The chances that a young nonviolent offender can be turned around are greater when exposed to work camps or work release programs with an educational component.

Should I be fortunate enough to win this election, I will insure that the District Attorney's Office takes full advantage of these programs, freeing the much-needed prison space for offenders who belong in prison.

True community prosecution allows attorneys to act as problem-solvers, engaging in proactive crime prevention and working side-by-side with judges, the police and the community in a renewed focus on the quality of neighborhood life. The next District Attorney has the power to fix this problem, without adding personnel or raising the budget, by instituting community-based prosecution as the foundation for the entire Office.

As District Attorney, I will make this program a priority and I am looking forward to working with members of City Council to implement a system of community-based prosecution. Together, we will set high standards, demand accountability and develop a system of justice for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Together, we will again make the City of Philadelphia a great place to live, work, and raise our families.

Thank you again.