

# 2025 Public Safety Agenda for Prosecutors and Courts



## INTRODUCTION

● The era of the so-called “progressive prosecutor” appears to have passed, giving way to mounting pressure on courts and prosecutors to adopt “tough on crime” approaches despite a lack of research supporting their effectiveness. Yet even with these challenges, prosecutors and courts retain significant power to shape a justice system that prioritizes public safety while addressing systemic flaws. Many remain committed to prioritizing smart policies over free-driven politics. As we move into 2025, this agenda outlines practical, impactful steps that prosecutors and courts can take to enhance safety, rebuild trust, and advance justice in a rapidly evolving landscape.

## AGENDA


### IMPROVE CASE EXPEDIENCY

Instead of overhauling the system, it may be time to streamline existing processes for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

- — ? **Why:** Speed is critical to ensure fairness and effectiveness when [processing cases through the justice system](#). Research consistently shows that the swiftness of punishment has a [greater deterrent effect on crime](#) than the severity, emphasizing the importance of timely resolution. Delays in the justice process can erode case quality as witnesses’ memories fade, evidence degrades, or individuals simply become unavailable. For victims, prolonged timelines delay closure, compounding their trauma and undermining trust in the system. As the system continues to face [staffing issues and backlogs](#), resolving cases quickly has never been more important. For defendants, quicker outcomes mean more opportunities to contribute as a productive member of society through accountability, rehabilitation, or returning to work.
- ✓ **Benefit:** Case expediency can be achieved in many ways, but a good starting point for courts and prosecutors is creating internal policies around caseload or procedural deadlines and exploring investments in advanced technology. [Controlling a case’s progress](#) is key. Some states set time-limit standards for [bail decisions](#), [charging decisions](#), or [case resolution](#); courts or prosecutors can create similar policies to help eliminate unnecessary bottlenecks. If meeting a deadline is consistently challenging, it is essential to examine the underlying

## IMPROVE CASE EXPEDIENCY (continued)

causes and identify opportunities for efficiency improvements. Implementing more advanced technology can help ensure these deadlines are met. Artificial intelligence (AI) can [efficiently review and analyze evidence](#), speeding up information processing, assessing probable cause, and identifying potential red flags. Even modernized case management systems can enhance consistency in outcomes, ensure timely victim notifications, and auto-generate essential court filings. These tools streamline processes while clear internal deadlines help hold humans accountable for timely and efficient case resolution.


 **Keep in Mind:** Prosecution offices and courts have been [slow to adopt advanced technology](#) and are often hesitant to change familiar policies and practices. When implementing new policies, examining successes in other jurisdictions can illustrate how initial challenges pave the way for long-term success. While the upfront costs of integrating new technology may be significant, [grants could help offset expenses](#) and [long-term savings could follow](#). When exploring tools like AI, it is also essential to [carefully address concerns](#) around discrimination and privacy to ensure fair and ethical practices.


### **Where Communities Stand:**


- [Caseflow management](#) – Multiple jurisdictions
- [AI for evidence review](#) – Oakland County, Michigan
- [Case management system to screen for diversion](#) – Coming soon

## REDUCE FAILURES TO APPEAR

Court proceedings stall without attendance, but small changes can significantly improve appearance rates.

 **Why:** Research shows that [17 percent of felony cases](#) involve a missed court date, and some jurisdictions show a failure to appear in up to 52 percent of misdemeanor cases. More often than not, [failures to appear](#) result from logistical challenges like lack of transportation, work conflicts, child care issues, or even simply forgetting or misunderstanding a court date rather than a deliberate attempt to evade the system. When someone misses court, it creates a ripple effect: Courts and attorneys must reschedule hearings, delaying case resolution and adding to already heavy caseloads. Police then face the burden of executing warrants, diverting resources from elsewhere. For accused individuals, being arrested for a missed court appearance can disrupt jobs, family responsibilities, and housing stability, often causing more harm than the original issue that brought them to court. By implementing small changes to improve appearance rates, the system can reduce unnecessary strain while minimizing disruptions in people's lives.

 **Benefit:** Reducing failures to appear benefits both individuals and the justice system. [Simplified court summons](#) and [automatic notification systems](#) have proven effective in preventing missed appearances caused by confusion or forgetfulness. Expanding [virtual appearances](#), particularly for non-substantive hearings, can reduce stress for everyone involved while improving attendance rates. If a warrant is issued, [specialized dockets or events](#) that connect individuals with community resources like housing support, job assistance, and treatment services can resolve cases more efficiently. By reducing failures to appear, expensive resources like warrant enforcement can be prioritized for those who pose a danger to the community or are intentionally avoiding justice, ensuring the system operates more fairly and effectively.

 **Keep in Mind:** Making court notifications [opt-out instead of opt-in](#) removes unnecessary hurdles by ensuring participants receive critical reminders automatically. Warrant-resolution initiatives do not mean attendees are exempt from arrest; clear boundaries can still be set, such as avoiding on-site arrests while keeping the warrant active for future resolution. This approach balances public safety concerns with encouraging participation in the legal process.

## REDUCE FAILURES TO APPEAR (continued)

### BETTER ADDRESS REPEAT OFFENDERS

A small number of individuals consume a large share of criminal justice resources, making it critical to address repeat offenders effectively.

## FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

#### 📍 Where Communities Stand:

- [Electronic court reminders](#) – Hennepin County, Minnesota
- [“Walk-in” docket](#) – Kansas City, Kansas
- [Warrant Fest](#) – Spokane, Washington

— **?** **Why:** [Repeat offenders](#) often appear in the news, fueling public frustration and demanding attention from policymakers and the justice system. These offenders place a significant drain on public resources, from law enforcement to courts and detention facilities. Their repeated presence also highlights systemic gaps in addressing underlying issues like [mental health disorders](#), [substance use](#), and [homelessness](#)—factors that frequently contribute to cycles of rearrest. These challenges reveal that the current system could be doing more to break these patterns and ensure individuals have the support and resources to succeed outside the system.

✓ **Benefit:** Violations of bail, probation, or parole should receive swift but proportional responses. This could be [accomplished](#) through a modification of conditions, a sanction—such as one night in jail—or, when necessary, revocation resulting in detention. While alternatives to detention for noncompliance on supervision have long been available in many states [post-conviction](#), their use at the pretrial stage is relatively new. Making it work would require collaboration among judges, supervision officers, and prosecutors. Any response must also be formulated within a holistic framework that addresses [underlying causes of criminality](#) in order to be truly effective. Root causes can be addressed through [needs assessments and case management](#); [targeted diversion programs](#); or alternatives like [problem-solving courts](#) or [restorative justice](#), which integrate mental health and addiction treatment into the sentencing process.

🗨️ **Keep in Mind:** Supervision, revocation hearings, treatment, and detention should be reserved for individuals who truly need them—not those caught up in [technical violations](#) for minor missteps. [Over-supervision](#) and [unnecessary incarceration can backfire](#), increasing criminal behavior while draining resources and diluting support for those who truly need intervention. Further, ensuring access to adequate support and services is essential. Too often, communities [lack sufficient resources](#) to implement their well-intentioned policies effectively.

#### 📍 Where Communities Stand:

- [Pretrial needs assessment and voluntary support](#) – Camden, Essex, and Middlesex Counties, New Jersey
- [Alternatives to revocation](#) – Multiple jurisdictions
- [Shelter Court](#) – Missoula, Montana

● If you need help with further research around these issues, information on implementing these types of initiatives, or anything else, please do not hesitate to reach out.

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