

Between the Lines

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UPCOMING TRAININGS & CONFERENCES

NDAA's Prosecuting DUI Cases Online Course
 On Demand Training

https://ndaa.org/training/prosecuting-dui-cases/

Lifesavers Conference

Tampa Bay, FL / March 15-17, 2020

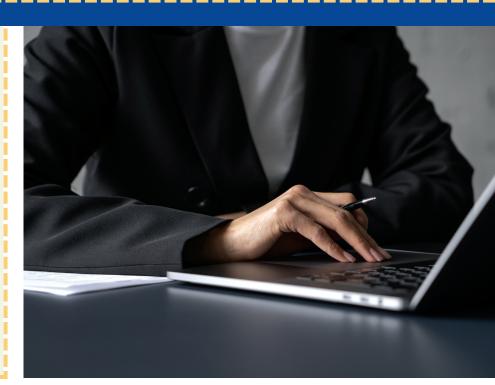
NDAA's Securing and Protecting Your Case: Evidence for Prosecutors

New Orleans, LA / March 16-19, 2020

NDAA's Improving Your Trial Strategies: Hands On Trial Advocacy Training

Columbia, SC / April 20-24, 2020

- NDAA's Career Prosecutor Course
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NDAA STAFF

Executive Director

Nelson O. Bunn, Jr.

Chief Operating Officer

Christine Mica

THE NATIONAL TRAFFIC LAW CENTER

Director

Joanne E. Thomka: <u>jthomka@ndaajustice.org</u>

Senior Attorneys

M. Kimberly Brown: mkbrown@ndaajustice.org
Romana Lavalas: rlavalas@ndaajustice.org

Staff Attorneys

Jeanine Howard: <u>jhoward@ndaajustice.org</u> Erin Inman: <u>einman@ndaajustice.org</u>

Project Coordinator

Metria Hernandez

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If Your State Doesn't Have a TSRP, This Is Why It Should

By Clay Abbott1

here are Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutors (TSRP) in almost every state. The TSRP has many roles, and I want to talk about my two favorites: 1) the TSRP as a resource, and 2) the TSRP as an ambassador.

A RESOURCE

Twice a year, my employer, the Texas District and County Attorneys Association (TDCAA), holds a Prosecutor Trial Skills Course for new prosecutors in Texas. It has been my privilege to present at the last 41 such courses. This conference recharges my batteries like

nothing else. It is also my twice-yearly reminder why I both have and love my job. I am a resource prosecutor.

This course also reminds me twice a year of the main reason we TSRPs exist. New prosecutors are an extremely important part of the criminal justice system, yet they are ridiculously overworked and undertrained, they lack resources, and they are often left to blunder through learning a job with very real impact on the world around them. The cases of most victims and defendants, after all, go through the lower courts. The public's view of prosecutors and courts depends on these "green" prosecutors; public safety also depends on them. Yet they get little or no attention until they do something very wrong. As a resource prosecutor, I answer to elected prosecutors through our association, but I serve new prosecutors who are valiantly trying to learn the coolest, most important, and perhaps most difficult job in the world.

On my first day in the DA's office back in the '80s, I went to traffic court to try a case. My training was the hearty blessing from my chief of, "Don't screw up." I hope we are doing

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better 35 years later, but my guess is not a lot better. I went to a training session for prosecutors after almost exactly a year of floundering. The first advice I would give a new prosecutor anywhere is to find your resource prosecutors. The first advice I would give to any TSRP is to find your new prosecutors. It would be great if every overstressed, over-docketed, understaffed prosecutor's office had a training plan. My experience is they don't. New prosecutors must find the training and beg to attend.

One of the great things about the Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor program is that every state gets to create the position that serves itself best. Some TSRPs can swoop in and appear on cases.² Many TSRPs publish manuals to assist with understanding various areas of traffic safety, for example, TDCAA has a dozen or so. For the new prosecutors reading this, make sure you know what resources your TSRP has in written or digital form. TDCAA publishes 16 manuals including a Predicate Guide, DWI Investigation and Prosecution, Intoxication Manslaughter, Traffic Stops, and a Warrants Manual. Nothing beats taking the textbook with

you to your first trial, or better yet, reading it before you go. TDCAA also publishes a journal, *The Texas Prosecutor*, six times a year. It is written by Texas prosecutors for Texas prosecutors. If you are reading this article, you have found a similar periodical—seek out your local TSRP to find what else you have in your state. Many TSRPs use list serves or other digital platforms to also share valuable information.

Chances are your TSRP has a website or a page on a website. Mine is https://www.tdcaa.com/resources/dwi/. There, you'll find a digital case summary of every important DWI case opinion from Texas, and it's updated twice yearly. There is an SFST review document, numerous forms, articles from TDCAA's journal, and about 12 hours of excellent training videos. Want an hour of examples of DWI jury selection by the very best DWI prosecutors in Texas? You'll find it there. The Texas web page may be biggest (well, because everything is bigger in Texas), but every TSRP is busy completing similar products for the prosecutors they serve.

The luxury I have found as a resource prosecutor is that I have time to read, study, network, and update like I never did in a local office pushing a docket up the hill every day. I have the opportunity to gather resources and not just respond to emergencies. (Responding to emer-

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gencies was my life as a supervising prosecutor.) Gathering resources allows me the time to develop content and prepare presentations that line prosecutors simply can't. In addition, I, like most TSRPs, gather the best line prosecutors across my state and the country to help me teach and present. Not surprisingly, most TSRPs are highly sought-after presenters for police training programs and traffic safety programs. I get dozens of requests each year in Texas and dozens more across the country, most of which I must turn down because I put on about 20 regional programs trying to get close to the new prosecutors who need me most. Most TSRPs are very familiar with the roads in their states for the exact same reason.

Are you so remote no one will go there? Have you explored webinars? Keep reading this publication I bet you find info on them.

The bottom line is that every single TSRP provides technical assistance in many different forms. At our very core, resource prosecutors are people to call or email when no one around

you seems to have an answer. While we might not know the answer, chances are we know someone in the country who does. More resources—whether through in-person training, trying cases, fielding phone calls, or writing reference books—make hard jobs easier.

AN AMBASSADOR

The TSRP as an ambassador may be a bit less obvious than our role as a resource, but in my opinion it is equally important. The Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor has one foot in traffic safety and the other in criminal justice. Those two worlds often use the same words but they can have opposite meanings. Although both serve the public good, they go about it in different ways and with sometimes opposing strategies.

Prosecutors serve the people as a client. That client includes, but certainly is not only, the traffic safety community. Prosecutors must be a part of any effort using criminal justice as a mechanism to save lives and change behavior. There is not part of the criminal justice system more powerful or granted greater discretion and holding greater responsibility than prosecutors.

The TSRP plays an essential role in the traffic community, on task forces, on assessment teams, and in any policy-making dialogue. They bring the experience of the line prosecutor, the rare expertise of a prosecution specialist, and the ability to research denied most prosecutors by the demand of docket.

They purposefully are granted more discretion than peace officers and are given more responsibility than judges. If law enforcement and adjudication are part of a solution, then prosecutors must be part of the plan. No other role in criminal justice interacts with every other role in criminal justice. Prosecutors are simply the center of the storm.

The TSRP plays an essential role in the traffic community, on task forces, on assessment teams, and in any policy-making dialogue. They bring the experience of the line prosecutor, the rare expertise of a prosecution specialist, and the ability to research denied most prosecutors by the demand of docket. Without the TSRP, every plan, discussion, and initiative has a profound blindside. No "fire" is as needless or heartbreaking as "friendly fire."

The TSRP also serves as an ambassador to prosecutors from the traffic safety community.

When misunderstandings arise between prosecutors and victims' advocates, police, judges, funding sources, or national initiatives, the TSRP is especially suited to help resolve it. We understand the goals of each side and often the demands of both sides, too. The traffic safety office requires "data-driven, evidence-based" proposals. When they use the word "evidence," they mean surveys, assessments, statistical studies, and anonymously submitted data enhanced and completed with statistically sound inclusions. None of those things constitute "evidence" to a prosecutor in a courtroom (meaning, none of those things comes anywhere close to the standards required of

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"admissible evidence")—prosecutors think evidence is eyewitness testimony, expert opinions, and case-specific data applied one case at a time. To the traffic safety specialist, every bit of this "admissible evidence" is anecdotal and entirely worthless. At their very core, these two groups use the same words with not only different meanings, but opposite ones.

To quote the warden in *Cool Hand Luke*, "What we have here is a failure to communicate." What is needed is a translator—and more importantly, an ambassador or diplomat. Traffic safety specialists appropriately gravitate to hard numbers, such as arrests and convictions, but TSRPs also know the disaster awaiting any peace officer or prosecutor tying funding to a constitutionally sensitive decision. Friendly fire kills you as dead as unfriendly fire. It may actually be worse because no one ever sees it coming.

Again, my advice to line prosecutors is that before you send that confrontational letter to a traffic safety ally, talk to the TSRP ambassador. TSRPs understand where prosecutors can, and perhaps more importantly cannot, help reach legitimate traffic safety goals. The TSRP serves both sides by facilitating communication.

For 16 years, being a resource prosecutor has been my job, but more importantly my calling. Serving the people of Texas as a prosecutor was significant and fulfilling, but serving the prosecutors who serve the people of Texas has been an even greater blessing. Find your TSRP, engage, get their help, and help them know what you need.

¹ Mr. Abbott is the Texas Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor and works for the Texas District and County Attorneys Association.

² Mr. Abbott does not appear on cases; "To try a case for each office in my state would require six years to prosecute one case per week per office."

TRAFFIC SAFETY RESOURCE PROSECUTORS

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ALABAMA

Bill Lindsey

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

515 South Perry St. Montgomery, AL 36103 Phone: 334.242.4191

Fax: 334.240.3186

Email: william.lindsey@alabamada.gov
Web: http://alabamaduiprosecution.com

ALASKA

Currently Vacant

ARIZONA

L. Beth Barnes

Assistant City Prosecutor, City of Phoenix

300 West Washington, 8th Floor

Phoenix, AZ 85003 Phone: 602.262.6461

Email: <u>beth.barnes@phoenix.gov</u>

Web: http://phoenix.gov/LAW/tsrp.html

ARKANSAS

Mark L. Carpenter

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Office of the Prosecutor Coordinator

323 Center St, Ste 750 Little Rock, AR 72201 Phone: 501.682.3576

Email: Mark.Carpenter@arkansas.gov

CALIFORNIA

Hoon Chang

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Orange County District Attorney's Office

401 W. Civic Center Drive Santa Ana, CA 92701 Phone: 714.347.8620

Email: hoon.chang@da.ocgov.com

Dalia Wahab

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor
Orange County District Attorney's Office

401 W. Civic Center Drive Santa Ana, CA 92701

Phone: 714.347.8887

Email: <u>Dalia.Wahab@da.ocgov.com</u>

COLORADO

Jennifer R. Knudsen

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Colorado District Attorneys Council

3600 S. Yosemite St., Ste. 200

Denver, CO 80237

Email: jen@cdac.state.co.us Phone: 303. 830.9115 (main) Phone: 303. 957.2547 (direct)

Fax: 303. 830.8378

Web: www.cdacweb.com

CONNECTICUT

Brenda Hans

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

300 Corporate Place Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone: 860. 258.5926 Fax: 860.258.5838

Email: Brenda.Hans@ct.gov

DELAWARE

Barzilai Axelrod

Deputy Attorney General

Delaware Department of Justice 820 North French Street, 7th Floor

Wilmington, DE 19801

Phone: 302.577.5173 (direct)

Fax: 302.577.2496

Email: Barzilai.axelrod@state.de.us

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Melissa G. Shear

Assistant Attorney General Office of the Attorney General

Public Safety Division - Criminal Section

441 4th Street, NW, Suite 1060N

Washington, DC 20001 Phone: 202.724.6633 Fax: 202.730.1478

Email: Melissa.Shear@dc.gov

FLORIDA

Vincent Petty

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Unit 107 PMB 108 14851 State Road 52 Hudson, FL 34669-4061 Phone: 850.566.9021

Email: VinPetty@FloridaTSRP.com

GEORGIA

Gilbert A. Crosby

Prosecuting Attorneys Council of Georgia

1590 Adamson Parkway, 4th Floor

Morrow, GA 30260-1755 Phone: 404.969.4001

Email: gcrosby@pacga.org

Jason Samuels

Senior Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Prosecuting Attorneys Council of Georgia

1590 Adamson Parkway, 4th Floor

Morrow, GA 30260-1755 Phone: 770.282.6282 Mobile: 404.295.7300

Email: jsamuels@pacga.org

HAWAII

Stephen L. Frye

Deputy Prosecuting Attorney

Office of the Prosecuting Attorney

County of Hawaii

81-980 Haleki'i St., Suite #150

Kealakekua, HI 96750 Phone: 808.322.2552

Email: Stephen.Frye@HawaiiCounty.gov

Ramsey Ross

Deputy Prosecuting Attorney-County of Kaua'i

3990 Kaana Street Lihue, HI 96766 Phone: 808.241.1911 Email: rross@kauai.gov

IDAHO

Jared Olson

Idaho Prosecuting Attorneys Association

Idaho POST Academy 700 S. Stratford Drive Meridian, ID 83642 Phone: 208.884.7325

Cell: 208.559.1217

Email: <u>Jared.olson@post.idaho.gov</u>

Web: www.TSRP-Idaho.org

ILLINOIS

Jennifer L. Cifaldi

Illinois Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Institute for Legal, Legislative and Policy Studies

Univ. of Illinois Springfield

Center for State Policy and Leadership One University Plaza, MS PAC 451

Springfield, IL 62703-5407 Phone: 217.257.5050

Email: jcifaldi3@gmail.com

INDIANA

Christopher Daniels Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council 302 W. Washington Street, E-205 Indianapolis, IN 46204-2767

Phone: 317.232.1836

Email: chdaniels@ipac.in.gov

Erica J. Dobbs

Assistant Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council 302 W. Washington Street, E-205 Indianapolis, IN 46204-2767

Phone: 317.232.1836

Email: erdobbs@ipac.in.gov

IOWA

Jeremy Peterson Assistant Iowa Attorney General Office of the Attorney General of Iowa Prosecuting Attorneys Training Coordinator Div. 1305 E. Walnut Street

Des Moines, IA 50319 Phone: 515.281.5428

Email: jeremy.peterson@ag.iowa.gov

KANSAS

Corey Kenney
Assistant Attorney General
Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor
Office of Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt
120 SW 10th Avenue, 2nd Floor
Topeka, KS 66612

Phone: 785.296.3750

Email: Corey.Kenney@ag.ks.gov

KENTUCKY

Aaron Ann Cole

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Kentucky State Police 919 Versailles Road Frankfort, KY 40601

Phone: 502.782.2199 Fax: 502.782.1636

AaronAnn.Cole@ky.gov

TOM LOCKRIDGE

Office of the Attorney General 1024 Capitol Center Drive Frankfort, KY 40601-8204

Phone: 502.696.5437 Cell: 859.351.7878

Email: tlockridge@prosecutors.ky.gov

LOUISIANA

Rachel Smith

Louisiana District Attorneys Association

1645 Nicholson Drive

Baton Rouge, LA 70802-8143

Phone: 225.343.0171 Email: Rachel@LDAA.org

MAINE

Scot Mattox, Esq.

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Maine Bureau of Highway Safety

Dirigo Safety, LLC

225 First Flight Dr. Ste. 2B

Auburn, ME 04210 Phone: 207.376.7325

Email: scot.mattox@dirigosafety.com

Web: www.dirigosafety.com

MARYLAND

David Daggett

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor
Maryland State's Attorneys Association

3300 North Ridge Road, Ste 185

Ellicott City, MD 21043 Phone: 410.203.9881 Cell: 410.979.3356

Email: ddaggett@mdsaa.org

MASSACHUSETTS

Andrea Nardone

Mass. District Attorneys Association

1 Bulfinch Place, Suite 202

Boston, MA 02114 Phone: 617.723.0642

Email: Andrea.Nardone@state.ma.us

Web: www.mass.gov/mdaa

MICHIGAN

Ken Stecker

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan

116 West Ottawa Street, Suite 200

Lansing, MI 48913

Phone: 517.334.6060 ext. 827
Email: steckerk@michigan.gov
Web: www.michiganprosecutor.org

Kinga Gorzelewski Canike

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan

116 West Ottawa Street, Suite 200

Lansing, MI 48913

Phone: 517.334.6060 ext. 816 Email: CanikeK@michigan.gov

Web: www.michiganprosecutor.org

MINNESOTA

Bill Lemons

Minnesota County Attorney Association

100 Empire Drive, Suite 200

St. Paul, MN 55103 Phone: 651.289.8451

Email: blemons@mcaa-mn.org
Web: www.mcaa-mn.org

MISSISSIPPI

Molly Miller

Mississippi Attorney General's Office

Walter Sillers Bldg.

550 High Street, P.O. Box 220

Jackson, MS 39205 Phone: 601.359.4265 Fax: 601.359.4254

Email: mmill@ago.state.ms.us

MISSOURI

Susan Glass

Missouri Office of Prosecution Services

P.O. Box 899

Jefferson City, MO 65102 Phone: 573.301.2630

Fax: 573.751.1171

Email: Susan.Glass@prosecutors.mo.gov

Stephanie Watson

Missouri Office of Prosecution Services

P.O. Box 899

Jefferson City, MO 65102 Phone: 573.751.2415 Fax: 573.751.1171

Email: <u>Stephanie.Watson@prosecutors.mo.gov</u>

MONTANA

Chad Parker

Assistant Attorney General

Montana Department of Justice

215 N. Sanders Street

P.O. Box 201401

Helena, MT 59620-1401 Phone: 406, 444,2026

Email: CParker2@mt.gov

NEBRASKA

Ed Vierk

Attorney General's Office

2115 State Capital

Lincoln, NE 68509 Phone: 402.471.1886

Fax: 402.471.3591

Email: Ed.Vierk@nebraska.gov

NEVADA

Shannon M. Bryant Deputy District Attorney

Washoe County District Attorney's Office

1 S. Sierra St. Reno, NV 89501 Phone: 775.337.5751

Email: sbryant@da.washoecounty.us

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Benjamin Maki

New Hampshire Department of Justice

Office of the Attorney General

33 Capitol Street Concord, NH 03301 Phone: 603.271.2069

Email: Benjamin.Maki@doj.nh.gov

NEW JERSEY

Robyn Mitchell

Division of Criminal Justice

25 Market Street

PO Box 086

Trenton, NJ 08625-0086

Phone: 609.376.2398

Email: mitchellr@njdcj.org

Erin Shamy

Deputy Attorney General

Division of Criminal Justice

25 Market Street

P.O. Box 085

Trenton, NJ 08625-0085

Phone: 732.282.6054

Email: shamye@njdcj.org

NEW MEXICO

Brett Barnes

Assistant Attorney General

New Mexico Office of the Attorney General

408 Galisteo Street

Santa Fe, NM 87504

Phone: 505.490.4842

Email: bbarnes@nmag.gov

Ashley A. Schweizer

Assistant Attorney General

Prosecutions Division

New Mexico Office of the Attorney General

Box 1508

Santa Fe, NM 87504

Phone: 505.717.3567

Email: <u>aschweizer@nmag.gov</u>

NEW YORK

Lauren D. Konsul

New York Prosecutors Training Institute

107 Columbia Street Albany, NY 12210

Phone: 518.432.1100 x. 203

Email: lauren.konsul@nypti.org

Web: www.nypti.org

Mary Tanner-Richter

Vehicular Crimes Bureau Chief

Albany County District Attorney's Office

6 Lodge Street Albany, NY 12207 Phone: 518.275.4743

Email: Mary.Tanner-Richter@albanycountyny.gov

NORTH CAROLINA

Isaac T. (Ike) Avery, III

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

North Carolina Conference District Attorneys

P. O. Box 3159 Cary, NC 27519 Phone: 919.829.2523

Email: Isaac.T.Avery@nccourts.org

Sarah Z. Garner

North Carolina Conference District Attorneys

P. O. Box 3159 Cary, NC 27519 Phone: 919.890.1500

Email: Sarah.z.garner@nccourts.org

NORTH DAKOTA

Aaron Birst 1661 Capitol Way

P.O. Box 877

Bismarck, ND 58502-0877

Phone 701.328.7342

Email: <u>aaron.birst@ndaco.org</u>

Kristi Pettit Venhuizen

311 South 4th Street, Suite 103

Grand Forks, ND 58201 Phone: 701.780.9276 Fax: 701.780.0786

Email: kpettit@kalashpettitlaw.com

OHIO

Holly Reese

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Ohio Traffic Safety Office

Stark County Sheriff's Office

4500 Atlantic Blvd., N.E. Canton, OH 44705

Phone: 330.904.8971

Email: hreesetsrp@gmail.com

Sierra Williams

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Ohio Traffic Safety Office

c/o Cincinnati Police Department

310 Ezzard Charles Dr. Cincinnati, OH 45214 Phone: 513.379.7551

Email: swilliams.tsrp@gmail.com

OKLAHOMA

Jeff Sifers

District Attorneys Council 421 N.W. 13th Street, Ste 290 Oklahoma City, OK 73103

Phone: 405.264.5000

Email: jeff.sifers@dac.state.ok.us

OREGON

Deena Ryerson

Senior Assistant Attorney General Oregon Department of Justice 2250 McGilhrist Street, SE

Salem, OR 97302 Phone: 503.934.2030 Mobile: 503.991.0313

Email: Deena.a.ryerson@doj.state.or.us

PENNSYLVANIA

Jerry Spangler

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association

2929 North Front Street Harrisburg, PA 17110 Phone: 717.238.5416

Email: jspangler@pdaa.org

PUERTO RICO

Rosaura González Vélez

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Coord. of te Specialized DWI Prosecution Unit

Calle Teniente César González 672

Esquina Av. Jesús T. Piñeiro

Piso 2 - Ofiina 204 San Juan, PR 00919

Phone: 787.721.2900 ext.1241 Email: rgonzalez@justicia.pr.gov

RHODE ISLAND

Jay Sullivan

Assistant Attorney General

RI Attorney General 150 South Main Street Providence, RI 02903

Phone: 401.274.4400 ext. 2375 Email: jsullivan@riag.ri.gov

SOUTH CAROLINA

Sara Lee M. Drawdy

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

SC Commission on Prosecution Coordination

PO 11561

Columbia, SC 29211-1561 Phone: 803.343.0765 Direct line: 803.832.8278

Fax: 803.343.0766

Email: sldrawdy@cpc.sc.gov

SOUTH DAKOTA

Paul Bachand PO Box 1174

Pierre, SD 57501-1174 Phone: 605.224.0461

Email: pbachand@pirlaw.com

TENNESSEE

Linda D. Walls

Tennessee District Attorneys General

283 Stewarts Ferry Pike Nashville, TN 37214 Phone: 615.945.2040

Alternate phone: 615.232.2944 Email: ldwalls@tndagc.org Web: www.dui.tndagc.org

Terry Wood

Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference

226 Anne Dallas Dudley Blvd., Suite 800

Nashville, TN 37243-0890 Phone: 615.253. 6734

Email: tewood@tndagc.org
Web: www.dui.tndagc.org

TEXAS

W. Clay Abbott

Texas District & County Attorneys Association

505 W. 12th Street, Suite 100

Austin, TX 78701 Phone: 512.474.2436

Email: Clay.Abbott@tdcaa.com

Web: www.tdcaa.com

UTAH

Tyson K. Seen

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Utah Prosecution Council

5272 College Drive Murray, UT 84123 Phone: 801.281.1209 Cell: 801.391.9667

Email: tskeen@agutah.gov

VERMONT

Stacy Graczyk

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

7 Mahady Court Middlebury, VT 05753 Phone: 802.388.7931

Email: stacy.graczyk@vermont.gov

Heather J. Gray

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Dept of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs

110 State Street

Montpelier, VT 05633-6401

Phone: 802.828.2891

Email: heather.gray@vermont.gov

VIRGINIA

Jacob "Jake" Lambert

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Commonwealth's Attorneys Services Council

P.O. Box 3549

Williamsburg, VA 23187-3549

Phone: 757.253.4994

Email: jrlambert@wm.edu

WASHINGTON

Julia Davis

Deputy Prosecuting Attorney

Yakima County Prosecutor's Office

Yakima County Courthouse, Room 233

128 N. Second Street Yakima, WA 98901 Phone: 509.574.1218 Fax: 509.574.1245

Email: juli.davis@co.yakima.wa.us

Web Site: http://www.yakimacounty.us/pa/ Web: https://duienforcers.wildapricot.org

Moses F. Garcia

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor MRSC

2601 Fourth Ave., Suite 800 Seattle, WA 98121-1280 Phone: 206.625.1300

Email: mgarcia@mrsc.org

Miriam Norman

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2050 Seattle, WA 98104-7097

Phone: 206.684.8526 Cell: 206.850.5260 Fax: 206.684.4648

Email: miriam.norman@seattle.gov

WEST VIRGINIA

Nicole A. Cofer

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

301 Virginia St. E Charleston, WV 25301 Phone: 304.357.5143

Email: Nicole.a.Cofer@wvtsrp.org

WISCONSIN

Tara Jenswold

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Assistant Attorney General

Wisconsin Department of Justice

17 W. Main Street Madison, WI 53707 Phone: 608.266.8908

Email: jenswtm@doj.state.wi.us

Emily Thompson

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

Assistant Attorney General

Wisconsin Department of Justice

17 W. Main Street Madison, WI 53707 Phone: 608.266.8941

Email: thompsonel@doj.state.wi.us

WYOMING

Ashley C. Schluck

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Wyoming Highway Safety Program

P.O. Box C

Laramie, WY 82073 Phone: 307.721.5321

Email: acastor@cityoflaramie.org

NATIONAL TRAFFIC LAW CENTER

Website: https://ndaa.org

Joanne Thomka

Director, National Traffic Law Center National District Attorneys Association

1400 Crystal Drive, Suite 330

Arlington, VA 22202 Phone: 703.519.1678 Fax: 703.836.3195

Email: jthomka@ndaajustice.org

M. Kimberly Brown Senior Attorney, NTLC National District Attorneys Association 1400 Crystal Drive, Suite 330

Arlington, VA 22202 Phone: 703.519.1645 Fax: 703.836.3195

Email: mkbrown@ndaajustice.org

Metria Hernandez Project Coordinator, NTLC National District Attorneys Association 1400 Crystal Drive, Suite 330 Arlington, VA 22202

Phone: 703.519.1683 Fax: 703.836.3195

Email: mhernandez@ndaajustice.org

Jeanine Howard (Commercial Motor Vehicles) Staff Attorney, NTLC National District Attorneys Association

1400 Crystal Drive, Suite 330

Arlington, VA 22202 Phone: 703.519.1650 Fax: 703.836.3195

Email: jhoward@ndaajustice.org

Erin Inman

Staff Attorney, NTLC

National District Attorneys Association

1400 Crystal Drive, Suite 330

Arlington, VA 22202 Phone: 703.519.1696 Fax: 703.836.3195

Email: einman@ndaajustice.org

Romana Lavalas (Commercial Motor Vehicles)

Senior Attorney, NTLC

National District Attorneys Association

1400 Crystal Drive, Suite 330

Arlington, VA 22202 Phone: 703.519.1674 Fax: 703.836.3195

Email: rlavalas@ndaajustice.org

NAPC PROGRAM

Website: htts://www.napc.us/

Michael R. Galantino Executive Director, NAPC

PO Box 62

Springfield, PA 19064 Phone: 610.506.0201

Email: mrgalantino@napc.us