



COMMUNITY JUSTICE

From the Desk of District Attorney General Steve Mulroy

The Shelby County District Attorney's Office Community Justice Program is a grassroots alternative to traditional prosecution aimed at restoring victims and communities impacted by crime. Its mission is to unite the victim, the offender and the community so that all parties can work together to make the victim whole, curb future offenses and give the community a larger role in the criminal justice process.

Offenders and victims must consent to participation in the program. Community members -- volunteers willing to undergo training and meet twice a month -- make up the *Community Justice Panels (CJP)*. Cases are referred to the CJP by prosecutors who would otherwise handle the cases in court. If the participant completes requirements ordered by the CJP, the case will be returned to prosecutors who then will dismiss the case and also will help get the criminal charge expunged from the participant's record.

What is the purpose of CJPs?

The DA's Office is offering this grassroots alternative to traditional prosecution in an effort to engage the community while also recognizing that offenders often act out because they have a personal need which the community may be able to provide. When someone steals from a store or breaks into a citizen's car, that entire neighborhood is victimized. When businesses are victimized they are at a greater risk of closing. If businesses close then the neighborhood suffers a lack of options. On the other hand, someone who steals is often reacting to a social, personal, mental or emotional vulnerability that local resources may be able to address.

What type of charges will I see?

The panels will review felonies and misdemeanors, including (but not limited to) theft of property, assault, burglary of a motor vehicle, burglary of a building, vandalism and theft of merchandise. Panels will not review homicides, rapes or cases involving serious bodily injury. Offenders 18 years and older are eligible for participation.

How will CJP work?

Community Justice Panels will consist of three panel members who will manage the development of a "case." Each case has an adjoining criminal case. However, the DA's Office will not move forward with prosecution on a criminal case until the CJP has completed its recommendation. CJPs will meet face-to-face with each participant (defendant) and with victims of crime (should the victim choose to attend). CJPs will act as mediators to give victims a chance to tell the participant how that person's actions affected them. They may prefer to do so by submitting a victim-impact statement. An apology, financial restitution and/or community service might be ordered for the participant. While acting as mediators to help restore the victim's well-being, CJPs also will listen to the participant to see how they can help the participant become a contributing member of the community. For instance, if a participant stole items from a store for lack of money or a job, the CJP will help the participant find job training and employment. Once the participant has completed requirements assigned by the CJP, the case will be sent back to the DA's Office for final review. Once approved, the DA's Office then will dismiss the adjoining criminal case and will help to have the case permanently expunged from the participant's record. If the participant does not complete the CJP requirements or otherwise fails to cooperate, the criminal case will be handled through the court system.

What role will CJP members have in the criminal justice system?

Your CJP will not be a court of law. It is not the CJP's job to find a participant guilty or innocent of wrongdoing. CJPs will act as mediators between victims and wrongdoers. The goal of a CJP is to help participants understand that they have harmed people by their actions and to provide an environment where the wrongdoers learn from their mistakes. CJP members are not probation officers. Instead, this new method requires participants to engage with the CJP and the victim throughout the entire process.

We can't do this without volunteers.