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Hon. Joyce Draganchuk
Chief Judge, 30th Judicial Circuit
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It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve as Ingham County's Prosecuting Attorney for these past six years. I was first appointed to the office in 1983 as an assistant prosecuting attorney, and was then elected to lead the office in 2016. As an assistant and the elected county prosecutor, this has been my home for a cumulative seventeen years.

Now at the age of 66 years, I acknowledge that there are seasons for all things. I now plan to move on to the next stage of my life, although the memories of these career experiences make this a bittersweet occasion. After careful consideration over many months, I am providing Chief Circuit Judge Draganchuk a notice of my imminent retirement, effective December 31, 2022.

Since taking office in 2017, it has been a pleasure to support and develop my outstanding co-workers who do the vital day-to-day work of this office. They have been subject to many extraordinary stressors over the past few years and have constantly risen to every challenge. My pride in their efforts cannot be overstated. Since 2017, I believe that our entire country's justice system has also been beset with three fundamental crises - one unexpected, and the others long term, but never previously garnering the attention they should have.

First, violence against women: we have long known that domestic violence and sexual assault are a silent epidemic. Each year in our medium-sized county, there are over 2,000 reported cases of domestic and sexual violence and those are only the ones reported to police. We all know the real number is much higher.

The Me Too movement brought this nation to a reckoning with its violence and inequality against women, one that we are still working on. I originally joined the prosecutor's office in 1983 because of the deep commitment I had to better addressing domestic violence through my volunteer work with the Council Against Domestic Assault (now Ending Violent Encounters, EVE). While much progress has been made, violence against women is still one of the most fundamental issues facing our society. I am pleased that we were able to leverage grant funding to hire an additional assistant prosecutor to focus on intimate partner violence and we continually strive to focus our attention on supporting victims who are particularly vulnerable and marginalized.

Second, addressing the racial disparities at the core of American society: The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police also brought into stark relief the crisis in our courts and justice systems. As a candidate and prosecutor, I spoke of the need for reforms since entering the race in 2016. Once again, the crisis brought to light what many have long known: the significant racial disparity that sadly has always existed in the United States—its justice system and the health care, education, finance, and employment realms. The institutionalized racial disparities create a criminal legal system where, for example, 12% of our population is charged with 40% of its offenses. I have worked within the office and across the nation and state with organizations like the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, the Vera Institute of Justice, Fair and Just Prosecution, and the Prosecutors' Center for Excellence to reform sentencing practices and to address mass incarceration. While the overall number of those imprisoned is now significantly reduced, the work continues as racial inequities remain.

Third, the Coronavirus pandemic that began in 2020 and has killed over one million Americans has challenged our justice system in an unprecedented fashion. We have seen increases in gun violence, homicides, and domestic violence. In its early stages, Covid relentlessly targeted persons of color, those in cities, and, in particular those who lived and worked in close proximity with others. To control the deadly infection and its rampant community spread, our justice system was unable to provide its full complement of in-person services (most notably jury trials) at the same time that violent felony offenses were increasing nationwide. We are still catching up with the many pending cases that occurred in 2020-21. While many have been resolved, the delays have created terrible burdens on victims and survivors and all those involved with the criminal legal system. In the face of these three parallel, intersecting crises, I believe we have made substantial progress to reform the justice system and provide for a proportionate response to criminal charges. We have changed the prosecutors' office's charging and sentencing practices, to provide a greater range of options to hold people accountable for the harm they cause while reducing incarceration, and continuing to serve victims and to expand their services and support. While sentencing and imprisonment practices have changed throughout the State of Michigan, with bipartisan reforms in the legislature and in our courts, our office has made significant progress above and beyond the statewide trends.

Through it all, we have been fortunate for the great work and support that's made these efforts possible, working not only with our office's staff, county leaders, and those in partner agencies, but also with advocates and activists who have sought to create change.

I am most grateful to those who have provided this unique opportunity to create change; my true 'bosses' to whom I report and who rightfully have this office, before and beyond my tenure: The people of Ingham County. To the public, I say thank you and that it has truly been the honor of a lifetime to be in service to our community.

Very truly yours,

Carol A. Siemon