

**Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys**  
**Prosecution Wellness Initiative**

Prosecutor Wellness Best Practices Recommendations  
*Adopted August 29, 2023*

Note: A best practices recommendation of the Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys is the product of careful consideration by experienced prosecuting attorneys. However, it is only a recommendation. A best practices recommendation may or may not be feasible or desirable to implement in every jurisdiction. There may be other methods in local jurisdictions that reach the same or similar objectives.

**Best Practices Statement:** Prosecutors and their staff have a unique position in the criminal justice system centered on compassion and the relentless pursuit of just outcomes for defendants, victims, and the community. This is often in the face of trauma: either direct or indirectly experienced. Their professional quality of life incorporates both the positive (compassion satisfaction) and negative (compassion fatigue) sides of this emotion. Such trauma takes a toll on professional effectiveness as well as personal satisfaction and quality of life. Missouri's prosecutors and their staff, working under high-stress and trauma, deserve access to resources, training and peer support that protect those who serve.

RECOMMENDATIONS for all prosecutors, including elected prosecutors and assistant prosecutors:

1. Prosecutors should create a culture within their own offices and within their professional community that acknowledges that our profession by its very nature can cause and exacerbate secondary trauma due to the scarcity of resources, direct exposure to victim and witness trauma and the gravity of the cases we handle.
2. Prosecutors should encourage open dialogues, and make their availability known, between attorneys, investigators, advocates and support staff about mental health and wellness issues.
3. Prosecutors should seek education and an understanding of trauma theory and the impact of trauma, including secondary trauma. Prosecutors should attend a training such as Building Resilience: Surviving Secondary Trauma (BRSST) or similar interdisciplinary trainings with other related professions.

*Commentary:* Secondary trauma and post-traumatic stress are endemic to prosecution. Compassion is essential to prosecution and public service – both compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue are opposite sides of the same coin.

4. Prosecutors' offices should have access to peer support programs and mentoring in building mental resilience, which will increase work and personal productivity.

*Commentary: Sometimes prosecutors best peer support resources are other prosecutors. MAPA's Prosecutor Wellness Initiative continues to examine the means by which to facilitate these connections. Prosecutors are encouraged to seek both informal and formal support from each other.*

5. Prosecutors should be aware that they can participate in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) in the event of a mass casualty, line of duty death, child death or other critical incident.

*Commentary: Critical Incident Stress Management can and should be a part of prosecutors' peer support. These programs provide a structured framework for processing trauma and could help the prosecutor help other members of their team. These programs should also be put in place for high emotional cases and situations – domestic and sexual violence cases, crimes against children, and homicide.*

*If invited to attend the law enforcement Critical Incident Debriefing, prosecutors should consider attending the Critical Incident Debriefing to show solidarity and a willingness to assist their team members with processing trauma. If not included in the law enforcement Critical Incident Debriefing, prosecutors should consider hosting their own in-house Critical Incident Debriefing in the event of a critical incident.*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS for Elected Prosecutors & Supervisory Staff-

1. Prosecutors should be familiar with what insurance coverage the county provides for trauma counselling and/or employee assistance programs.
2. Prosecutors should develop or seek out mental health resources with a special emphasis in secondary trauma.
3. Prosecutors should have a list of service providers or facilities that can provide confidential assistance or counselling.

*Commentary: Some prosecutors have made arrangements with a local provider who can be accessed confidentially for assistance. Lawyers also have access to MOLAP, the Missouri Bar's Lawyer's Assistance Program. These services can and should be provided without the employer being notified, and with complete confidentiality to the person seeking assistance.*

4. To the extent possible, prosecutors should allow flexible work hours for staff to be able to make appointments to see a professional provider.
5. Prosecutors, or their designee should seek training that allows the prosecutor to provide an in-house resource for their staff.

*Commentary- MAPA/MOPS and NDAA have resources available to provide training and information to prosecutors' offices. All elected prosecutors who are members of MAPA are also members of NDAA.*

6. Prosecutors should be aware of resources available through, and consider participating in, their local Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) multi-disciplinary teams to encourage better feedback and peer support. At a minimum, prosecutors should know how to contact their local Community Behavioral Health Liaison (CBHL) and the resources they can provide.

*Commentary: CIT provides community options such as understanding mental health and wellness issues and encourages feedback by building relationships and self-awareness. A Community Behavioral Health Liaison can provide an important link for prosecutors and their staff to engage with mental health resources locally.*