



A Message From the District Attorney



Dear Friends:

If there's one thing we all have in common in this country, it's a demand for fairness. I believe that we share an intolerance for unequal treatment and those who take advantage of loopholes. Nowhere is that truer than in the criminal legal system, be it for tax evasion, scams, or above all, violence against the most powerless victims: children, the elderly and those who cannot protect themselves.

It's those most egregious cases that trigger our collective protectiveness and instinct for fairness. Those are the ones that keep me up at night. They also require the most introspection.

Some facts first: These cases represent just a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of cases we file each year. Research shows that incarcerating children does not enhance public safety but significantly increases their likelihood of committing future offenses. Incarcerating children decreases the likelihood that they'll complete high school and increases the probability that they will be incarcerated as adults.

I remain committed to the policy of treating kids like kids, but I also know we cannot be dogmatic when a crime's unique circumstances demand our attention. We need to ensure that the rare and extreme examples are dealt with accordingly, without making the way we deal with these rare occasions the rule.

Our policies are about fairness, protecting victims and creating a safer, healthier Los Angeles County for everyone. They are about addressing root causes of crime, such as mental illness, addiction and trauma.

I must add that it is simply a myth that youth are not being prosecuted. The truth is that youth should not be prosecuted as adults and incarcerated in adult prisons with people two and three times their age. What those kids need is real accountability that holds them responsible for their actions while keeping them connected to what works: counseling, treatment and medication, mentors, parents and grandparents.

Justice reform is and should be a dialogue. As Americans, we're at our best when we ask ourselves and each other "What's the fairest dispensation of justice? How can I offer more support to the victim in this case? Are we really pursuing accountability and public safety or vengeance, retribution and political grandstanding? How do we truly make our communities safer, especially in the long run?"

I hope all of us—myself included—never stop asking those questions.

With respect and gratitude,

George Gascón
District Attorney