



SONIA FONTICIELLA

Prosecuting Attorney, District 02

Fonticiella has a private law practice in Paragould and works as a Deputy Public Defender in Craighead County. She is a member of the Criminal Justice Act Panel for the Eastern District. Previously, she worked with the Federal Defender's Office in Little Rock.

Describe the qualifications and experiences that make you the best candidate for the prosecutor's office.

My trial experience and dedication to criminal law will be put to great use as Prosecuting Attorney. I promise to seek the truth and dispense swift and harsh justice to all violent criminals in our district. My 12 years of state and federal practice make me well qualified to be a highly effective and efficient prosecuting attorney.

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge facing the prosecutor's office and how do you plan to address it?

As Prosecuting Attorney, I will not allow violent criminals to plea their cases down and continue to re-offend. They will face harsh and tough consequences. These individuals should face juries in their communities and be brought to swift justice.

In order to do this, I will ensure we have strong and ethical deputy prosecutors in our district. I will use specialty courts -- such as drug and mental health courts -- and have ethical and diligent deputy prosecuting attorneys in order to create more time to focus on the worst of the worst in our society.

What role should money/cash bail play in pretrial release?
What steps would you take to safely reduce the rate of pretrial incarceration in our county?

Violent criminals will get no sympathy from me on bond issues. Neither will defendants who are out on bond and commit new offenses. However, first-offenders and some non-violent defendants should be treated as the law provides. I will work with reputable drug and mental health treatment facilities to safely release defendants who do not pose a danger to the community.

What is your attitude/approach toward negotiating plea bargain versus trial litigation in criminal cases?

I personally love trying cases! Trial time before our circuit judges is precious and I have no intention of wasting it! With violent crime on the rise, we need to take those cases to trial as quickly as we can and use plea bargaining to clear the dockets on the cases that should not go to trial.

Prosecutorial discretion in a negotiated plea is very important to me. When using this discretion, I believe a prosecuting attorney needs to have input from their local law enforcement agencies and victims.

What do you think is the most effective way to deal with low-level drug offenders? What would your office policies be regarding plea bargaining in drug offense cases? Use of these individuals as criminal informants?

The drug court program is very important to me and the 2nd Judicial District is lucky to have wonderful Judges who support the program. I will work with the Court in any way possible to expand the program and be sure it is successful for those who come through it.

I believe drug addicts need treatment if they are willing to accept it. However, those who continue to leave trail of destruction in their wake should be prosecuted as the law provides.

With regard to criminal informants, I will put my federal practice experience to great use. I have worked with the United States Attorney's office and law enforcement on countless large drug indictments that involve cooperation and putting defendants to work as confidential informants. Doing so is hard work and takes a lot of diligence. I have the skills and experience to work with law enforcement and confidential informants to be sure we locate and fully prosecute dangerous drug dealers.

Studies show racial disparities in drug law enforcement, despite the fact that white people and people of color use and sell drugs at the same rate. What would you do to minimize these disparities?

I believe the Prosecuting Attorney should always aim to seek the truth and equal justice. I will prosecute drug dealers equally and work with law enforcement to ensure equal treatment regardless of race.

What would your policy be regarding charging children in adult court? When would you use your authority to file charges in adult court and when would you pursue a case in juvenile court?

As the mother of six children, juveniles hold a special place in my heart. Violent, repeat offenders must be taken off the streets. In those instances, I would encourage charges be filed in adult court.

However, there are many who come into the system as abandoned children and are crime victims themselves. For those non-violent juveniles who come into the system, I will encourage the Juvenile Courts to provide the rehabilitation and resources they are designed to share with troubled youth.

What would you do to develop a trusting relationship with the immigrant community in your county?

Countless violent crimes go unpunished because immigrant victims and witnesses are fearful to come forward. I want to stop that.

I am the daughter of Cuban immigrants who fled communism to come to America and create a better life for my family. We have lived the American dream and hold American values dear to our hearts. My family is what America is all about.

I can build trust with this community by sharing my family story. This trust will help put more violent criminals behind bars.

Mental health has been a significant topic throughout the debate about reducing the jail population. Incarceration has been widely shown to make mental health conditions worse. What steps will you take as DA to divert people with mental health conditions from the criminal justice system?

The 2nd Judicial District's Mental Health Court program has and will continue to help many individuals with mental health issues. I will work with the Courts and public defenders to help expand the program and supplement their services with local community resources that can assist those with mental health issues stay well.

How would you handle use of force incidents involving local police?

I am a proud supporter of the Arkansas State Police and believe they do an excellent job investigating use of force in our communities. I will work side by side with them when this issue arises.