



2023
Allegheny County
District Attorney
Candidate
Questionnaire

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What is your strategy for keeping our community safe?

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

Prosecuting violent criminals to the fullest extent of the law and treating them with respect and compassion are not mutually exclusive. It is simultaneously possible to acknowledge the key drivers into the criminal justice system while also being a zealous advocate for victims of the crimes.

The District Attorney’s Office has the power and discretion to implement positive change in the criminal justice system through reform-minded policies, thoughtful case resolutions that benefit both victims and defendants, and working to enact forward-thinking and preventative measures that will reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

I believe the District Attorney’s Office has the opportunity to be proactive, and to work to prevent crime before our communities are in crisis. There is an obligation to look beyond a model that merely punishes and create one that provides, when appropriate, true second chances and opportunities for rehabilitation without requiring a guilty plea and a lifetime deprived of possibility that often comes with a criminal record.

NO RESPONSE

Do you believe the current approach to criminal justice in Allegheny County is working? Please explain.

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

In Allegheny County, the system isn't working at all. Every day we're failing the people who encounter the criminal justice system. We fail to address the issues that bring defendants into the system: substance abuse disorder, untreated or undiagnosed mental health issues, and instability due to poverty. We're failing victims of violent crime by not securing convictions in our most serious cases. We're failing Allegheny County because our criminal justice system refuses to acknowledge the humanity of the individuals it is meant to serve.

NO RESPONSE

The Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association often lobbies the state legislature for changes to law impacting criminal justice. As District Attorney, how would you attempt, or how have you attempted, to influence the association's agenda?

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

The DA's Association is one of the most powerful lobbies in the state. As DA of the second largest County in Pennsylvania, I would explore opportunities to reshape the association's agenda. If that's not possible, an opportunity may exist to partner with other like-minded and similarly situated counties to create a more moderate association in Harrisburg.

NO RESPONSE

Agree/Disagree

Question:	Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
<p>“The best way to keep our communities safe is to prevent crime from happening in the first place, not just react after it happens. The DA’s office should play an important role in crime prevention, and devote more resources to prevention than punishment.”</p>	<p>Agree</p>	
<p>“The role of the DA is to protect the public by being tough on crime. In order to accomplish this, we must have zero tolerance for criminals who break the law.”</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	
<p>“Our reliance on punishment and incarceration isn’t working – it’s time for a new approach to public safety that focuses on prevention and rehabilitation.”</p>	<p>Agree</p>	
<p>“Safety requires prioritizing investments in schools, mental health and drug treatment, and affordable housing – rather than spending more money on jails and prisons.”</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>NO RESPONSE</p>
<p>“As DA, I will direct more resources towards preventing crime, increasing diversion programs, and working with state and local leaders to invest in mental health and drug treatment services.”</p>	<p>Agree</p>	
<p>“To keep our community safe from criminals, we must keep people who have committed crimes in jail or prison for the maximum time possible so there’s no chance they can reoffend.”</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	
<p>“The war on drugs has failed. We should treat drug use as a health issue, not a criminal problem. Prosecuting low-level drug crimes does nothing to improve the safety of our community.”</p>	<p>Agree</p>	
<p>“We should double down on the war on drugs. Punishment and criminalization are a critical component of our response to drug use.”</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	

The United States spends \$200 billion on the criminal justice system every year. Please choose the response that best represents your position on the best use of taxpayer dollars:

a) The United States spends too much money on prisons and jails. To protect public safety, taxpayer money would be better spent on community-based services that address the root causes of crime such as education, job training, and drug and mental health treatment.

b) People who have committed crimes need to be punished with incarceration to protect public safety; people’s lives are at stake. We can cut the costs of the criminal justice system in other ways, but reducing reliance on incarceration would result in dangerous people being released and threaten the safety of our communities.

Matt Dugan

The United States spends too much money on prisons and jails. To protect public safety, taxpayer money would be better spent on community-based services that address the root causes of crime such as education, job training, and drug and mental health treatment.

Stephen Zappala

NO RESPONSE

Will you commit to adopt a policy making the following offenses associated with poverty and health the lowest priority for prosecution? (YES/NO)

Offense:	Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Failure to pay fees or fines	Yes	NO RESPONSE
Driving on a suspended license	Yes	
Driving an unregistered or un-inspected vehicle”	Yes	
Consensual sex work	Yes	
Shoplifting	Yes	
Trespassing	Yes	
Obstructing of a passageway	Yes	
Marijuana possession for personal use	Yes	
Possession of other drugs besides marijuana for personal use	Yes	

Will you commit to issuing a fiscal impact report to the court in all cases where your office seeks a sentence of incarceration? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

Will you commit to reducing the number of people sentenced to serve in jail or prison each year? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

Do you commit to expanding the use of and eligibility for diversion courts and/or programs to address: (YES/NO)

	Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Substance use disorder	Yes	NO RESPONSE
Mental health	Yes	
Youth, including pre-arrest diversion programs	Yes	
First time offenders	Yes	
Veterans	Yes	

ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS:

Given the pending case, *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine et al. v. U.S. Food and Drug Administration et al.*, that could ban mifepristone nationwide, do you commit to adopt a policy making seeking, distributing, prescribing or administering mifepristone for purposes of causing an abortion the lowest priority for prosecution? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY:

Assistant District Attorneys work in close connection with law enforcement on a daily basis and rely on them to gather the evidence and testimony they need to successfully prosecute cases. This makes it hard for prosecutors to investigate and prosecute the same police officers in cases of police violence, when they may have an incentive to protect the police officers involved. Will you hold police accountable by committing to: (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Require independent investigations in all cases where police kill or seriously injure civilians, or are accused of misconduct	NO RESPONSE
Create an independent unit that will focus exclusively on serious misconduct and that is staffed with prosecutors who do not work alongside local law enforcement on a regular basis	

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

Make investigation findings publicly available when deciding whether to charge an officer with a crime

Yes

NO RESPONSE

Will your office hold police accountable by maintaining a list of officers who are engaged in patterns of misconduct, including racial bias, excessive force, or dishonesty, and make the list available to defense counsel and the public? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

Yes

NO RESPONSE

Will you decline to rely on the reports of those officers on such a list, and decline to call those officers as witnesses in any criminal prosecution? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

Yes

NO RESPONSE

Will you commit to expand the demographics the DA’s office tracks and make public anonymized demographics (with regard to race, gender, age, disability and socioeconomic status) including in charging decisions, bail recommendations, sentence type and length, plea bargains, diversion program placements, and convictions? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

Will you commit to create a Conviction Integrity Unit to review innocence claims, due process violations, and excessive sentences? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

Will you commit to publish all office policies and protocols online? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
NO RESPONSE	NO RESPONSE

DA OFFICE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Will you commit to refrain from retaliation against individual attorneys and their clients based on political leanings, criticisms of the DA’s office, or any other personal attributes, statements, or beliefs? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

POVERTY, PENALTIES, AND CASH BAIL:

Question:	Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Will you commit to implementing a presumptive release on recognizance?	Yes	NO RESPONSE
Will you commit to only requesting release on monetary conditions in very limited circumstances where no combination of conditions can reasonably ensure a defendant’s appearance in court?	Yes	
Will you commit to reviewing cases and training your staff to ensure that individuals are not incarcerated pretrial solely because they are unable to afford bail, as per Pennsylvania law?	Yes	
Will you use your prosecutorial discretion to establish and enforce an office-wide policy to support all motions to waive court costs when the defendant has been found indigent?	Yes	
Will you use your prosecutorial discretion to establish and enforce an office-wide policy to create opportunities for individuals to clear court debts?	Yes	

Question:

Matt Dugan

Stephen Zappala

<p>Will you commit to expanding the availability and eligibility of pre-arrest diversion programs for youth?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you commit to a moratorium on the charging of students stemming from summary citations in school-related matters?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you commit to collecting and publicly reporting data on the charging of students stemming from summary citations in school-related matters (disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, and English proficiency status) to provide an accurate picture of how students are impacted by justice system involvement?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you commit to reducing the number of minors transferred to adult court?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you commit to ending the prosecution of children as adults, including avoiding direct filing where possible, and decline to oppose defense motions to return cases to juvenile court?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you commit to never seeking life without parole or equivalent sentences for juveniles?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you commit to reconsidering the sentences of all juveniles sentenced to life without parole?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Will you address the school-to-prison pipeline by establishing and enforcing office-wide policies to reduce the number of children referred to juvenile court for misdemeanors that occurred at school?</p>	<p>Yes</p>

NO RESPONSE

DEATH PENALTY:

Will you commit to never seeking the death penalty?
(YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
NO RESPONSE	NO RESPONSE

INTEGRITY IN PLEA BARGAINING:

Do you commit to establish and enforce office-wide policies to minimize the coercive nature of plea bargaining, and to not threaten longer sentences if people refuse plea offers? (YES/NO)

Matt Dugan	Stephen Zappala
Yes	NO RESPONSE

ACLU
Pennsylvania