



EDITORIAL

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Gun crime defendants must get a mental health screening before they are given a chance to commit another crime with a gun. At arraignment hearings, Macomb County assistant prosecutors will recommend judges order all felony gun crime arrestees to receive a mental health community assessment as a bond condition. Alcohol and drug screening is regularly done at arraignment. A mental health screening for felony gun defendants is equally important.

This recommendation aims to reduce gun violence in Macomb County. After arraignment and release on bond, a defendant's case may not be tried for over a year. This is far too long to allow someone with a mental health issue to go unevaluated and remain untreated. Allowing such a situation to exist puts society at risk. The Macomb County Community Corrections Department and the Macomb County Community Mental Health Department already conduct mental health and community assessments. In 2022, we had 308 felony firearm cases and 551 carrying concealed pistol felony cases where this policy would have recommended a mental health screening. Mental health treatment and the reduction of gun crimes is of utmost importance. I fully support providing the appropriate resources for mental health screenings.

Judges have discretion to grant or deny assistant prosecutors' requests for mental health evaluations. It is essential to note that the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office is not asking the Community Corrections Dept., Community Mental Health Dept., or any mental health professionals, to substitute their judgment for a judge's decision. A mental health assessment will give helpful information to judges who decide daily whether a defendant will pose a risk to the community.

This is not the only action the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office is taking to help reduce the risk of gun crimes. The Macomb County Prosecutor's Office has authorized more felony firearm and carrying concealed weapon charges in the last two years than ever before. The increase in felony charges for carrying a concealed pistol without a license mirrors a statewide trend, but the increase in felony firearm charges is a direct result of Macomb County Prosecutor's Office's tougher stance on gun violence.

Referring gun crime defendants to the Macomb County Community Corrections Dept., Community Mental Health Dept., or another qualified agency or professional, will not solve the entire problem, but it will help in determining whether mental health treatment is necessary and whether bond conditions should be changed to reduce the risk a defendant will commit another crime with a gun. If the screening helps a defendant receive the mental health treatment they need and prevents even one shooting, it is worth it.

If you agree with me on this issue, please contact your Macomb County Commissioner and let them know you support our initiative.