In 2018, Jefferson County will elect the most powerful person in the criminal justice system.

In a county where nearly 70% of the jail population is Black, while only 44.1% of Jefferson County's population is, the district attorney (DA) has massive power over who is protected and who is prosecuted.

If someone is accused of committing a crime, it is not the police but the DA who has the sole power to decide if criminal charges are filed and the severity of those charges. They alone decide who is deserving of a jail or prison sentence and who will instead be routed into a diversion program to help rebuild their life or have their charges dismissed.

DAs have used their power to pack jails and prisons. And it has taken decades, billions of dollars, and thousands of laws to turn the United States into the largest incarcerator in the world. But did you know that prosecutors also have the power to dismantle this machine — even without changing a single law?

This November, Jefferson County has the chance to elect its next DA. What can our next DA do for us?

**The District Attorney Can Help End Racial Disparities.**

Racial disparities plague our county’s criminal justice system. In 2015, although black people made up only 44.1% of Jefferson County’s population, they accounted for nearly 70% of the jail population. We need a DA who will acknowledge and take steps to reduce these troubling disparities.

Our next DA can address racial disparities by:
- Refusing to prosecute police stops that are based on race and not probable cause.
- Establishing trainings and workshops to prevent bias in sentencing recommendations.
- Gathering and sharing race-based data to ensure the office is not discriminating against people of color.

**The District Attorney Can Make Diversion Programs Accessible to All.**

Diversion programs rehabilitate individuals rather than punish them. However, they all require a guilty plea first and can cost thousands of dollars.

Our next DA can improve these programs by:
- Creating alternatives to prosecution that ensure that no one is denied based on ability to pay.
- Expanding access to pre-plea diversion programs for offenses that do not pose a public safety risk.
- Ensuring that successful completion of the programs results in a dismissal or reduction of charges.

**The District Attorney Can Stop Jailing People for Failure to Pay Fines and Fees.**

Excessive fines and fees have devastating impacts on the poor. In a 2014 study, more than half of Alabama participants reported that they neglected necessities such as rent in order to pay fines and fees.

Our next DA can stop this by:
- Encouraging more dismissals and no incarceration with a finding of indigency.
- Seeking waivers for mandatory or automatic fines and fees whenever they are presumptively imposed by the court.
The District Attorney Can Stop Criminalizing Substance Abuse Issues.
Aggressive criminalization of drug use has harmed communities, while doing nothing to promote public safety. In 2016, 33 percent of all system-wide admissions in Alabama were for drug offenses, including possession.

Our next DA can work to carry out drug reform by:
- Refusing to prosecute low-level marijuana cases.
- Diverting people with substance abuse issues away from the criminal justice system and toward necessary services.

The District Attorney Can Treat Kids Like Kids.
Too many juveniles in Alabama are being tried, sentenced, and imprisoned as adults. Children who are 16 or older are automatically tried as adults for capital crimes, certain felonies, and certain drug offenses, and the state’s transfer status allows children as young as 14, accused of any criminal offense, to be tried and sentenced as adults if the prosecutors’ motion for transfer is approved. Furthermore, once a young person has been tried as an adult and not acquitted, that child will be tried as an adult for any future offenses.

Our next DA can implement practices and policies to treat kids like kids by:
- Not prosecuting a child as an adult unless required by law.
- Refusing to detain or incarcerate students for school offenses except in exceptional circumstances.

The District Attorney Can Promote Transparency and Accountability.
Public trust in the criminal justice process is fading because of a lack of transparency and accountability.

Our next DA can take the necessary steps to make sure the community is informed and bad actors are held accountable by:
- Adopting an open file policy that requires the defense to have early access to discovery and discipline prosecutors who fail to comply.
- Collecting data that allows the DA’s office to judge the success or failure of their policies, and to develop solutions for the office’s flaws.
- Hosting regular events so the community is updated and can voice their concerns.

Candidates:
- Mike Anderton (R), andertonforda.com
- Danny Carr (D), votedannycarr.com

For more information, visit alabamaDA.org.

Important Dates:
- September 7, 2018 - Last day to apply for voting rights restoration
- October 22, 2018 - Last day to register to vote
- November 1, 2018 - Last day to apply for absentee ballot
- November 6, 2018 - Election Day

Information provided by ACLU of Alabama and Alabama Civic Engagement Coalition.