



## Office of the District Attorney

Gordon P. McLaughlin, District Attorney

8th Judicial District

*Serving Larimer and Jackson Counties*

**VISION:** To protect and serve Larimer and Jackson counties, while creating a stronger community where the application of criminal justice is more equitable and no longer at odds with social justice.

While challenges in the behavioral health and criminal justice worlds collide often, none is more acute in 2024 than the nationwide fentanyl epidemic. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is typically sold as a pill that mimics the look of prescription drugs. It is cheap, readily available, powerfully addictive, and highly lethal. It presents challenges more difficult than previous drug crises by orders of magnitude.

Combating the distribution of fentanyl in Larimer County has been a priority for the law enforcement community. The Northern Colorado Drug Task Force, a collaboration of local law enforcement agencies and the District Attorney's Office, has focused resources on targeting large-scale distribution, successfully convicting many dangerous fentanyl dealers. However, there were no tools to address the dealers knowingly killing members of our community with this new poison. In 2023, at the urging of folks like myself, the Colorado Legislature passed a bill making distributing fentanyl that kills someone a homicide-level crime.

Since then, our office has developed a nation-leading model in the prosecution of those dealers and has a prosecutor focused specifically on these murders. To date, we have charged seven defendants with fentanyl distribution causing death, more than any other district in the state. When I met with the parents of our first successful conviction for fentanyl distribution causing death, they conveyed their hope that their daughter's story would prevent more deaths. She was a promising young woman, who had completed drug rehab in Fort Collins but was lured back into purchasing four fentanyl pills by a dealer. One of those pills killed her that night. Victims like her cannot be forgotten and finding accountability for their killers and justice for their families is paramount.

It is not just dealers who enter the criminal justice system, however. Those struggling with addiction wind up in our courtrooms every day. How we treat the most vulnerable members of our community likely says more about our character as a community than any other thing we do. Ensuring that those in behavioral health crises – like addiction – are provided resources, education, treatment, and opportunities to succeed is an essential part of a modern understanding of how to address the root causes of crime, get people back on track, and reduce recidivism. That includes programs like the 8th Judicial District Drug Court and our new adult diversion program that provide alternatives to traditional criminal justice outcomes. It also means valuing efforts at saving lives through efforts like immunity provisions for calling 911 in the event of an overdose and making the overdose reversal drug naloxone – a simple nasal spray our office has already been trained to use – more available.

Finally, it means ensuring resources are available and investing in social services like the new County Campus at Longview or the work of the Larimer County Regional Opioid Abatement Committee, of which I'm a committee member. Such efforts at prevention can interrupt the cycle that necessitates criminal justice system involvement in the first place. Those are outcomes that promote equity, compassion, and safety all at once.

The fentanyl epidemic, like any complex issue, has no simple answer. But the solution surely lies in the input and support of our entire community. I am hosting the first in a series of Community Conversations with the District Attorney on March 28th. The topic of the first conversation will be fentanyl and its impact on our community. I invite you to come learn about the current state of the epidemic, and our efforts to combat it, and to share your feedback.

Sincerely,

Gordon P. McLaughlin, District Attorney  
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**Office of the District Attorney**  
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