

Bristol County District Attorney's Office
C. Samuel Sutter
District Attorney

Press Release
January 14, 2009

The Massachusetts District Attorney's Association has elected Bristol County District Attorney Sam Sutter its new Vice President for 2010. Timothy Cruz, the Plymouth County District Attorney, was elected President. Each term will last one year. Sutter is currently entering the final year of his first term as Bristol County District Attorney, which began on January 4, 2007 after he defeated a 16-year incumbent in the election of 2006.

After graduating from Vanderbilt Law School in 1983, Sutter began his legal career in private practice on Cape Cod. He joined the Bristol County District Attorney's Office in 1991 and served four years in the district court and four years in the superior court. In 1999, he left the District Attorney's Office to reenter private practice and for the next six years built a prominent practice in Southeastern Massachusetts. In February of 2006, he announced his decision to run for District Attorney.

During his three years as District Attorney, Sutter has devised new ways to attack the problem of gun violence, which he has characterized as one of the preeminent public safety issues facing America. From day one, Sutter implemented a multi-faceted approach which centered on the use of dangerousness hearings to keep gang members and other criminals arrested with illegal firearms behind bars for 90 days while his office rapidly prosecuted the case. Dangerousness hearings were created by the Legislature in 1994 to prevent dangerous offenders from returning to the streets to terrorize their victims, and until three years ago, were most often employed in cases of domestic violence, sexual assault and other cases of threatened physical force. In Bristol County, Sutter used dangerousness hearings to "change the landscape"---in other words, to get immediate practical results and to demonstrate our county's and our country's growing intolerance of gun violence caused by illegal firearms. The results were transformative. Shootings declined in New Bedford from 38 in 2006 to 13 in 2007 and, county-wide, from an average of four shootings per months in 2006, to approximately one per month during the first four months of 2009. Reports of shots fired also fell an average of 33 percent in the county's three major cities.

Then, on May 4th of 2009, the state Supreme Judicial Court ruled, in a Bristol County case, that the Legislature had not made it clear that dangerousness hearings could be used on illegal gun possession felonies and therefore, District Attorney Sutter could no longer use the statute for these cases until the Legislature amended the statute. Since then, Sutter has led a state-wide effort to get the dangerousness statute amended. He enlisted the support of every district attorney in Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Major City Chiefs Association, the mayors of Bristol County and state representatives and senators from across the Commonwealth. His persistent efforts paid off in November of last year when the Senate passed the amendment which would allow prosecutors to ask for dangerousness hearings for gun felonies involving illegal possession. The House is expected to take up this amendment early this year.

Although the dangerousness hearing initiative is the best known tool Sutter has employed to reduce gun violence, it is just one piece of a larger plan the district attorney developed to tackle this destructive problem. Since taking office, Sutter has created a Gun Crime Unit for superior and district court; he has assigned prosecutors to respond to the scenes of non-fatal shootings and investigate these cases just as prosecutors investigate homicides; he has consistently refused to reduce charges against those who are caught carrying illegal firearms on the county's streets and has repeatedly asked for sentences of 10 years or more for shootings. Angel Peralta, for example, received a 27 to 33 year prison sentence for a multi-victim shooting in Fall River

and Nigel Vaughn received an 18 to 20 year prison sentence for a similar multi-victim shooting in Fall River. Sutter has also led a high profile publicity campaign to make the criminals more aware of the consequences of carrying illegal firearms.

Additionally, Sutter has followed through on his campaign promise to solve cold homicide cases and improve the office's homicide solve rate; he has cracked down on major drug dealers through a firm no plea bargaining policy on the most serious cases; implemented a one of a kind office-wide volunteer initiative; modernized case management and budget management at the office and reorganized the office in order to put more prosecutors in the county's courtrooms. He has also kept his campaign pledge to forge a much closer relationship with local police departments and has fostered greatly enhanced cooperation and information sharing amongst law enforcement agencies through multi-jurisdictional crime fighting initiatives and innovative technology.

During his first three years in office, Sutter's Cold Case Unit has solved seven previously unsolved homicides, one of which dated back to 1986. His Homicide Unit has brought charges in more than 80 percent of the homicides that have occurred since he became district attorney, a solve rate that far exceeds the national average of around 60 percent.

Sutter brought back court-ordered wiretap investigations to Bristol County after a 16 year absence, in order to carry out his commitment to cracking down on the county's biggest drug dealers. His office has already undertaken two large-scale wiretap investigations which resulted in the arrests of seven leaders of organized drug trafficking rings.

In October 2007, Sutter announced the formation of a unique volunteer initiative within his office. He redesigned the Community Affairs Division and made the centerpiece an inter-office volunteer program. Since then, more than 80 prosecutors, managers and other staff have contributed more than 6,000 hours of community service, after their work hours, through mentoring at risk youth, tutoring, coaching and other needed community activities. Sutter has also offered free basketball, baseball and tennis clinics to hundreds of Bristol County youngsters to emphasize the benefits of sports and a healthy, active lifestyle.

Sutter is a graduate of Brown University and Vanderbilt Law School. He lives in Fall River with his wife, Dottie, his two sons, Cliff and Alex, and his daughter, Ava.

About his election, Sutter commented: **“It is truly an honor to be elected by my peers to this position and I am very pleased about the opportunity to assist President Cruz in leading this stellar organization during what promises to be a critical year for public safety issues in Massachusetts.”**