

# Chittenden County State's Attorney Candidate Questionnaire: Sarah F. George

The ACLU of Vermont reached out to each candidate for state's attorney in June 2022 and asked about their views and policy intentions through a series of county-specific questions.

**Q:** For many, the money bail system perpetuates widespread wealth-based incarceration: those who have money are released from jail while their court case is pending, those who do not have money remain in jail while their case is pending. Will your office adopt an office-wide policy to not request monetary bail?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** In 2018, Vermont passed a law lowering the maximum bail amount for expungable misdemeanors to \$200. If you will not adopt a policy to never request monetary bail, will you adopt an office-wide policy to not request monetary bail for individuals charged with expungable misdemeanors?

**A:** N/A (See question 1)

**Q:** Public officials in Chittenden County have advanced and debated very different approaches to public safety in recent years. What do you think are the most effective public safety strategies for ensuring healthy and equitable communities, and what is the role of a state's attorney in advancing those strategies?

**A:** As one of those public officials in Chittenden County, I believe the most effective public safety strategies for ensuring healthy and equitable communities are ones that lift up and support people over systems, by providing opportunity, employment, safe and stable housing, and low barrier access to health care (including mental health care and substance use care). As a State's Attorney you can advance those strategies by limiting the number of people coming into the legal system, prioritizing treatment and accountability over punishment and convictions, you can support and expand the use of expungement statutes, giving folks fresh starts and more opportunities to get better jobs and housing etc. You can limit the number of convictions sought, number of folks incarcerated, and you can work with community organizations to help folks in the community thrive, both before they engage in criminal activity, but also after they do and are in need of community supports to connect them to services and mentors. You can promote harm reduction approaches in place of war on drug approaches, meeting folks where they are at and helping get them what they need to ensure they stay alive while they use, and work to engage them with healthcare providers they trust so that when they are ready to address underlying root causes they already have relationships in place to help them do that.

**Q:** Access to a vehicle is a practical necessity in a rural state, and yet many Vermonters have lost their licenses because they have been unable to pay traffic fines. In 2015, then-State's Attorney T.J. Donovan instituted a "[Driver Restoration Day](#)," where those with suspended licenses could pay \$20 per fine and have their license restored. Within one year of being sworn into office, will you institute or participate in a similar driver's license restoration program?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** The Vermont House of Representatives recently passed a bill that would have reduced penalties for drug prosecutions. One of the bill's goals was to reduce racial disparities in Vermont's drug prosecutions. Will you write and publish a drug prosecution policy that adopts, at a minimum, the categorization and limited penalty structure of [H. 505 \(2022\) as passed by the Vermont House of Representatives](#)?

**A:** Yes



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**Q:** Black people in Vermont are more likely to be stopped and searched by police, but less likely to be found with contraband. One reason for this is that police can and do use pretextual, non-safety-related reasons to stop drivers, in order to conduct criminal investigations based on racial bias. As a prosecutor, you will have the power to decline to prosecute criminal matters based on non-safety related stops, and the Chittenden County State's Attorney's Office currently has a policy that such stops will presumptively result in declining to prosecute. Will you, at a minimum, maintain the current policy of presumptively refusing to charge cases based on non-public safety traffic stops?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Will you institute or participate in an expungement clinic in your county within one year of being sworn in?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Will you track and publish data on your office's charging decisions, diversion recommendations, bail recommendations, plea offers, and sentencing recommendations by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and public defense eligibility to identify and address racial, gender, and class disparities in your office's prosecutions?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** A recent Council of State Government's report recommends Vermont's state's attorneys' offices "develop internal guidance to support consistency in charging and plea-bargaining decisions." To the extent your office does not have such policies, within two years of being sworn in, will you publish policies regarding charging, bail, plea bargaining, Brady/Giglio obligations, sentencing, and data collection?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Vermont is in the midst of an unprecedented overdose crisis. Overdose prevention sites or mobile services, where individuals can use their own drugs in view of medical personnel ready to save their life, help prevent needless deaths and have been implemented in hundreds of locations around the world. There has never been a recorded death in an overdose prevention site. Do you support the opening of overdose prevention sites or the use of mobile overdose prevention services in Vermont?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** As state's attorney, will you expand your offices use of restorative justice and court diversion services and publish data showing such an expansion?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Chittenden County is home to the largest immigrant communities in Vermont. As state's attorney, will you train and direct prosecutors, in written policies, to consider the immigration consequences of a conviction during each stage of a case, and to favor dispositions that avoid adverse immigration consequences?

**A:** Yes

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**Q:** Will you decline to prosecute children for typical childhood behavior such as disorderly conduct, fights, smoking marijuana, or other low-level infractions committed in school or the community that do not result in serious physical harm, and instead reject the case or refer them to restorative justice processes?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Will you develop, implement, and/or continue updating a "Do Not Call" or "Brady" witness list, and require all prosecutors in your office to reject new cases and search warrant requests from police officers with histories of dishonesty, racism, or bias?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Will you implement an "open-file" discovery program and require that prosecutors turn over full discovery, including exculpatory information, to the defense upon filing charges?

**A:** Yes



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