

THE COURT WATCH PROGRAM

The Court Watch Program started in October of 2003 in response to continuous complaints from community residents and street-level police officers concerning the "revolving-door" nature of the Marion County criminal justice system. The program is designed to bring the residents of neighborhoods into the courtroom to convey the real-life impact of the particular criminal offenses or offenders that most directly affect the quality of life in the neighborhoods. Consisting of a partnership between the Marion County Prosecutor's Office and residents of the neighborhoods that the office serves, the program's objective is to persuade all of the actors within the Marion County criminal court system to take a more proactive role in preventing crime in the community by imposing meaningful sentences on offenders who chronically victimize the community.

- Court Watch focuses primarily on low-level, chronic offenders who have several cases pending within the system, who frequently violate conditions of pre-trial release by committing new criminal offenses, and who have a reputation within the neighborhoods for being consistent troublemakers.
- Residents who are Court Watch members receive a weekly list of court hearings scheduled on Court Watch cases. The community prosecutor and coordinator work closely with Court Watch members to

educate them about the criminal court process and to resolve any confusion stemming from the intricacies of the system.

- **Residents** are encouraged to attend **bond review** and **sentencing hearings** because they often possess additional information about a particular case or offender that is pertinent to issues raised during such hearings. During these hearings, residents are often called to testify about the impact of offenses such as prostitution, criminal trespass, or drug-related misdemeanors and felonies, and the relationship between these offenses or offenders and other criminal activity in the neighborhood.
- Court Watch members may attend as many or as few court hearings as their schedules permit and should set aside about three (3) hours for each hearing. Members are encouraged to bring reading materials to occupy their time while waiting for the case to be called before the judge.
- Weekly Court Watch reports contain case information including the factual basis of the charged offenses, the name and phone number of the trial prosecutor assigned to the case, the date and time of the next court hearing, and the location and the phone number for the court room in which the hearing is to be held

For more information about the Court Watch program please contact Dirk Cushing or Mariann Scott:

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