

MCAP questions the candidates for State's Attorney in Prince George's County

MCAP submitted the following questionnaire to each of the five Democratic Party candidates for the office of State's Attorney for Prince George's County, the chief officer in charge of prosecuting and defending the county's laws. Whoever is elected will be instrumental in determining whether there will be true enforcement of the county council's legislation that was passed last year, to take effect in 2011, intended to limit the operations of sexually-oriented businesses.

The five candidates that were asked to respond to the questionnaire are named below alphabetically.

- Angela Alsobrooks (AA)
- Thomas Dernoga (TD)
- Peggy Magee (PM)
- Mark Spencer (MS)
- Joseph Wright (JW)

Following the candidate questionnaire is the candidates' written responses which have been provided when available along with a quick-reference summary of all their responses for your consideration when choosing who you will cast your vote for come November.

Candidate Questionnaire

A driving force affecting the safety of families and declining moral values is the flood of illegal adult pornography pouring into our communities and children's minds. These materials depict in graphic detail every form of promiscuous, degrading, perverse, unsafe and violent sexual behavior imaginable.

As a candidate, we are concerned about how you will enforce the county code that applies to the operation of sexually-oriented businesses, if elected. Specifically, we wish to ask the following questions; please elaborate, if you wish.

- Will you enforce the existing county code regarding sexually-oriented businesses (video stores, exotic dancing clubs, public displays of nudity). This includes restrictions on locations and hours of operation. We know of at least one that is open 24/7.
- Will you work with police to actively monitor such businesses?
- Will you publicize your efforts? We view this as a deterrent to both purveyors and consumers.
- Will you assign a prosecutor whose primary responsibility would be to deal with these matters?

The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the First Amendment does not protect obscene material. The Court has also stated that there are "legitimate state interests at stake in stemming the tide of commercialized obscenity." Among other things, obscenity corrupts youth, wrecks marriages, inflames the passions of sexual predators, contributes to prostitution, contributes to on-the-job sexual harassment, and undermines the right of citizens to live in a decent society.

How the Candidates Responded

Responses Summary

	Angela Alsobrooks	Thoma Dernoga	Peggy Magee	Mark Spencer	Joseph Wright
1	N.A.	Yes*	N.A.	Yes	Yes*
2	N.A.	Yes*	N.A.	Yes	Yes*
3	N.A.	Yes*	N.A.	Yes	Yes*
4	N.A.	Yes and No*	N.A.	Yes	Yes*

*see “Responses in Detail” for detailed written response

Responses in Detail

1. Will you enforce the existing county code?

- **JW** - I will enforce the existing county code regarding sexually-oriented businesses. Indeed, as a prosecutor in the State’s Attorney’s office, I have, for years, been working to ensure that establishments follow all county codes regarding sexually-oriented businesses. I have been responsible for closing down over 20 illegal businesses in Prince George’s county, businesses which were inherently dangerous. They were magnets for crime, and as such put all involved parties in danger, from the actual dancers, to consumers, and most definitely the surrounding communities. As your State’s Attorney, I would continue to enforce regulations regarding sexually-oriented businesses and, more generally, continue to prevent our communities and families from the harmful effects of such businesses.
- **TD** - I helped draft this law and get it adopted. I worked closely with MCAP to achieve this goal. Enforcement is generally through DER Code Enforcement and the Office of Law. However, as State’s Attorney I will work DER to assist them in making certain that the law is enforced.

2. Will you work with police?

- **JW** - I will indeed work with police to actively monitor sexually-oriented businesses. In fact, in my efforts to shut down illegal businesses and prevent the spread of crime which results from their existence, working closely with police has been paramount to my success. As a prosecutor who handles such issues, I am constantly merging my efforts with those of the local police to ensure strict implementation of the law. I will bring this valuable and extensive experience with me as your next State's Attorney, meaning more effective monitoring efforts and thus, more generally, safer communities.
- **TD** - I will work with DER and the police to ensure that these businesses are in full compliance with all County licensing and Code requirements. This would include providing the police with legal analysis as to whether certain actions constitute a violation.

3. Will you publicize your efforts?

- **JW** - I will make publicizing our efforts a top priority. I agree that bringing our efforts into the public eye acts as a useful deterrent. Furthermore, I believe that by increasing awareness, our communities become more knowledgeable as to the dangers associated with sexually-oriented businesses, and as a result we, as a whole, become better suited to take on such businesses in a unified and well prepared manner.
- **TD** - I intend to implement a program of Community-Oriented Prosecution through which specific Assistant State's Attorneys are assigned to work with certain communities. This includes a significant outreach and communication effort. Through this community-based dialogue we will be able to inform the public of our actions on this front.

4. Will you assign a prosecutor?...

- **JW** - I will definitely assign a prosecutor whose priority will be handling such issues. In fact, for many years, I was that prosecutor. As such, I have a deep understanding and appreciation for the work that prosecutor will do. I know, better than most, how important their responsibilities will be and the resources necessary to effectively discharge the duties of that office. As State's Attorney, my extensive working knowledge of the area will be complemented by my ability to channel resources and focus efforts in such a way as to assure the relentless and spirited pursuit of illegal sexually-oriented businesses in our county.
- **TD** - I see the approach a little differently than suggested by the question. As part of the Community-Oriented Prosecution program, individual Assistant State's Attorneys that are responsible for an area that includes such an establishment would have responsibility of any matters involving the establishment. They would work directly with the affected community in addressing and problems.