

May 12, 2020

Via Email

Mikel Weisser
Executive Director, Arizona NORML
1344 E Indian School Rd.
Phoenix, AZ 85014
mikelweisser@gmail.com

Re: Statement in response to proposed article addressing May 5, 2020 AZ NORML debate

Dear Mikel:

There's a lot of momentum behind justice reform. In fact, every single candidate running for Maricopa County Attorney, regardless of party affiliation, speaks eloquently about ending mass incarceration, the school-to-prison pipeline, and safely reducing prison populations and costs. But they feign understanding, *and I offer empathy*. My commitment to justice reform was not gleaned from some political strategy session or incorporated because some poll suggested it. My commitment to transforming our conception of justice comes from personal experience. Full stop.

My detractors at last week's debate suggest two false narratives. The first is that I've been dishonest during my career and campaign about my personal background. Not true. There exists a full *decade* of my publicly recorded transparency. But in this moment, without the heat of a false accusation in a public setting driving my emotions, let me be clear about the facts:

- When I was 18 years old I illegally consumed alcohol in Kennesaw, Georgia;
- I drove a car home with a blood/alcohol content of 0.021%;
- I was arrested and convicted of a misdemeanor DUI.

It was a foolish lapse in judgment for which I accepted responsibility, paid my fines, performed my community service, and served my probation term. But it was also a *defining moment* in my life, because it set me on a different path. In that moment, sitting in jail, I was absolutely terrified of ending up like my biological father, whom I hadn't seen since he was sentenced to federal prison for drug trafficking when I was a child.

Now reasonable minds may differ on whether we should even be talking about this nearly 20 years later. But I have always accepted the reality that I would *forever* have to periodically

respond to some inquiry or background investigation, and *particularly* so once I announced my candidacy for County Attorney. That's why I have spoken openly on at least half a dozen occasions about it.

The second false narrative is that my conviction defines me, that it should disqualify me from serving and protecting my community. To the contrary, my experience with the justice system, and the 20 years of bird-dogging that followed, gives me unique *and desperately needed* insight, empathy, and an unyielding appetite for justice reform.

My detractors and adversaries may talk about reform, but I live it. Yet, while their words surely paint a politically expedient picture, their attacks, to me, suggest a much more concerning reality: how will they treat young men and women who deserve second chances? And how will they assure Maricopa's most marginalized communities that they are *truly* committed to eradicating barriers and promoting rehabilitation?

Hacia la justicia,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William H. Knight", with a stylized, cursive script.

William H. Knight