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Plan aimed at helping charge more cases Choi lays out 'Second Look' initiative

Emily Gurnon egurnon@pioneerpress.com

Newly sworn-in Ramsey County Attorney John Choi announced a collaboration Tuesday between prosecutors and area police agencies to charge cases that are initially declined by prosecution.

Choi said the "Second Look" initiative will help attune police to what prosecutors need to bring a case to trial, will focus limited resources and will improve public safety and livability.

"I'm a big believer in partnerships, and I believe this initiative ... is really about that," he said at a news conference at the Law Enforcement Center in St. Paul. He said he wanted to see more human interaction and less "working in silos."

Choi was flanked Tuesday by Ramsey County Sheriff Matt Bostrom, St. Paul assistant police chief Ken Reed and the chiefs of the Maplewood and North St. Paul police departments, among others.

Mindy Elledge, a prosecutor with 30 years of experience in the county attorney's office, will be in charge of cases that get another look. Elledge was planning to retire but will stay for at least the nine months that Choi said he planned to devote to the program before reviewing its effectiveness.

Choi said he could not estimate how many additional cases would be charged. He did not have specific cases in mind for prosecution but noted that crimes such as serial burglaries or robberies, crimes "very important to the community," might be good candidates. The collaboration would include measures like a prosecutor developing a checklist for police on a specific case to point out what additional evidence needs to be gathered, Choi said. It might mean urging police to find another witness or noting that certain evidence won't be admissible in court.

Maplewood Police Chief Dave Thomalla said he believed the initiative could help police. "All too often the business of policing can be frustrating, and investigations oftentimes are run in two tracks, one by law enforcement and one by the prosecuting attorneys," Thomalla said.

"What you're going to see is our officers having these cases looked at by another set of eyes, saying, 'This is one that, through some more work, will go a little further,' versus us spinning our wheels on our end and going nowhere," he said.

Emily Gurnon can be reached at 651-228-5522

651-228-5522