

# D.C.'s Office of Attorney General

*What is the role of D.C.'s Attorney General? How is OAG structured? How does it compare to other places in the United States? What different things does OAG do?*

## 1. What is the role of the D.C. Attorney General?

The Attorney General (AG) for the District of Columbia is D.C.'s chief legal officer, and their staff at the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) handles much of the local government's legal business. This includes pursuing civil, family, and commercial investigations and mediations, prosecuting juvenile and some adult justice cases, and representing the District in lawsuits brought *against* and on *behalf* of D.C. government. OAG also advises District officials on the legality of proposed legislation, regulations, and commercial transactions. **The majority of cases handled by the OAG are everyday civil legal issues that affect thousands of families across the District.**

## 2. How is OAG structured? How does it compare to other places in the U.S.?

OAG is an independent agency led by an AG who serves a four year term. Previously, the D.C. Attorney General was appointed by and operated under the direction of the Mayor, but in 2010 D.C. voters overwhelmingly approved a charter amendment providing for an independently elected Attorney General. The stated goal of this change was to "ensure the position's independence, and significantly enhance the Attorney General's ability to serve the interests of the District of Columbia and its residents in an objective and independent fashion."

This system of selecting an AG is in line with that in most states: in 43 of 50 states the attorney general is popularly elected; in five, their AG is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by a statewide legislative body (usually, the state senate); in one the position is appointed by the state legislature, and in one it is a state supreme court appointment.

## 3. What does OAG primarily do?

OAG serves D.C. residents through a wide array of civil and family-related legal actions that make up most of the office's overall work. **These include cases that: protect children from abuse and neglect; enforce consumer protection laws; resolve landlord/tenant disputes; defend elders from abuse and fraud; and shield families from domestic violence.** As just one example, in fiscal year 2024, the Child Support Services Division collected over \$47 million in child support payments to ensure children have the financial support they need.

OAG also serves as D.C.'s legal watchdog, through such actions as holding polluters and other bad corporate actors accountable and protecting workers from wage theft. For example, in 2024, OAG secured over \$661 million in savings and benefits for D.C. residents through legal actions—representing a 330% return on investment compared to its approximately \$154 million annual budget.

### 3. What does OAG primarily do? (Con't)

**In sum, OAG handles the types of legal issues residents are most likely to encounter, particularly vulnerable individuals who lack the resources to hire private attorneys.** OAG also engages in community outreach to prevent fraud and crime, such as educating on the warning signs of human trafficking.

### 4. What is OAG's responsibility for criminal and juvenile prosecutions?

OAG helps reduce and prevent crime through a comprehensive public safety strategy that includes civil and criminal prosecutions as well as community initiatives like shutting down illegal cannabis shops and working with businesses to improve security. In 2024, OAG charged 2,995 adult misdemeanors, including 97% of adult DUI misdemeanor cases. The federally appointed U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia (USAO) is responsible for prosecuting most other adult misdemeanors and adult felonies.

OAG has sole jurisdiction over youth prosecutions in D.C. For each juvenile case, OAG balances rehabilitation and accountability. In 2024, OAG prosecuted 84.3% of juvenile arrests for violent offenses. When appropriate, OAG diverts youth such as those with no prior arrests and low-level charges, as well as youth better served by programs that address underlying issues like mental health and substance use. Data shows that youth who were diverted had lower rates of recidivism than those who were prosecuted.

### 5. How does OAG fit into D.C.'s blended legal system?

OAG plays a critical role in protecting the rights and well-being of District residents, where OAG oversees civil and youth justice, and the federal USAO holds jurisdiction over most adult criminal cases. **As the District's lawyer, the AG also is the advocate for D.C. residents in cases where the legal issue involves the federal government.** Should the AG become a federal political appointee, District residents would be unable to hold OAG accountable for the vigorous and ethical defense of their rights. This could have both individual- and District- level impacts on the cases OAG chooses to prosecute, its approach to addressing illegal behavior, and access to justice for everyday people in D.C.

#### Our Mission

Council for Court Excellence's (CCE's) mission is to bring people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community.



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