

Geneva check collection service on the decline

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GENEVA — Requests for bad check collection, the community service that helps fund personnel in the Geneva County District Attorney's office and donations to law enforcement, have steadily decreased, leaving the prosecutor to seek more funding from state lawmakers.

"District attorneys across Alabama need more staff to better serve their districts," said Kirke Adams, the district attorney for the 33rd judicial circuit of Geneva and Dale counties.

He has asked the legislative delegation from the Wiregrass to work with the governor to push for more funding.

"The Legislature will be working on the education budget next week. Any request for additional funding for a state agency will be part of the general fund budget and taken up later," said Warren Beck, the state representative for District 87 that includes Geneva County and the western edge of Houston County. "But I will support the district attorney's request."

"They have all agreed to go to bat for us," Adams said.

Geneva County Worthless Check Unit

2003 1,297 cases —
\$96,300 returned to
businesses

2004 1,288 cases —
\$58,600 returned to
businesses

2005 1,167 cases —
\$53,200 returned to
businesses

"We're the only agency that relies on people to commit crimes to fund the office."

The association for prosecution services is asking for a 5 percent increase this year, he said. "It's not much. But it is a start."

The extra revenue would not fully pay for a salary and benefits for another prosecutor or an investigator or the office supplies and furniture, he said.

"That's why having a worthless check unit is so important," he said. "It's a valuable service. I appreciate every merchant that uses us."

Adams said the concern often voiced during his cam-

paign in 2004 was to keep a prosecutor full-time in the Geneva office.

The worthless check unit supports this prosecutor.

But in the past three years, the number of bad checks presented to the district attorney's office has decreased from improved check-out technology, municipalities taking on the service and businesses going with collection agencies.

Larger stores have the technology to automatically deduct the amount from a person's checking account from either a check or debit card. "I expect this trend to continue," Adams said.

"But I don't think a merchant realizes that a collection agency must use civil action to collect for a bad check. It's a statewide stance for district attorneys to not pursue a check presented from a collection agency," he said. "A criminal prosecution is better. With a check submitted through the district attorney's office, we have the threat of jail for non-payment."

The worthless check unit is paid \$99 for each bad check that is collected through the district attorney's office. If the

person refuses to pay and is arrested, the amount follows the case through the court process, he said. "By state statute, the district attorney can assess a penalty for a bad check."

Adams said the check fee is used for training of law enforcement officers and the purchases of vehicles, law books, radar units and Tasers.

"Right now, we're only collecting about \$4,000 a month in fees," he said. "Police officers must have re-certification classes and laws change. So I'm trying to build up funds to help provide training for them."

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