

MOTUS THEATER

Moving Stories that Move Us Forward

November 18, 2022

Dear Motus Supporter,

My name is Michael Dougherty and I am honored to serve as Boulder County District Attorney, a position I have held since 2018. During my tenure, I have been deeply committed to public safety and restorative justice. I am working to lower the rate of convictions and re-offense, as well as interrupt racial bias in the justice system, because I recognize the impact of incarceration on individuals, their families, and the larger community. I am working hard to improve outcomes across the system for everyone involved to enhance public safety and improve the justice system. That's why I am writing to you today.

I hope you have experienced a Motus Theater *JustUs* monologue performance. If you have, you will understand why the *JustUs* project inspires me in my work, as well as other District Attorneys across the country, to go further in our efforts to effect systemic change in prosecution toward true and equitable justice. Motus' powerful artistic work, at the intersection of strategic storytelling and public policy, is catalyzing policy shifts in Boulder County and the State of Colorado.

I am writing to ask you to join me in supporting the national tour of Motus Theater's *JustUs* project. Your gift will support the cultural shift and policy changes needed to improve the criminal legal system.

I became involved in the *JustUs* project in 2019 when Motus invited me to participate in the premiere of the first group of monologues at the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice Conference in Denver. **I was one of seven law enforcement leaders and legislators who co-read the stories of Motus' *JustUs* monologists at a plenary session attended by over 1,600 people.**

In Motus' *JustUs* project, people who were formerly incarcerated share personal stories about how the racism, dehumanization, and injustice of the criminal justice system have impacted them and their families. Standing on stage with monologist Dereck Bell to read and reflect on his story was a very emotional and incredibly powerful experience. I actually underestimated the impact it would have on me as well as the audience.

Motus' *JustUs* project is crucial to supporting criminal justice reform. The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with nearly two million people behind bars. Black people are 13% of the U.S. population, and yet they disproportionately make up 40% of our nation's prisons. And Colorado's racial and ethnic disparity is higher than the national average. **Motus' *JustUs* monologues reflect that racial bias and support our efforts to address it in the justice system in Colorado.**

Over the past two years, my office worked with the Vera Institute of Justice on an analysis of our 2013 – 2019 data. The final data analysis presentation was released in a community presentation on July 7, 2022. Building off the one-time data review by Vera, the District Attorney's Office has partnered with Prosecutor Performance Indicators (PPI) to create a dashboard that was released in early September. This is an exciting next step in our ongoing efforts for data-responsive practices, community engagement, and transparency. We are also excited to partner with PPI and the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to do an additional data analysis that will focus on data from 2019 to 2022. Further, this analysis with PPI and the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab will go beyond the Vera analysis, as it will not focus only on felonies and will include how an individual's criminal history factors into decision-making and the data.



*Michael Dougherty shakes the hand of Motus Theater's *JustUs* monologist Astro Allison after performance at the National Association of Community & Restorative Justice Conference in Denver. Photo by Rick Villarreal.*

The actions of a District Attorney's Office should be part of the solution to criminal justice reform because prosecutors are, arguably, the most powerful agents within the criminal justice system. District Attorneys play a critical role in mass incarceration and continuing racial disparities – or we can interrupt systems of inequity. District Attorneys decide who to prosecute, whether to file charges or give a second chance, and how extensive a sentence to recommend to the judge.

Here's some big news for you. Because of the impact of Motus Theater's work on me, I reached out to other District Attorneys in Colorado and to a national organization supporting the leadership of reform-minded prosecutors, Fair and Just Prosecution. At my encouragement, **Fair and Just Prosecution invited Motus Theater to present the *JustUs* stories in front of over 53 leading District Attorneys from across the country at their national convening in Los Angeles in December of 2021.** The impact on those District Attorneys was as significant for

them as it was for me. The Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution, Miriam Krinsky, had this to say:

“Motus Theater’s JustUs presentation at Fair & Just Prosecution’s 2021 Conference truly surpassed even our incredibly high expectations. Motus’ performances will make a difference in decisions made by DAs across the country and, as such, in the willingness to rethink punitive approaches that simply waste more lives.”

Each *JustUs* monologue highlights powerfully and personally the urgency of reforming the criminal legal system and the prison system. As a prosecutor, the monologues remind me that it is imperative that we look at offenders as individuals and assess how best to get them back on the right track. The best way to do this is by listening and understanding what got them into the criminal justice system in the first place.



Motus Theater JustUs monologist Dereck Bell listens while DA Michael Dougherty reads Bell’s monologue back to him during practice for the performance at the National Association of Community & Restorative Justice Conference in Denver.

. Photo by Rick Villarreal.

Every time I have participated in a *JustUs* performance, I leave with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the monologists’ courage, a heavy heart because of their struggles, and inspiration for the work ahead.

JustUs fills me with hope and energy for the future. The transformative power of this project in the past three years is truly impressive. *JustUs* has catalyzed two pieces of legislation in the Colorado State House to support criminal legal reform. The Motus staff team and the *JustUs* monologists have

worked with DAs, prosecutors, law enforcement, Department of Corrections leaders, state legislators, judges, and education leaders who, like me, stood with *JustUs* monologists, read aloud, and reflected on their stories.

Motus Theater’s performances like the one I participated in are getting the attention of national grantmakers, too. The Arts for Justice Fund allocated \$150,000 to support two monologue workshops and 13 performances of *JustUs* in collaboration with district attorneys’ offices.

Motus now needs to raise \$120,000 to support reaching 13 more offices seeking presentations. Your meaningful contribution will make this tour possible.

Late Justice Robert Jackson once wrote that “The prosecutor has more control over life, liberty, and reputation than any other person in America.” For its artistry and strategy, Motus Theater’s

JustUs project has the power to spark and foster important conversations in district attorneys' offices and communities throughout the U.S. to support the systemic change needed to reform the criminal legal system in our nation and honor the life, liberty, and reputation of every American.

I have never written a letter such as this one. It is exceptional for me to support an organization in this way. But Motus is exceptional in their work and their impact.

Please join me in supporting Motus Theater so that they can bring more impactful performances to District Attorneys' offices and communities around the nation. Every workshop they do, and every performance they create opens discussion and spurs action. Every performance takes resources. A *JustUs* autobiographical monologue workshop costs approximately \$25,000. A *JustUs* performance can cost more than \$10,000 if it's out of state. Consider doubling your annual contribution and making a meaningful gift of {{doubled amount}} today. Please use the envelope provided with this letter, scan the QR code below, or go to coloradogives.org/donate/MotusTheater. Remember: no contribution is too small.

Motus Theater and I are grateful for those of you who already took action and made your contribution.

Thank you for your support and your commitment to equal rights and justice.

Sincerely,

Michael Dougherty
Boulder County District Attorney

*P.S.: Join me in supporting Motus Theater's efforts to raise \$120,000 by December 31st to expand the tour of the *JustUs* project and support nationwide criminal justice reform. Make your contribution today! And if you have already contributed - thank you for your support.*



Scan this QR to donate online today!