



The Paladin

Washington County Attorney's Office Quarterly Newsletter

A Message from the County Attorney

Dear staff and friends of the office,

We had another great quarter with many staff accomplishments to highlight. Our annual Law Clerk Summer Training program got off to a good start with law clerk orientation at the beginning of the summer. Every year this office provides work opportunities and practical learning experience to law students to enhance their academic and professional development. In exchange, the students provide invaluable daily legal



support on the jail and misdemeanor court calendars. We are very lucky to have five outstanding law students clerking for us this summer. A big thank you goes out to assistant county attorneys Scott May and Marc Berris for their leadership at this training event kicking off our summer clerkship program.

Congratulations to the entire Juvenile Division staff for receiving the 2024 Excellence in Service Award from the Minnesota Juvenile Officer's Association. This award reflects the division's outstanding teamwork in support of our partners in law enforcement and schools who serve the youth of our community. I am very proud of this well-deserved recognition of our ability to partner with others to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our kids.

A recent visit by Congresswoman Betty McCollum highlighted the partnership between the Sheriff's office, local law enforcement agencies, and the County Attorney's Office in building a new and improved evidence management system. This visit allowed the Sheriff, Brent Wartner, First Assistant, and me to talk with Congresswoman McCollum about the Sheriff's funding request for a new document management system platform to complement the new digital evidence management software our office is currently implementing. The new system will assist county agencies and local law enforcement to store and share digital evidence. We explained that, in addition to many other advantages, the system will also facilitate law enforcement's response to citizen requests for information. We are grateful for Congresswoman McCollum's visit and recognition that this type of collaboration is essential for good government at the local level.

Sincerely,

Kevin Magnuson

Congresswoman Betty McCollum Visits

County Attorney Kevin Magnuson, Commissioner Stan Karwoski and Sheriff Dan Starry, photographed right with Congresswoman Betty McCollum, met on June 20th regarding the partnership between the Sheriff's Office, local law enforcement agencies, and the Attorney's Office on building a new and improved evidence management system.



Update on the Truancy Program

The second quarter of 2024 included the end of the 2023-2024 school year, and another successful year for the Truancy Program. Through our partnership with schools and the Community Services department, the program reached out to hundreds of students and families throughout Washington County. Typically, about 500 students are referred to the Attendance Intervention Meeting where they receive information on the importance of school attendance and where to look for help. For students who continue to struggle, a diversion process is utilized to focus on that specific student and offer services and encouragement to improve school attendance. About 200 students participate in the diversion process for truancy in a school year. Through those efforts, we can intervene early and provide services to improve attendance, school performance and mental health. Despite those efforts, some students and families need additional help that cannot be offered in a voluntary setting. Those students are petitioned to court for higher levels of intervention and services. Over the last two school years, only 20 truancy petitions were filed each school year.

In June, the County Attorney's Office continued the tradition of recognizing two Washington County students who pledged to graduate from high school. The Pledge to Graduate program encourages Washington County students to graduate high school on time. Students submit an online form to pledge to graduate found on the County Attorney's Office website. A drawing is held by the County Attorney's Office where two students are awarded an iPad by the office. This year's winners were from Cottage Grove Middle School and Independent School District 622 online program.

Another tradition of the Truancy Program is to host an annual training for school officials and school resource officers. This year that training occurred on August 6 at the Stillwater Public Library. The County Attorney's office has hosted this training for over ten years. At this year's training, attendees learned about current trends in chemical use, mental health, and social media; supportive services for youth sexual violence/trauma; SOGIE allyship and leadership; and juvenile law updates and trends.

Pledge to Graduate winner

County Attorney Kevin Magnuson, Commissioner Karla Bigham, and Assistant County Attorney Betsey Urbas presented an iPad at Cottage Grove Middle School on June 5 to the winner who pledged to graduate.



Criminal Division Highlights

During the second quarter of 2024, the Criminal Division continued its hard work to do justice, protect public safety, and vindicate the rights of victims. We tried serious and difficult cases, including multiple cases in which police and correctional officers were assaulted.

Notable cases and sentences

A jury found Anyeth Deng guilty of four felonies for physically assaulting, spitting on, and threatening violence toward multiple police officers. Mohammed Hassan was found guilty of felony fourth-degree assault for spitting on a correctional officer at the Minnesota Correctional Facility—Oak Park Heights. A jury found Brenda Moldovan guilty of fifth-degree assault for an unprovoked attack on a driver from a ride-sharing service. The prosecutors and staff who worked on these important cases deserve kudos for their tremendous efforts.

Our office was also pleased to bring justice in a tragic car crash that killed an innocent woman in Oakdale in 2021. Scott Hardy pleaded guilty to fleeing a peace officer in a motor vehicle resulting in death. Hardy was sentenced to 166 months in prison. Though nothing can bring back the beloved woman who was senselessly killed by Hardy's reckless and selfish actions, we are pleased that Hardy is facing the serious consequences called for by Minnesota's sentencing guidelines.

Task Force updates

Criminal Division attorneys also continued their hard work on numerous task forces and other groups that promote public safety. The East Metro Human Trafficking Task Force and Cottage Grove Police Department investigated a report of a 13-year-old girl who had run away from home. Police were able to find the victim at a motel, where a 29-year-old man had forced the girl to perform sexual acts. Scott Haldeman, the prosecutor assigned to the EMHTTF, filed criminal sexual conduct charges. Recently, Angel Morales-Morocho pleaded guilty to second-degree criminal sexual conduct and faces a substantial prison sentence when he is sentenced in August. The members of all our task forces and committees are committed to ensuring public safety through vigorous prosecution and community education.

Juvenile Division awarded an Excellence in Service Award by the Minnesota Juvenile Officer's Association (MNJOA)

Juvenile Division Head Tony Zdroik and Assistant County Attorney Tricia Loehr attended the MNJOA conference in Duluth to appear on behalf of the division and receive the award. The division received the award for the support shown to school resource officers in Washington County and the support we have shown to MNJOA.



Juvenile Division Highlights

The Juvenile Division was especially active in training other justice partners in the second quarter of 2024. Juvenile Division attorneys presented a training to the Community Services department's social workers about working with attorneys for parents and children on child protection cases. Presentations regarding specific issues related to juvenile investigations were made to local law enforcement officers as part of the Washington County Attorney's Office Law Enforcement Training Program. Additionally, Juvenile Division attorneys trained law enforcement officers from all over the state at the Minnesota Juvenile Officers Association annual training in June.

Erin Johnson, an assistant county attorney in the Juvenile Division, was appointed to serve on the Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention. The council is led by the Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court and will consist of many professionals with expertise in the child protection system as well as individuals who have experience with that system. The council will develop a comprehensive blueprint for improvement of the child protection system. This is a great accomplishment for Erin who has distinguished herself as an expert in all aspects of child protection law. She is recognized and relied upon on a statewide level to consult on child protection legislation, policy, and case management.

Civil Division Highlights

The Washington County Attorney's Office Civil Division had a very busy and rewarding second quarter in 2024.

Collaboration with Public Works

Civil Division staff, working with the Public Works department, successfully resolved an eminent domain case in Oakdale that had been in litigation for over two years. They also assisted with re-drafting the Parks Ordinance which was recently adopted by the Washington County Board and is currently in effect. The team also assisted in the successful closing on the land purchase for the first of three phases of the Kelley Land & Cattle 685 acres of acquisition for Big Marine Park.

2024 Tax petition caseload

The Civil Division received approximately 175 property tax petitions filed by Washington County taxpayers contesting their property assessments for 2023 (taxes due year 2024). Most are challenging the assessor's value of their properties; some are also contesting that they have been unequally assessed and/or are exempt from taxation. We do our best to use the legal process to obtain fair outcomes for all parties involved.

Partnership with Community Services

While maintaining a very busy caseload, Civil Division staff has been working in partnership with the Community Services department's Child Support Unit to implement new Department of Human Services intervention policies (cases where Washington County will become a party in a private family case) and preparing for a new statutory change entitling each parent to at least 25% parenting time upon request.

Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Granted

Civil Division staff successfully assisted the Sheriff's Office in obtaining Washington County's first Extreme Risk Protection Court Order. The case involved a person in crisis who had made a very detailed plan to kill two family members and then himself with a large caliber hunting rifle he has in his car. That individual lost possession of the rifle for 12 months.

Other news

In most circumstances, federal and state law mandate the reimbursement of Medical Assistance from a person's estate after death. Civil Division staff works closely with Community Services to collect the reimbursement from estates through court actions, as well as voluntary

payments from estates. The Civil Division has assisted in collecting over \$430,000 in the first half of 2024. These dollars are reinvested in the Medical Assistance program to help to provide medical services for people without medical benefits.

The Civil Division drafted five appellate briefs this past quarter and received favorable decisions from the Minnesota Supreme Court on a 1st Degree Murder case (State v. McKinley-Phillips) and the Minnesota Court of Appeals on a bail challenge case (State v. David Powers).

There were 102 convictions for fleeing from police officers in 2023 (down from 110 in 2022), and so far 55 this year, but still significantly higher than 45 in 2019. With this rise in motorists fleeing from police, Civil Division forfeiture attorneys and staff have been busy seizing the vehicles involved when appropriate, terminating ownership, which is helping to deter similar dangerous criminal conduct.

Law Clerk Training Program



Madeline Titus
Senior law clerk
University of St. Thomas



Kate Gaulke
Summer Intern
University of St. Thomas



Kaytlin Sederholm
Summer Intern
Mitchell Hamline School of Law



Ben Werner
Senior Law Clerk
University of St. Thomas



Kevin Thole
Summer Intern
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Welcome Aboard!



Erin Stephens

Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division)

Erin joined the WCAO in May. Erin practiced throughout the state but most recently in Hennepin County before making the important decision to come to Washington County.



Wendy Allison

Senior Legal Assistant
(Criminal Division)

Wendy also joined the WCAO in May of this year. Wendy has worked in the legal field for several years (mostly in family law but also has worked in Juvenile, Tribal, and Personal Injury).