



The Paladin

Washington County Attorney's Office Quarterly Newsletter

A Message from the County Attorney

Dear staff and friends of the office,

I am pleased to share with you a few of the many office highlights from the past quarter.



Our [Annual Report for 2023](#), which posted online last May and went out in July, summarizes the outstanding work our staff accomplished this past year. I am proud of the report's account of our focus on decreasing crime and improving livability in Washington County.

The fun at the county fair this year began early in the morning on Wednesday, July 31, and continued through the evening of Sunday, August 5. Despite the usual August heat and sun, many folks in the office staffed our booth and chatted with people who stopped by. Community interest was at an all-time high. Kids and adults alike loved our newly acquired Plinko game and prizes. Thanks to everyone who volunteered and who visited us at the fair. Check out the pictures at the end of the newsletter.

Office team-building events like our annual lunchtime lawn games tournament and barbecue not only celebrate our hard work and commitment, but also bring us together and have a little fun. Hats off to the law games champions of 2024 – Tony and Christine! You can find pictures of the tournament and the winners at the end of the newsletter.

Finally, I always love bringing news of milestones in the lives of the people in our office. One such milestone worthy of celebrating is the gubernatorial appointment of yet another attorney from our office, Tricia Loehr, to the judicial bench. We are very proud of Tricia and know she will be an excellent jurist for the community. Please check out more news about Tricia's exciting appointment below.

Sincerely,



Kevin Magnuson

Navigating the Digital Age: e-litigation Unit

In recent years, our office has had to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of criminal cases. Gone are the days of receiving a paper police report and perhaps an audio recording of a witness statement. Books and paper files that once lined the office of a hard-working prosecutor are now replaced with monitors and computer screens. Huge amounts of digital evidence frequently accompany the cases our office prosecutes. Even relatively simple cases include hours of body worn camera and dash cam footage. More complex cases may also involve tens of thousands of pages of digitized phone records and gigabytes of evidence such as recorded audio/video statements, surveillance videos, cell phone data, social media, and financial forensic evidence. Managing all of this evidence in a manner that can easily be disclosed to the defense, as required by law, is its own challenge and presenting voluminous and complex evidence to a jury can be a daunting task.



The Washington County Attorney's Office is taking important steps to adapt to this new reality through the creation of an e-Litigation and trial technology prosecution unit. Leading the new unit is Assistant County Attorney Scott Haldeman, who was recently named the office's Case Management and e-Litigation Supervisor. Scott will spearhead our effort to utilize the latest technology, expertise, and practices to better obtain and manage evidence from law enforcement agencies, disclose it to the defense, and exhibit it at trial. Scott will also be responsible for distributing incoming cases and caseloads among our adult felony prosecutors in a way that maximizes each attorney's productivity and potential for professional development.

To assist with this effort, our office recently invested in new software from Axon Premiere Justice, (aka Evidence.com) to help attorneys and legal support professionals manage the digital evidence in all its forms to ultimately be used in court. We also are currently in the process of hiring our first ever e-Litigation and Trial Technology Specialist. The position requires extensive eDiscovery and trial presentation technology expertise. I am very excited about the capabilities of our new initiative to maximize productivity and efficiency while enabling us to thrive in the rapidly expanding future.

Criminal Division Highlights



The Criminal Division vigorously prosecutes assaults on police and correctional officers. Our law enforcement colleagues have difficult and dangerous jobs, and this office treats assaults on officers with the utmost seriousness. In the third quarter of 2023, the Criminal Division tried three cases involving assaults against police and correctional officers. This is a high number of trials for that set of cases, but the Criminal Division's aggressive prosecution of those who assault our police and correctional officers makes trials, rather than guilty pleas, more likely. Our prosecutors are more than happy to try these cases.

After being found guilty by a jury of multiple counts of fourth-degree assault and threats of violence against sheriff's deputies, Anyeth Deng was sentenced to 120 days of jail and six years of probation. A jury found Mohamed Hassan guilty of fourth-degree assault for spitting in the face of a correctional sergeant at Minnesota Correctional Facility—Oak Park Heights and received the presumptive sentence of an additional year in prison. Anthony Cox was also found guilty by a jury of third-degree assault for throwing a scalding liquid at a fellow inmate at MCF—Oak Park Heights and receive the presumptive sentence of 15 additional months in prison.

The Criminal Division also continues to hold dangerous offenders accountable. After pleading guilty in May to second-degree intentional murder, Sylvester Jones was sentenced to 367 months (30½ years) in prison—the top of the range called for by the sentencing

guidelines—in July. Jones shot and killed his cousin in a parking lot in Newport in February 2023. In June, Matthew Hall pleaded guilty to ten charges of possessing and disseminating child pornography. Hall was sentenced to 153 months (12¾ years) in prison.

Juvenile Division Highlights



The Juvenile Division continues to represent the office well by offering trainings to key stakeholders throughout the juvenile justice system. The trainings are crucial in a system that promotes collaboration to achieve goals of accountability, service providing, and well-being of children and families. Social workers, school administrators, and law enforcement officers from all over Washington County participated in training this past quarter led by staff from the Juvenile Division.

Juvenile Division attorneys who represent Washington County Community Services on child protection cases partnered with social workers for a training on courtroom testimony in September. Social workers were provided with a fact scenario of a child protection case. Attorneys from the juvenile division played the role of assistant county attorney, attorney representing a parent, and judge. The training took place in two courtrooms of the Washington County Courthouse. Social workers were subject to direct and cross examination and breaks were taken during testimony to emphasize a point or answer questions. The training involved about 30 social workers with varying level of experience. This training will allow social workers to be more effective in testifying and presentations to

the court which will lead to positive outcomes on child protection matters and ultimately safety for Washington County Children.

In addition to that training, Juvenile Division attorneys and staff also participated in other training opportunities. On July 31, 2024, Tony Zdroik, Juvenile Division Head spoke to school resource officers at a training organized by the Minnesota School Safety Center, an organization within the Department of Public Safety. During that training, school resource officers from all over Minnesota learned about the unique issues involved in the investigation of juvenile delinquency matters. The topics included searches in a school building, interviewing juvenile suspects, school resource officer duties, marijuana use by juveniles, and many other juvenile law specific topics. The truancy program also held its annual training for Washington County school officials and school resource officers on August 6, 2024. Approximately 70 attendees from all over Washington County participated in that full day of training.

Juvenile Division Attorney Tricia Loehr Appointed District Court Judge



Minnesota is home to just under 300 district court judges, and come January, Assistant Washington County Attorney Tricia Loehr will be among them. Loehr joined Washington County in 2017, where she has focused on juvenile delinquency and child protection cases. Her previous experience includes serving as an assistant county attorney in Dakota County and as a law clerk for the Honorable Edward Lynch in Minnesota's First Judicial District.

In Minnesota, selecting and appointing judges when vacancies exist is the constitutional responsibility of the Governor. A judicial nominating commission recommends candidates to fill the vacancy, and the Governor ultimately makes the appointment. Those involved in the judicial selection process repeatedly describe Loehr as "exactly the kind of judge they are looking for," citing her strong sense of justice, grace, good judgment, and collegiality.

"I am proud to appoint Tricia Loehr to the Tenth Judicial District," said Governor Walz. "Compassion, humility, and patience are qualities that great judges possess, and she embodies all of them. Ms. Loehr will be a leader on this bench and in this community for years to come."

Tricia follows in the footsteps of several other attorneys from the Washington County Attorney's Office who have been appointed as judges, most recently Judge Justin Collins, Judge Kevin Mueller, Judge Siv Mjanger, Judge Jesse Seabrooks, and Judge Karin McCarthy.

We are very happy for Tricia and value the contribution we know she will make to the Tenth Judicial District. At the same time, we're sad to see her leave us. Tricia is loved and respected in the office and in the community. She brings the skills and experience she developed as a successful adult felony prosecutor to her current work prosecuting juvenile delinquency

cases. In addition to being a talented attorney, Tricia is a wonderful person and colleague. She is a leader in our office and is seemingly on every committee, formal and informal. She chairs the diversity, equity, and inclusion work group and leads a multidisciplinary team addressing the needs of sexually trafficked and exploited individuals. She also is frequently on interview panels helping to hire new employees that share her commitment to excellence and to the values that are central to the office, contributing in no small part to the special quality of our culture. We wish her the very best as she begins a new chapter of public service.

Civil Division Highlights



The Civil Division continues to represent the county through a wide range of legal work that very few members of the public ever see, e.g., tax appeals, guardianships/conservatorships, forfeitures, child support, civil commitments, licensing, contracting, etc.

Jim Zuleger obtained a big win for our office and Washington County from the Minnesota Supreme Court concerning a property tax appeal by the Tamarack Shopping Center in Woodbury. The Supreme Court issued its opinion on July 31, 2024, affirming without qualification the Tax Court's decision to not only reject Tamarack's argument that its property assessment was greater than its fair market value, but agreed with the County that the property was actually underassessed by almost \$8,500,000.

The Civil Division continues to put on training for county departments on a wide variety of topics. Most recently, the division conducted ongoing training with Community Services

regarding the legal standards for requesting and obtaining guardians and conservators, along with the importance of using less restrictive alternatives before seeking a guardianship or conservatorship.

Community Outreach: Summer 2024

Washington County Fair: July 31-August 4

Many of our staff enjoyed spending time at the Washington County Fair this summer! We loved having the opportunity to talk with community members about what we do day in and day out.



National Night Out: August 6

National Night Out is an annual nationwide event that encourages residents to get out in the community, meet their neighbors, and partner with law enforcement to actively prevent crime in their community. Members of the Washington County Attorney's Office joined law enforcement in their communities and enjoyed having the opportunity to represent WCAO!



Staff Events

Lawn Bags Tournament: August 21

The "Fun Committee" hosted the 2nd Annual Lawn Games Tournament for the office over the lunch hour in September and fun was had by all. The competition was fierce as the teams vied for first place and bragging rights. For those of us who didn't partake in the tournament, we had so much fun cheering and jeering our peers on while they played.





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