



Washington County Attorney's Office

Annual Report 2024



15015 62nd Street N
Stillwater, MN 55082



www.washingtoncountymn.gov



(651) 430-6115



WCA@washingtoncountymn.gov

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MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTY ATTORNEY



Welcome to the Washington County Attorney's Office's annual report for 2024.

Heading into year four as your County Attorney, I am as committed today as I was on day one to representing the people of Washington County. It is an honor and privilege to be your voice and speak on behalf of those in need. The County Attorney, as a prosecutor, plays a critical role in the administration of justice in both civil and criminal matters. Daily court actions enforcing child protection and vulnerable adult laws is vital to keeping our kids and community members safe. Similarly, by working to secure a conviction in a violent crime, this office helps ensure that justice is served, victims are heard, offenders are held accountable, thereby promoting a sense of security in the community. As prosecutors, we understand the critical role that we play in raising public awareness to important criminal justice issues, such as domestic violence, sex trafficking, child abuse, and other crimes of violence.

This annual report represents a snapshot of the work that our office does every day on behalf of the citizens of Washington County. It highlights just some of the many accomplishments coming from the work of our dedicated teams of prosecutors and legal support professionals who seek justice in our courtrooms and communities. Every day we strive to be responsive to law enforcement's case referrals and average less than a 14 day turn around to charging decisions. We provide a 24-hour/ 7-day a week duty attorney to make our services to law enforcement available "whenever needed" during the investigative phase of a criminal case.

Our mission is to serve the community with integrity and be able to support the positive outcomes with data. Now let me share more about what we delivered in 2024 for our community, law enforcement partners, and citizens inside and outside the courtroom. In 2024 over 2040 people attended over 67 presentations sponsored by county attorney's office staff in areas of police training and crime prevention.

Our dedicated prosecutors filed 1170 criminal complaints in 2024. On the juvenile prosecution side of the caseload, prosecutors reviewed 790 referrals from law enforcement. Our civil attorneys continued to assist all the county departments, processing 856 contracts and other legal documents as we provide additional professional services to the county.

In 2025, I am excited to know that the people who comprise this office will continue to work hard on keeping kids and vulnerable community members safe and collaborating with our criminal justice partners. We also continue to expand our collaboration through extensive training opportunities for our law enforcement partners on the new laws impacting the people we serve. As we move forward, our office will seek to build on the accomplishments of 2024 and set the bar higher for the coming year.

Thanks everyone for your support!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. R. May", written in a cursive style.

CRIMINAL DIVISION



Nick Hydukovich
Criminal Division Head



Thomas Wedes
Assistant Criminal Division Head

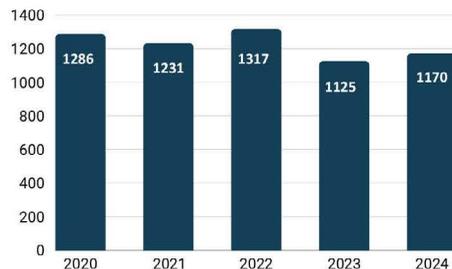
The Criminal Division is led by Nick Hydukovich, Criminal Division Head; Thomas Wedes, Assistant Criminal Division Head; and Scott Haldeman, Case Management and e-Litigation Supervisor. There are twelve prosecutors and eight legal support professionals. The prosecutors are responsible for prosecuting all felony and select gross misdemeanor crimes that occur in Washington County, in addition to all misdemeanor crimes that occur in townships in the county. Criminal Division prosecutors are responsible for prosecuting all types of criminal offenses, from murder to sexual assault, drug trafficking, and financial crimes.

During the past year, Criminal Division prosecutors continued their work to protect the community by holding violent criminals accountable. After a two-week trial, a jury returned a guilty verdict for second-degree felony murder in a case involving the tragic and senseless death of a 17-year-old girl in Forest Lake. Our prosecutors also obtained guilty verdicts in cases involving sexual abuse of children, assaults against police officers, and many others.

We also vigorously prosecute high-level drug dealers, including those who sell drugs to others that result in the death of the buyer. At the same time, we recognize that a significant portion of lower-level drug- and theft-related crimes are the direct result of addiction. Accordingly, Criminal Division prosecutors actively engage drug users in our robust drug diversion program, which provides an opportunity in the right circumstances for drug users—not dealers—to get the treatment and pro-social and cognitive skills programming necessary to lead sober and productive lives. Rather than having a felony conviction hamper their job and housing prospects, those who successfully complete diversion have a chance to turn their lives around and make our community a better and safer place.

“Our prosecutors hold criminals accountable for their actions, and in doing so, ensure that victims are given a strong voice in the courtroom and beyond.”

CRIMINAL COMPLAINTS





Both the Criminal and Juvenile Divisions continue to offer law enforcement the assistance of our designated automobile theft prosecutors in vehicle theft investigations and related crimes, such as carjackings. Our office prioritizes these cases as well as the vital work done by the East Metro Sex Trafficking Task Force and our other task forces.

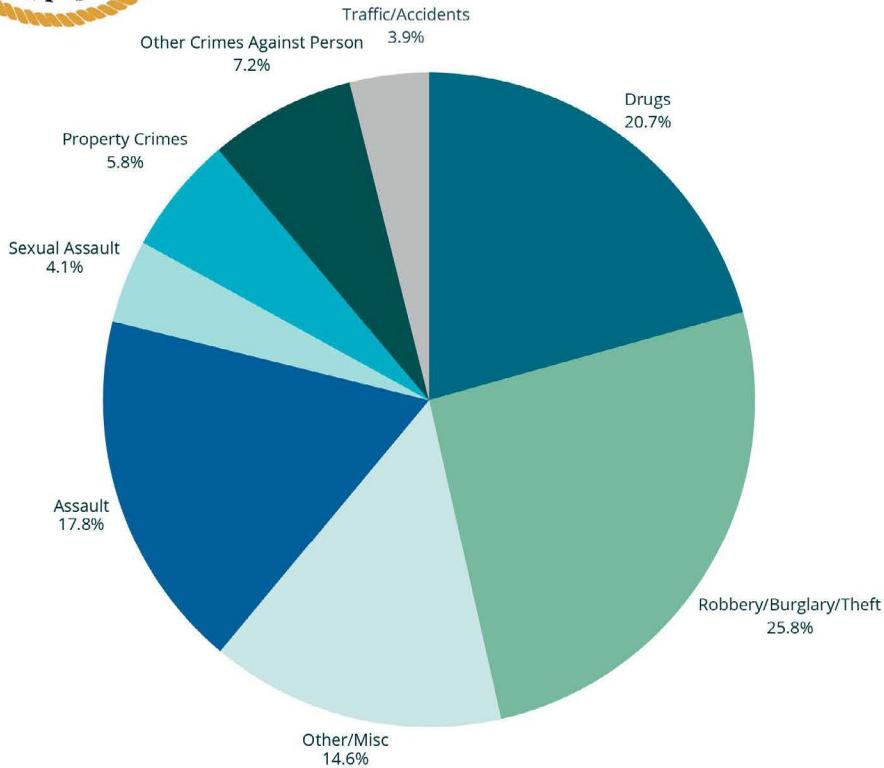
LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING PROGRAM



In 2023, County Attorney Magnuson formally announced the Washington County Attorney's Office Law Enforcement Specialized Training Program. This program provides a two-year curriculum of training courses for our law enforcement officers on a variety of topics, including training for new officers on court testimony and report writing, basic investigative techniques, and specialized types of investigations. The program hit its stride in 2024, with our attorneys teaching dozens of courses, which are free to our law enforcement partners. The program is led by Assistant County Attorney Wade Kish.

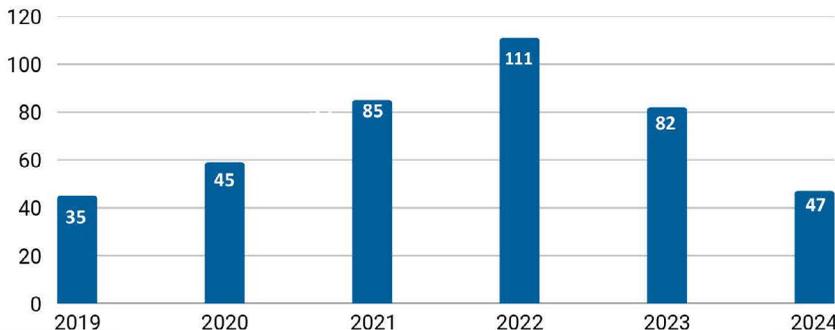


ADULT CASES BY CRIME TYPE 2024



FLEEING POLICE IN A MOTOR VEHICLE

Our prosecutors take cases in which the defendant flees police in a motor vehicle very seriously. These cases often involve high-speed pursuits and particularly reckless driving by the defendant. The number of these cases referred to the Washington County Attorney's Office for prosecution increased dramatically during and shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2022, the number has dropped substantially but it is still occurring far too frequently. Fleeing from police needlessly places the lives of innocent bystanders and officers at risk.





SERVING VICTIMS OF CRIME

Serving victims is at the forefront of the mission of both the Criminal and Juvenile Divisions. The five Victim/Witness Coordinators are paramount in our successes. Our mission is to protect the rights and aid victims and witnesses in understanding and participating in the criminal justice process. This includes addressing individual needs caused by victimization.

In the year 2024, the Victim/Witness Coordinators provided this assistance to over 2,060 victims of crime. Of those victims the coordinators provided 17,017 services to those victims.

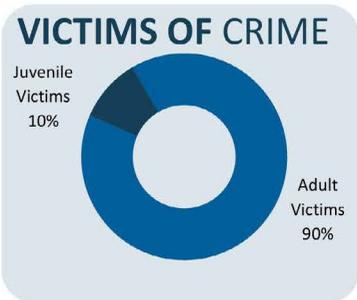
Our Victim/Witness Coordinators ensure that crime victims are informed of their rights as defined by Minnesota Statute 611A. Minnesota law gives victims several rights, including the right to be informed of criminal charges being filed, to attend court hearings, to be informed of plea offers, to provide victim impact statements at the time of sentencing, to obtain restitution for losses suffered as the result of a crime, and to be informed of post-conviction matters, including appeals and expungements. Victim/Witness Coordinators also work with community-based programs to help victims find resources and support groups in the community that can help the victim deal with the impact a crime in their life.

"Our goal is to make sure victims are informed, provided resources, and given the opportunity to have their voice heard."

Victim/Witness coordinators play a crucial role in preparing cases for trial. Coordinators work with victims and other witnesses to prepare them for the trial testimony. Testifying can be a nerve-wracking, painful, and anxiety-inducing event. The coordinators accompany victims to court and make sure victims and other witnesses know when and where their testimony is needed.

The coordinators also provide a crucial line of communication between the victims or witnesses and the prosecutor. One of the Victim/Witness Coordinators plays a similar role in the Juvenile Division, assisting victims of juvenile delinquency, traffic, and petty offenses.

In addition to their other duties, our coordinators act as a liaison to other criminal justice agencies, including the community corrections department and law enforcement.



In 2024, our Victim/Witness Coordinators provided assistance to over 2060 victims of crime.

EAST METRO HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE



Scott Haldeman

Assistant County Attorney

The East Metro Human Trafficking Task Force (EMHTTF) is a multijurisdictional unit that is combatting the commercial sex trade across Washington County. Scott Haldeman is the Assistant Washington County Attorney assigned to the taskforce. Amanda Moore is a criminal analyst dedicated to the EMHTTF, and Shawna Kish provides victim/witness support and coordinator services.

In addition to the three members of our office, the EMHTTF in 2024 consisted of Sgt. Paul Stenglein of the Washington County Sheriff's Office and Det. Brian Campbell of the Cottage Grove Police Department. In 2025, Sgt. Danelle Erickson of the Washington County Sheriff's Department took over Sgt. Stenglein's role, while Det. Jeff Rydeen of the Cottage Grove Police Department replaced Det. Campbell.

Members of the task force presented at several organizations and schools in 2024 to raise awareness, create connections, and highlight ways for Washington County residents to become involved. The task force continued their work to eliminate illicit massage parlors from Washington County. One case resolution resulted in the seizure of over \$100,000 in cash found during the execution of a search warrant that was connected to trafficking proceeds.

The task force continues to work closely with all jurisdictions in Washington County. The task force organizes multiple sting operations where officers pose as underage sex workers. These operations lead to numerous arrests and puts people on notice that Washington County does not tolerate underage solicitation. The task force also conducts several recovery operations, which are designed to provide human trafficking survivors resources and support, while holding accountable the individuals who force human trafficking survivors into the lifestyle.

Many of the juvenile victims of human trafficking have run away from home. These victims are among the most vulnerable to traffickers, who prey on their vulnerability. The task force emphasizes supporting these victims and holding accountable those who traffic them.



Washington County Tip Line

651-430-7825

National Human Trafficking

Resource Center Hotline

888-373-7888

"The East Metro Human Trafficking Task Force unites several jurisdictions across Washington County to combat the commercial sex trade and provide services and resources for victims."

DRUG TASK FORCE

The Washington County Drug Task Force (DTF) investigates and prosecutes cases involving the illegal sale, purchase, and possession of controlled substances. The DTF also investigates and prosecutes incidents involving overdose deaths related to the use of illegal controlled substances.

The Washington County Attorney's office continues to see the devastating impacts of fentanyl in our communities. When a member of our community suffers a fatal overdose, our office is committed to prosecuting individuals who supply the drugs that result in the fatal overdose.

In 2024, the DTF seized \$64,777 in cash and 36 firearms. Throughout the year, the DTF took 1.1 kilograms of fentanyl off the streets. The team confiscated 472 fentanyl pills and 1.1 kilograms of cocaine over the last year. Additionally, the team was able to intercept 162 pounds of methamphetamine from a large cartel trafficking organization.

The DTF is a partnership between the Washington County Sheriff's Office, Cottage Grove Police Department, Woodbury Public Safety Department, and the Forest Lake Police Department. The Washington County Attorney's Office assists the DTF by advising and prosecuting drug related cases. Additionally, our office litigates forfeiture proceedings based on property seized as a result of DTF investigations.

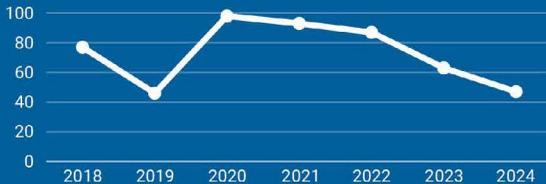


MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

The Washington County Attorney's Office provides a specific prosecutor to specialize in adult auto theft prosecution. By having a specialized prosecutor handling auto theft related crime, we streamline the charging process and identify trends and patterns in criminal activity, allowing us to take an aggressive and proactive approach to auto-theft prosecution. This approach enables the Washington County Attorney's Office to provide law enforcement training on auto theft investigations. The office also provides community outreach so members of the community can lower their risk of becoming the victim of these types of crimes.



Justin Richardson
Assistant County Attorney



MOTOR VEHICLE THEFTS CHARGED BY YEAR

VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION UNIT

This office is committed to protecting the public from the dangers of fraud and other exploitation crimes, which are frequently directed at vulnerable adults with devastating personal suffering and economic consequences.

The best protection is public awareness and prevention before a crime happens, and our attorneys continually conduct community outreach to alert and inform citizens about potential scams, swindles, and frauds. At these presentations, we educate the community about the different systems and resources to protect vulnerable adults and bring public awareness to the growing issue.

When necessary, our Civil Division attorneys intervene with court proceedings to establish protective guardianships and conservatorships over vulnerable adults. In addition, the Criminal Division of the office aggressively prosecutes offenders who financially or physically victimize the elderly and vulnerable.

In 2024, the Criminal Division charged eight cases involving felony financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult. These cases most often involve adult children who have taken on fiduciary responsibilities for their aging parents who misuse their parents' income and assets for their own personal gain.



Marc Berris
Assistant County Attorney



Keshini Ratnayake
Assistant County Attorney

VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION UNIT (CONTINUED)

In several cases, investigations revealed that the defendants had severe gambling addictions and were stealing money from their elderly parent to further the addiction. The theft is often discovered when there is suddenly no money left to pay for the vulnerable adult's long-term care. Most of those charged do not have prior criminal history, and the primary emphasis in plea negotiations is the payment of restitution so the vulnerable adult will regain the resources they need to ensure their future care.

EXPUNGEMENT INITIATIVE

Prosecutors are ministers of justice, and our office believes that we have a responsibility to help rehabilitated people who have paid their debt to society. Long after people have atoned for the harm they caused and fulfilled their obligations to the justice system, criminal records and the collateral consequences that follow serve as barriers to jobs, housing, education, and more, preventing people from serving as productive members of our community.



According to statutory criteria for certain low-level crimes, an individual has an opportunity to expunge a criminal conviction by petition to the court or agreement with the prosecutor. Our office provides a service to people, if they qualify, to seal their criminal record at no cost to them. This opportunity is an economic benefit to society and reflects an understanding that rehabilitation and atonement should be awarded. In addition to maintaining credibility with the court by reducing unnecessarily long judicial process that reach the same outcome, avoiding unnecessary petitions and hearings has allowed us to concentrate resources on petitions related to more serious crimes. Our office also handles the expungement cases that do not qualify under this statutory criteria. In 2024, we processed over 496 expungement requests.

APPELLATE PROCESS

A jury verdict rarely constitutes the final step of a criminal prosecution. In Minnesota, criminal defendants are entitled to appeal adverse rulings to the Minnesota Court of Appeals and, in some circumstances, to the Minnesota Supreme Court. The Washington County Attorney's Office continues its fight for justice by working to uphold convictions at the appellate courts. Our attorneys devote significant time and effort to reviewing trial court records, researching novel constitutional questions, writing appellate briefs, and arguing cases before panels of judges. In 2024, this Office received more than 20 appeals from criminal defendants challenging some aspect of their cases. Our attorneys successfully argued two first-degree murder cases at the Minnesota Supreme Court, as well as other high-profile cases on appeal including multiple criminal sexual conduct cases, firearms offenses, homicide, distribution of child pornography, and assaults against correctional officers at local prisons.



VETERANS PROGRAM

Over the last 12 years, the Washington County Veterans Program has worked with hundreds of veterans from all branches of the United States Armed Forces. Our highly successful program is a special partnership among the criminal justice system, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and local treatment providers. The veterans program promotes public safety while supporting veterans and their families through a coordinated effort among the veteran services delivery system, community-based services, and the court – thereby leaving no veteran behind.

This program recognizes the unique problems facing veterans and how problem-solving courts can help by recognizing the trauma related disabilities that military men and women returning from active deployment develop and identifying resources to assist the justice involved veterans. The program strives to identify veterans, offer them assistance, assess their needs, and help them solve their problems while taking responsibility for their offenses.

The Washington County program targets justice involved veterans currently facing prosecution in a Washington County criminal case. The overall goal is to divert the veteran out of the traditional criminal justice process and into appropriate rehabilitative alternatives. Once the veteran has been screened, assessed, and approved for participation in the program, he/she will promptly begin a treatment regimen specific to his/her needs.



Pictured Left to Right

Anne Cartman, Community Corrections Veterans Program Agent
Tom Frenette, Veterans Program Prosecutor
Kevin Magnuson, Washington County Attorney
Nicholas Velasco, Veterans Program Graduate
Bryant Peterson, Veterans Program Mentor Coordinator
Brent Wartner, Program Director (not pictured)

JUVENILE DIVISION



Tony Zdroik
Juvenile Division Chief

“Our work involves both protecting children and promoting the public safety through diligent prosecution.”

The Juvenile Division prosecutes all juvenile delinquency, petty, and traffic cases occurring in Washington County. We also represent Washington County Community Services in child protection matters that involve children who have been abused or neglected by a parent or legal custodian. Additionally, the County Attorney’s office devotes one prosecutor to handle all truancy matters. Through partnerships between schools, social workers, and this office, we provide services to families to address school attendance issues and avoid court intervention. The Juvenile Division has seven attorneys and four legal support professionals. Tony Zdroik, Juvenile Division Chief, leads the division.

DIVERSION

The number of cases referred to a diversion program increased noticeably in 2024. Each year, the office diverts around 40% of referrals with sufficient evidence for charging. A pre-charging diversion process is used to avoid the stigma associated with juvenile court. That process also allows the juvenile to be held accountable and receive services associated with the offense in a timely manner in the juvenile’s community. In 2024 the office referred 171 cases to the diversion program. That was the most cases sent since 2019 and was significantly more than the average over the last five years (138 cases).

CHILD PROTECTION

The number of child protection case referrals returned closer to normal levels after seeing a decrease in 2023. Juvenile division staff filed 45 child in need of protection or services (CHIPS) and 47 termination of parental rights or other permanency cases in 2024. In the previous five years, those numbers averaged 52 filings on CHIPS cases and 41 filings on permanency cases. The increase in the number of permanency cases is significant as those cases require substantial staff time and effort. In 2024, six permanency cases went to trial. Trials on those cases require significant effort for the attorney and support staff to coordinate with social workers in the organization and presentation of evidence.

In addition to testimony of social workers, those trials often require testimony of psychologists, therapists, chemical health providers, and mental health providers. The cases are document heavy and involve over one year’s worth of notes from the social workers which can amount to thousands of pages. Once the trial is completed, lengthy proposed findings are submitted to the trial judge for consideration. After the district court decision is made, there are often post-trial motions and usually appeal. The six trials in 2024, which was the most trials in one year since 2021, amounted to a significant number of hours for juvenile division attorneys and support staff.

One of the many positive aspects of child protection work is assisting Washington County Community Services with the filing and finalization of an adoption. In 2024, Juvenile Division staff continued its work with Community Services on adoption cases. Since a change in the law in 2013, Community Services and the County Attorney’s office have finalized the adoptions of 116 Washington County children who were previously placed in foster care through the child protection process. These adoptions permanently placed those children in supportive, stable homes and opened the door to a positive future.

JUVENILE PROSECUTION

Juvenile prosecution in the Washington County Attorney's Office is focused on promoting public safety through means that are fair and just but also recognize the unique needs of children. We recognize that youth make bad decisions and need to be held accountable to learn from those decisions. At the same time, we try to limit the long term impacts those bad decisions can have on a child. We also recognize that public safety is always a priority and will respond appropriately for youth who threaten the overall public safety of our communities.

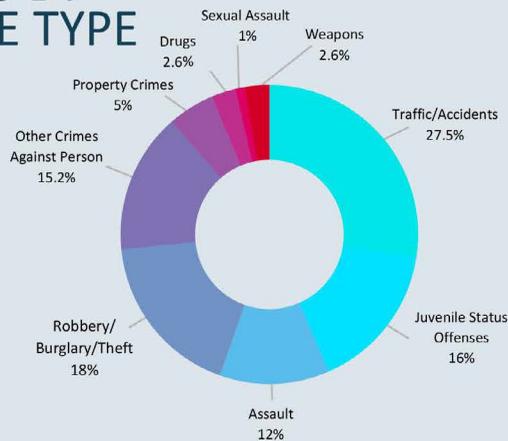
Over the years, motor vehicle thefts have been one area where the actions of juveniles presented a significant threat to public safety. Juveniles found in stolen motor vehicles often engaged in dangerous driving activity, were often in possession of firearms, and often had a prior history of similar offenses. Fortunately, there seems to be downward trend in the number of juveniles charged in Washington County with motor vehicle theft related offenses. The number of juveniles charged declined significantly in 2024 compared to the preceding years. The Juvenile Division charged only 7 offenses involving the theft of a motor vehicle. The seven cases were down significantly from 2023 when 20 cases were charged and was also lower than the five-year average of 22 cases. The Juvenile Division has not yet charged an offense under the carjacking statute (Minn. Stat. 609.247) which became law in 2023.

Despite those lower numbers, there were noticeable upward trending numbers in other categories of juvenile prosecution cases. The total number of referrals (790 cases) was up significantly when compared to 2023 (694 cases) and the five-year average (654 cases). Non-felony cases that were referred to court, often charged by citation, were up 23% from 2023. The number of traffic citations prosecuted also increased in 2024 compared to prior years. In 2024, the Juvenile Division prosecuted 197 traffic offenses. That number represented a 25% increase in traffic offenses over the yearly average since 2018 (158). Though traffic offenses may be less of a concern to public safety than more significant criminal offenses, this increase is concerning. These traffic matters involve inexperienced drivers whose conduct may endanger other citizens. The cases are often resolved by requiring the juvenile to participate in a safe driving class to address the reasons for the issuance of the citation.

TRAINING

Due to the special issues involved in both juvenile prosecution and child protection, there are many opportunities to provide training to other partners in the juvenile justice system. The attorneys in the Juvenile Division bring a significant amount of experience and are regularly called upon both in Washington County and throughout the state to train others. In 2024, we provided training to over 330 individuals from several different disciplines including social workers, law enforcement officers, judges, legislators, and other prosecutors.

JUVENILE CASES BY CRIME TYPE



STAFF DIRECTORY



Rick Allen
Assistant County Attorney
Juvenile Division



Natalie Anderson
Legal Assistant
Criminal Division



Jenn Baltain
Legal Services Manager



Marc Berris
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Kris Braml
Legal Assistant, Senior
Juvenile Division



Pamela Brandt
Legal Assistant, Senior
Criminal Division



Stuart Campbell
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division



Rik Chittajallu
Legal Assistant
Criminal Division



Patrick Collins
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Jessie Dando
Victim/Witness Coordinator



Byrdie Dicklich
Office Specialist



Kelley Doolan
Victim/Witness Coordinator



Bailee Earl
Legal Assistant
Criminal Division



Karen Fontaine
Office Supervisor
Civil and Juvenile Divisions



Rosam Forbie
Legal Assistant
Criminal Division



Tom Frenette
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Erin Gustafson
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Scott Haldeman
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Tammy Harrison-Hiben
Legal Assistant, Senior
Civil Division



Emma Hause
Victim/Witness Coordinator



Jeniffer Hawthorne
Office Supervisor



Pam Hughes
Paralegal
Civil Division



Nick Hydukovich
Criminal Division Head



Andrew Jackola
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division



Erin Johnson
Assistant County Attorney
Juvenile Division



Amanda Moore
Criminal Analyst



Shawna Kish
Victim/Witness Coordinator



Wade Kish
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Beth Kraske
Office Specialist



Vicky Krawczeski
Paralegal
Civil Division



Jamie Kreuser
Assistant County Attorney
Juvenile Division



Joe Kvam
Office Supervisor
Administration



Theresa Leverty
Paralegal
Juvenile Division



Karl Lindstrom
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division



Kevin Magnuson
Washington County Attorney



Abigail Maruish
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division



Scott May
Assistant County Attorney
Juvenile Division



Jessica Oertel
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division



Caitlin Ohrogge
Paralegal
Civil Division



Jeri Peck
Legal Assistant
Criminal Division



Laura Perkins
Public Information Officer



Richard Podvin
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Hannah Prokopowicz
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Keshini Ratnayake
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Justin Richardson
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



John Ristad
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division



Kattie Robinson
Executive Assistant



Arne Senko
Legal Assistant
Juvenile Division



Erin Stephens
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Betsy Urbas
Assistant County Attorney
Juvenile Division



Christine VonDeLinde
Victim Witness Coordinator



Brent Wartner
First Assistant County Attorney



Thomas Wedes
Assistant Criminal Division Head



Kayla Wengronowitz
Assistant County Attorney
Criminal Division



Jaelyn Young
Legal Assistant
Criminal Division



Tony Zdroik
Juvenile Division Head



James Zuleger
Assistant County Attorney
Civil Division

TRUANCY



Betsey Urbas
Assistant County Attorney

In 2024, the Washington County Truancy Intervention Program continued to support students aged 12-17 years old and their families via both in-person connections and virtual forums to assist in fulfilling their responsibilities and removing barriers to consistent school attendance.

A total of 507 students were referred to our initial stage of outreach, the Attendance Intervention Meeting, where Assistant County Attorney Betsey Urbas provided students and their families with useful information and guidance regarding the tremendous significance of high school graduation, the critical impacts of unaddressed truancy, and the vast range of supports and solutions to address inconsistent attendance.

Continued attendance concerns were addressed through facilitating one-on-one school diversion meetings with 164 students, their parents/guardians, and school staff to formulate individualized attendance support plans. Ultimately 23 students were petitioned to court for higher levels of intervention and support. This steady, unwavering stream of support continued to prove effective in fostering academic success and quality of life for Washington County students by helping identify, alleviate, and eliminate impediments to school attendance, engagement, and progress. In the month of September, the truancy team, including the Children's Services Prevention Unit, met with school administrators throughout Washington County to review program updates and guidelines, discuss and problem-solve unique situations to ensure the utmost support for students, and strengthen the collaborative relationships that are imperative to the ongoing success of the program.

In one Lunch and Learn event at the Washington County Service Center in Cottage Grove, Sheletta Brundidge, Emmy-winning comedian, passionate advocate for inclusive education, and mother of three children with autism in South Washington County Schools, led a panel with best-selling author Lambers Fisher and Executive Director of Minnesota Association Children's Mental Health Brandon Jones, on how racial and cultural awareness impacts student's well-being, relationships, and school climate.

Betsey continued the office's annual in-person training for School Administrators and School Resource Officers before the beginning of September.

"The Washington County School Attendance Intervention Program brings together children, parents, school staff, and County representatives as collaborative partners to foster consistent school attendance by identifying the causes of truancy, implementing effective interventions, and providing comprehensive support in order to give all children the educational opportunities they deserve."

2024 PLEDGE TO GRADUATE

For the 2023-24 school year, the office sponsored an online drawing with the purpose of recognizing student excellence and encouraging high school graduation. Washington County students from any grade were given the opportunity to enter their names for a chance to win an iPad or tablet. This is the 12th year that the County Attorney's Office has sponsored this event.



COTTAGE GROVE MIDDLE SCHOOL



ISD 622 ONLINE SCHOOL



CIVIL DIVISION



John Ristad
Civil Division Head

"Civil Division attorneys address the legal needs of all county departments and officials, from reviewing contracts to protecting vulnerable individuals."

The Civil Division acts as Washington County's civil lawyer both inside and outside of the courtroom. The division consists of seven experienced legal support professionals and nine attorneys whose mission is to provide timely, superior legal services. Our work is very diverse and touches the breadth of all legal issues Washington County faces. The Civil Division does it all – protecting the rights of the vulnerable, supporting citizens' due process rights, and facilitating civil infrastructure and environmental projects. The division is led by John Ristad, Civil Division Head.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE PUBLIC

The Washington County Attorney's Office remains steadfast in its efforts to protect its citizens who are unable to adequately care for themselves. The Civil Division is responsible for pursuing civil commitment and treatment petitions for individuals referred to the county who pose risk of harm due to mental illness, who are dangerous to the public due to mental illness, who are chemically dependent, who have a developmental disability, who are sexually dangerous persons, or who have sexually psychopathic personalities. In 2024, the Washington County Attorney's Office received 172 commitment referrals.

GUARDIANSHIPS/CONSERVATORSHIPS

In 2024, Civil Division attorneys continued to collaborate with the Washington County Social Service Adult Protection Division to assist community members by establishing guardianships and conservatorships that provide necessary care and supervision for vulnerable adults who lack capacity for self-sufficient care. A 2024 example involves an incapacitated adult in need of 24-hour medical and professional care who was facing eviction from a group home due to financial exploitation by a family member. We quickly obtained a court order granting an Emergency Guardian and Conservator, which allowed the vulnerable adult to stay in the group home where the necessary medical care and supervision were provided.

MEDICAL ASSISTANT REIMBURSEMENT & ESTATE RECOVERY

Counties are required to recover costs that the Medical Assistance program pays for its members under certain circumstances. Medical Assistance is Minnesota's Medicaid program for people with low incomes. In 2024, the Civil Division, in collaboration with Washington County Community Services, recouped more than \$1,300,000 in reimbursement for Medical Assistance expenditures.

PROPERTY TAX APPEALS

The Civil Division represents Washington County in property tax appeals brought by Washington County property owners. In these cases, our attorneys and staff work in close collaboration with the County Assessor's Office to ensure that property tax assessments accurately reflect a property's fair market value. In 2024, approximately 245 tax petitions were filed.

CIVIL DIVISION (CONTINUED)



ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS

In conjunction with Washington County Community Services Adult and Child Protection Units, the Civil Division defends vulnerable adult and child maltreatment findings as well as licensing sanctions imposed by Washington County Community Services and the Minnesota Department of Child, Youth, and Families. Those findings are aimed to insure those who provide care for the most vulnerable in our community are acting to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our vulnerable citizens.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Civil Division staff advise and represent the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy (R&E) Board, which is a joint powers board that owns and operates the waste processing facility in the city of Newport. That facility is responsible for processing all garbage and recyclables in the two counties. Processing at this facility results in reduced landfilled waste while converting a portion of the processed garbage into energy. Civil Division staff reviews all R&E contracts and grants which in 2024 amounted to approximately 250 document reviews.

The Civil Division also represent the Washington Conservation District, which does a wide variety of environmental work to preserve and enhance the County's natural resources.

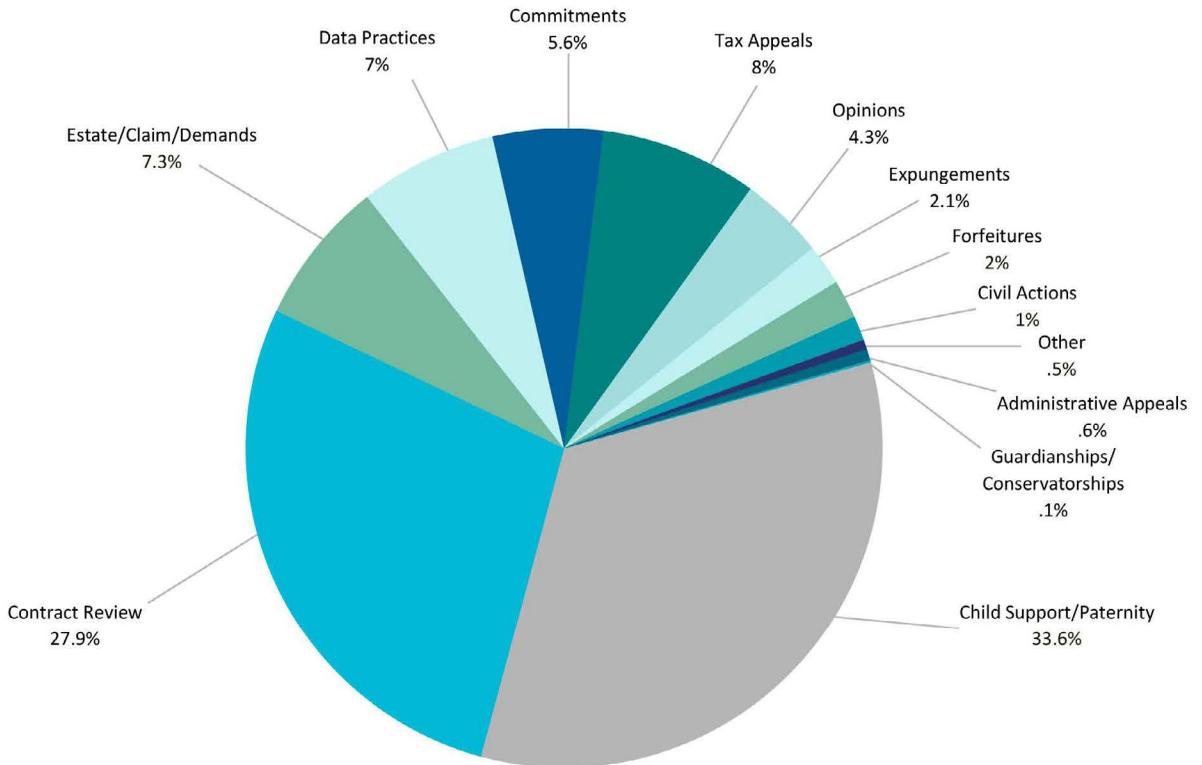
ADVISORY ATTORNEY ROLE

In its role as the county's attorney, Civil Division attorneys provide legal advice to county leadership and to all county departments. Much of that work pertains to contracts, grants, and other agreements, including review of all draft contracts to ensure compliance with legal and policy requirements. Other examples of our advisory role is providing legal advice and training to county departments and staff, and assisting with drafting ordinances and internal county policies. In 2024, our attorneys assisted in a much need redraft and update of the Washington County Parks Ordinance, as well as helped with updates to numerous internal county policies. We partner with subject matter experts in all departments to both prevent and to solve problems. As part of this effort, Civil Division attorneys provided over 600 hours of training in 2024.

IMPROVING THE COMMUNITY

In 2024, the Civil Division advised and assisted the Public Works Department on several community improvement projects. Attorneys in the Civil Division worked closely with Public Works staff to create and renovate county facilities, including the construction of the Central Service and License Center, the Central Park Renovation Project currently underway, and the Park Grove Library Remodel Project currently in the design stage. Our attorneys have also been busy advising the Washington County Parks Division on making improvements to parks throughout Washington County. During 2024, our attorneys helped facilitate playground equipment replacements that will be installed in 2025 at the St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park and the Lake Elmo Park Reserve. Our office was also able to assist in donating the outdated equipment to Kids Around the World, a non-profit and trust that transforms used playground equipment and places it in impoverished communities worldwide.

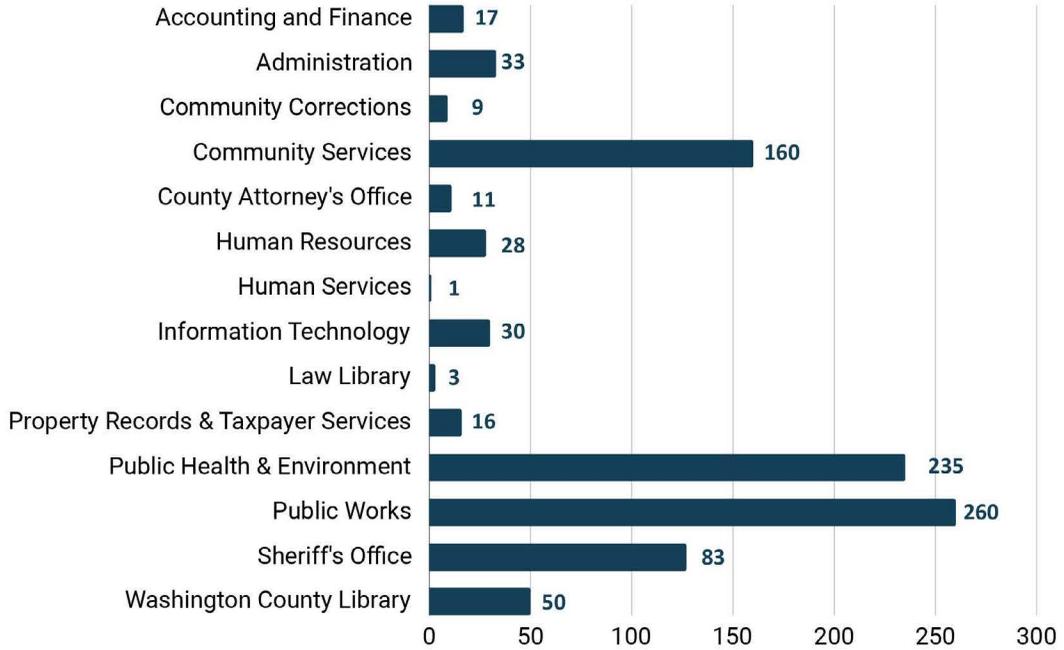
CIVIL DIVISION BY THE NUMBERS 2024



WORKLOAD DISTRIBUTION BY FILE ASSIGNMENTS

Child Support/Paternity	1,031	Legal Opinions	132
Contract Review	856	Forfeitures	60
Estate/Claim/Demands	225	Civil Actions	38
Tax Appeals	245	Other	15
Commitments	172	Administrative Appeals	18
Data Practices	215	Guardianship/Conservatorship	3
Prosecutor Initiated Expungements	63		

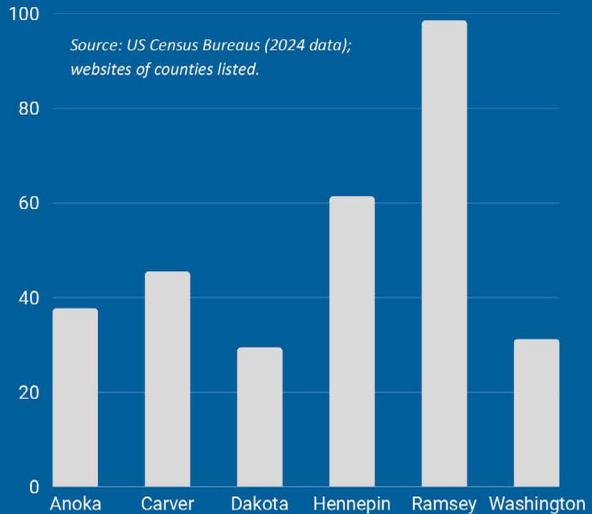
CONTRACT REVIEWS & LEGAL OPINIONS



SOUND FISCAL MANAGEMENT FOR LEGAL SERVICES IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

Cost Per Capita

Anoka County	\$37.74
Carver County	\$45.50
Dakota County	\$29.47
Hennepin County	\$61.38
Ramsey County	\$98.57
Washington County	\$31.27



ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

DIVISION OVERVIEW

The administrative division is responsible for planning and executing a comprehensive range of administrative services that support the mission of the Washington County Attorney and the work of all divisions within the office. Under the direction of the County Attorney, it develops and implements operating policies and procedures to protect public safety while being fiscally prudent. Thanks to the County Attorney's fiscal restraint, the operating cost of the office is well below other metropolitan area offices.

The division is overseen by the First Assistant, Brent Wartner, who is the principal advisor to the County Attorney on administrative matters. The administrative division provides guidance on the management and use of the office's financial, human and physical resources, systems and information management; automated litigation support; case management; records management; and media relations. The administrative staff must work closely with all divisions to ensure compliance with and implementation of all policies, standards and mandates of the office.



Brent Wartner
First Assistant
County Attorney

SYSTEMS, INFORMATION AND OFFICE MANAGEMENT

Legal Services Manager Jennifer Baltaian is responsible for the effective management of our \$8.9 million dollar annual budget, support services matters, and technological resources and initiatives. During the past decade, progress in automation has tremendously increased the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the office. For example, the implementation of our case management system, Law Enforcement Network System (LENS), permits the sharing of information with other law enforcement agencies, such as the Sheriff's Office, District Court, local police departments, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and outside governmental agencies, greatly increasing the overall efficiency of the office. Jennifer Baltaian, with the assistance of 3 supervisors (Jennifer Hawthorne, Karen Fontaine, and Joe Kvam), is responsible for management of office legal support services staff consisting of 13 legal assistants, 4 paralegals and 2 office specialist positions.



Jenn Baltaian
Legal Services Manager

Office Supervisor Karen Fontaine is responsible for the day-to-day workflow of the juvenile and civil divisions and supervises support staff responsible for data practices customer service. She also coordinates office operations and processes to ensure that policies and procedures are followed and updated as needed. Karen manages special projects such as accounts payable. Karen also coordinates physical and digital evidence within the juvenile division to include coordinating with other agencies on the use and efficiency of programs related to that process, appellate services for state and federal court, and administrative duties of the Office's expungement program.



Karen Fontaine
Office Supervisor

SYSTEMS, INFORMATION AND OFFICE MANAGEMENT (CONTINUED)

Office Supervisor Jeniffer Hawthorne is responsible for the day-to-day workflow of the criminal division support staff. Jeniffer manages special projects such as accounts receivable. She also manages the coordination and storage of physical and digital evidence within the criminal division to include coordinating with other agencies on the use and efficiency of programs related to that process.

Office Supervisor Joe Kvam is responsible for the day-to day workflow of the administrative division and supervises the front desk staffing, operation and customer service. He also coordinates office operations and process, to ensure that policies and procedures are followed and updated as needed.



PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MEDIA

Our Law Enforcement Public Information Manager leads public information efforts for the County Attorney, the County Sheriff, and their staffs. This position serves as the liaison between the County and the media, other governmental agencies, and the public. It facilitates the office responses to a variety of requests, including press releases, media requests for statements and interviews, and community events. While information regarding pending cases must be safeguarded to ensure effective prosecution, this need must be balanced with the public's right to know.



EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE COUNTY ATTORNEY

Executive Assistant Katie Robinson works closely with the County Attorney and First Assistant in planning, developing, and implementing all aspects of the office. Katie participates in the operation, organization, and planning of the County Attorney's office for matters that affect the office, its duties, operations and responsibilities. She coordinates the office responses to a multitude of requests, community events, website content, published materials, and ensures the County Attorney is prepared for all daily scheduled appointments which include, interactions with Law Enforcement, County and State Court Appointments, Legislative Testimonies, and Media Inquiries.



CUSTOMER SERVICE

In 2024, the office of the County Attorney's main telephone line field and processed over 2,600 phone calls and citizen requests. The processing and fielding each of these calls can range from case status inquiries to attorney and victim advocate questions, directions or other general inquiries. In addition, the office approved and processed 423 administrative subpoenas for business records related to criminal justice investigations.



STAFF ENGAGEMENT

The Social Activities Committee (SAC) helps plan, organize, and execute office-wide social functions on various holidays. In 2024, the SAC has helped organize events for Halloween, Festivus, the Chinese New Year, and various other staff social events. The all-volunteer cast includes John Ristad, Scott Haldeman, Keshini Ratnayake, Jeri Peck, Jenny Hawthorne, Pamela Brandt, Beth Kraske, Erin Johnson, and Tricia Loehr.



STAFF SERVICE AWARDS | MILESTONES IN 2024



Amanda Moore
Criminal Analyst
5 Years of Service



Kevin Magnuson
County Attorney
5 Years of Service



Pamela Brandt
Senior Legal Assistant
5 Years of Service

STAFF RECOGNITION



Staff celebrated Administrative Professionals Day as a thank you for all the work they do to contribute to our office and the community.



The "Heavy Hitter" Award is a travelling trophy awarded to the prosecutor who has successfully tried a jury trial. That prosecutor keeps the bat symbolizing the award until another prosecutor has similar success in a jury trial. Our prosecutors obtained convictions after trial in twelve felony cases in 2024. The charges ranged from murder to criminal sexual conduct to tax fraud.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



NIGHT TO UNITE



WASHINGTON COUNTY FAIR





LAW ENFORCEMENT CEREMONY



COMMUNITY THREAD PRESENTATION



YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU GALA



DEI BOOKCLUB

TRAINING

Training sessions have been presented to other county staff, attorneys, legal assistants, paralegals, social workers, judges, law clerks, child support officers, prison staff, law enforcement, and others.





MISSION

We promote justice and public safety through vigorously prosecuting crime, protecting those in need, and providing quality legal representation for Washington County.

Washington County: a great place to live, work and play... today and tomorrow.



This publication is made possible through the efforts of the Washington County Attorney's Office in association with local law enforcement agencies. Funds are utilized to convert property that aided in or was used in the commission of criminal offenses to a public benefit. No taxpayer dollars have been expended in the printing of this publication.