



J. HANLEY

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

PRESS RELEASE
September 22, 2025
State's Attorney J. Hanley

Winnebago County State's Attorney J. Hanley announces that the Honorable Judge Jennifer Clifford sentenced **Stillman J. Cunningham (DOB: 8/14/1996)** to 25 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections for Attempted First Degree Murder and 14 years for Witness Harassment. Further, after considering the nature and circumstances of the offenses and the history and character of the defendant, Judge Clifford found that consecutive sentences were necessary to protect the public from the defendant. The defendant must serve each sentence, one after the other, prior to his release from prison. Upon his release, Cunningham will then be on mandatory supervised release for three years. The defendant pled guilty to Attempted First Degree Murder in January of 2025. Later, pending his sentencing hearing for that offense, he was charged with Witness Harassment and pled guilty to that as well in June of 2025.

The defendant and his victim first began dating in Rockford in 2016 and she became pregnant early in their relationship. In 2016 and 2017, she made reports of domestic violence involving the defendant. Though some of those complaints were charged, none resulted in a conviction. They moved out-of-state, first to Arizona and then to Nevada, where they had a second child and her attempts at separation were unsuccessful. The abuse escalated in 2020 and 2021, and the defendant continued to evade full responsibility. In multiple instances, the defendant told his children he would kill their mother. On one occasion, he strangled the victim to unconsciousness in the presence of their crying children and told them they would no longer have a mom. She reported that incident to police, but felony charges were declined in Arizona at that time.

In the fall of 2022, the victim returned to Rockford with their children in a renewed attempt to escape the defendant. He reacted by bombarding her with constant phone calls and messages. He contacted her day and night and made explicit death threats to her and her family. He told her he was coming back to kill them all. The victim received an order of protection and reported the threats to the Rockford Police.



J. HANLEY

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

On January 2nd, 2023, the Rockford Police arrested the defendant outside the victim's grandmother's house. On January 25th, 2023, the defendant pled guilty to the felony offense of Stalking. He was placed on probation and released from custody with the condition he have no contact with his victim, their children, or her family.

Five days later, on January 30th, 2023, Rockford Police responded the victim's residence on 22nd Avenue near Kishwaukee Street. Neighbors and onlookers intervened after witnessing the defendant stabbing the victim repeatedly in the snow in front of her residence. She was screaming and bleeding heavily. When bystanders rushed to her aid, the defendant retreated inside the home, then fled the scene on foot. They drove her immediately to the emergency room at UW Health, Swedish American Hospital. It was determined at the hospital she had suffered 16 separate plunging stab wounds which resulted in various critical injuries about her body and her condition was considered life-threatening.

The victim's treatment at the hospital was exceptionally painful. Due to the amount and extent of her injuries, many of the sutures she received were sewn without any anesthesia or numbing agent. The victim bravely withstood the pain and survived the attack. She told investigators at the hospital that the defendant attacked her after he overheard her tell a friend she was single. She locked herself in a bedroom, then jumped out her window when he began to break in with a knife. The defendant found her outside in the snow, then began to stab her. The victim's children were safely in the company of her family, away from their home, when the defendant attempted to take the victim's life.

Meanwhile, responding officers with the Rockford Police conducted a K-9 track and quickly located the defendant on a snow embankment by a secluded portion of nearby railroad tracks. When officers took the defendant into custody, they located the knife he used to stab the victim. In his interview with detectives, the defendant said he thought he killed her and was planning to kill himself too.

Following the defendant's arrest, the defendant was again ordered to have no contact with his victim. Despite that order, investigators with the State's Attorney's Office uncovered hundreds of communications he made from the Winnebago County Jail to his victim. In those communications, he preyed on her sympathies and otherwise attempted to deter her from participating in the case against him. She repeatedly told the defendant she would not lie about what he did to her.



J. HANLEY

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

Ultimately, on January 2nd, 2025, the defendant pled guilty to Attempted First Degree Murder and that case was scheduled for a sentencing hearing at which the victim was expected to give an impact statement. In May of 2025, prior to sentencing, Rockford Police detectives learned from investigators at the State's Attorney's Office that the defendant had continued calling the victim following his plea, though she stopped answering his calls. Detectives further uncovered that, when she stopped speaking to him, the defendant paid another inmate to send her a message. In that message, sent on Mother's Day, the defendant unleashed a highly derogatory tirade against the victim in which he threatened to spit on her face in the courtroom. He wrote that he hated her, he wished she had died and that she deserved to die. Detectives confirmed with the victim that she had received the message. She told them then that he would do anything to get to her. The defendant was then charged with Witness Harassment, and pled guilty to that offense in June of 2025.

At the sentencing hearing on both cases, the Court received evidence of the defendant's long history of domestic violence against the victim, his longstanding homicidal and suicidal ideations, his conduct from the jail, as well as the additional threats pending sentencing. The Court also heard the words of the victim, who bravely appeared to speak about the impact of the defendant's actions on her life. Despite the years of abuse, violent outbursts, and threats, the victim stepped into the well of the courtroom and stood before the defendant for the first time since he attempted to take her life in 2023. She declined security or accompaniment, looked at him directly, and courageously gave her statement. Her bravery and grace was additional evidence that, not only was the defendant's conduct toward her heinous and awful, it was also- ultimately- a failure. He failed to take her life, and he failed to take her voice. Following the sentencing she said, "I hope that by sharing my story, other women can feel empowered to take their power back, no matter how long it takes. I am not a victim, I am a survivor. I have endured challenges, learned from them and come out stronger. This was not the end, and it did not break me."

Attempted First Degree Murder is a Class X Felony that is punishable by a sentence of 6-30 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections followed by three years of Mandatory Supervised Release. The sentence must be served at 85%.



J. HANLEY

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

Witness Harassment is a Class 2 Felony and in this case is punishable by an extended sentence of 3-14 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections followed by a year of mandatory supervised release. This sentence must be served at 50%

The Rockford Police Department conducted the investigation in this case. Assistant State's Attorneys Alex Ronning, Hannah Shelley and Calvin Wiegand handled the prosecution.

CONTACT PERSON:

J. Hanley, Winnebago County State's Attorney
815-319-4700