



2024

**YEAR IN
REVIEW**

J. Hanley
**WINNEBAGO COUNTY
STATE'S ATTORNEY**



2024 was another great year, particular in the recruitment and retention of prosecuting attorneys. This has been the single biggest challenge the Office has faced in the past four years, and I am confident that we are on way to being fully staffed. In November of 2024 we welcomed five new Assistant State's Attorneys! This is a direct result of our focus on recruitment and specifically, our intern program. Last Summer, we welcomed over 30 interns, 20 of which were law students. I would like to thank our staff who made that possible and in particular, Suzanne Willett, our Recruitment Coordinator.

As always, I remain committed to aggressively prosecuting violent offenders and effectively moving defendants through the criminal justice system. While we know we still have work to do, our year in review shows we are moving in the right direction. Thank you to our criminal justice partners, the County Board, and to all who have supported me and the efforts of the Office. I am honored to have another term as State's Attorney and to serve the people of Winnebago County. I am grateful for a community that puts their trust in me.

About the Office:

The Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office employs 95 people. Our employees include 42 full time and 5 part time Assistant State's Attorneys, 11 victim service providers, five investigators and two enhanced criminal liaisons. The office handled 3,237 criminal felonies, 2,540 misdemeanors, 17,232 traffic and 819 DUI cases last year. All numbers saw an increase from 2023.

Mission: To Do Justice

Vision: To Be Trusted

Shared Values: Trust & Gratitude

Locations:

Winnebago County Courthouse- 400 W. State Street Rockford, IL 61102

Juvenile Justice Center- 211 S. Court Street Rockford, IL 61102

Winnebago County Criminal Justice Center- 650 W. State Street Rockford, IL 61102

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Website: www.winnebago-county-states-attorney.com

Community Recognition



Chief of Civil Lafakeria Vaughn was honored as one of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce's 2024 People You Should Know. People You Should Know are those in our community who are admired for their work, drive, dedication, and commitment to what they believe in. Lafa has been the Chief of Civil Bureau for the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office since 2021. She is most deserving of this recognition for her contributions, not just to our office, but to our community. She works tirelessly for the County and all of the citizens.

Assistant State's Attorney Kirstin Krivanec and First Assistant State's Attorney Ken LaRue (not pictured) were recognized by the Illinois Association of Arson Investigators for their work and successful prosecution of the 2016 murder case against defendant Eric Jackson. Jackson murdered Keandra Austin, her unborn child and her three children then lit their house on fire. The Distinguished Team Award recognizes arson investigators, police detectives and prosecutors for their efforts annually.



Assistant State's Attorney Joseph Lesner was recognized by the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) organization for his efforts to keep impaired drivers off Illinois streets. ASA Lesner received MADD's Hero Award which honors prosecutors, judges and law enforcement officers who have shown exceptional commitment to protecting communities from impaired drivers. According to the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration, about 37 people in the United States die in drunk driving crashes every day. ASA Lesner is the supervisor and prosecuting attorney in our DUI Unit. The office is proud to see ASA Lesner recognized for working tenaciously to seek justice for victims of reckless and impaired driving.



Murder Cases

Our office achieved a 71% conviction rate in murder trials. Our overall murder trial conviction rate (bench and jury) for 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 is 77%.

Case of Note: 80 years in Department of Corrections for Preston Scott. Scott was convicted of killing a confidential informant for the Rockford Police Department.

Case of Note: 55 years in Department of Corrections for William Jones. Jones plead guilty to the murder of Peggy Anderson outside of Pinnon's Meats in January of 2023.

Case of Note: 65 years in Department of Corrections for Nakeithian Johnson. Johnson murdered Tammy Gonzalez during an attempted home invasion in October of 2020.

Firearm Cases

Our office remains committed to the prosecution of our community's most violent offenders. In unlawful possession of a firearm by a repeat felony offender cases, the office achieved an over 90% success rate with an average sentence of 6.8 years in prison.

Case of Note: Derrian Gamill was sentenced to 15 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections for Aggravated Battery with a Firearm. Gamill shot another man at the Rockford Ridge Apartment Complex.

Case of Note: George White was sentenced to 30 years for Possession with Intent to Deliver Cocaine and 14 years for Unlawful Possession of a Weapon by a Felon.

Child Advocacy

The office works with the Carrie Lynn Children's Advocacy Center to prosecute cases involving the physical and sexual abuse of children. In 2024, our office received roughly 200 referrals for cases involving suspected physical or sexual abuse involving children. Of those cases, 70 resulted in criminal charges. Over the last year, 33 cases were resolved by either a conviction or guilty plea in court. We remain committed to holding offenders accountable and protecting our community's youngest victims.

Case of Note: Joseph Ciancio-Fuchs was convicted and sentenced to Natural Life in prison for Predatory Criminal Sexual Assault. During this investigation, Detectives learned that the defendant had inappropriate contact with two victims at various residences between 2020 and 2022. One of the victims was only four years old at the time of some of the assaults.

Case of Note: Timothy A. Gulley, Jr. was sentenced to 11 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections for Predatory Criminal Sexual Assault of a Child.

Juvenile Unit

Our Juvenile Unit consists of five Assistant State's Attorneys, two administrative assistants, and one victim service provider. The unit handled 443 abuse & neglect petitions and 359 delinquency petitions in 2024.

43 cases referred to the Youth Services Network deferred prosecution program with a 76% successful completion rate.

Discretionary Transfers:

(from juvenile to adult court)

2

Abuse & Neglect

6% decrease in JA Petitions filed

Delinquency Court:

23% decrease in Diversion Files Reviewed

19% decrease in Delinquency Petitions Filed

Domestic Violence

In 2024, the office was able to expand the Domestic Violence Unit. The Unit now consists of six attorneys, two victim services providers, three administrative assistants, two enhanced criminal response liaisons, and two investigators. In 2023, the Unit began practicing an intentional, evidence-based prosecution strategy which in 2024, resulted in a 79% success rate in felony domestic violence cases.

Trial Success Rate:
100%

Overall Success Rate:
79%

Stalking Convictions
20

Case of Note: On February 6, 2023, not long after midnight, Winnebago County Dispatch placed a call back to an unknown number that had attempted to call for emergency assistance. They reached an adult female in distress, who said she called 911 earlier, but no longer wished to report anything because she was afraid her attacker would kill her if she talked to police. The woman refused to identify herself or the suspect and indicated she was driving back home out-of-state. She was persuaded to return to the Machesney Park Police Substation, where she met deputies. She had severe bruising and swelling to her head and face, and bruising all across her body. It was later learned she suffered a nasal fracture, and had internal swelling to tissue around her carotid artery. The woman disclosed she was strangled and beaten by her boyfriend. Her boyfriend, Stephen Pettaway, was staying there for work and she had come to visit him. Pettaway was located and arrested.

At trial, the victim did not appear to testify. However, prosecutors brought motions to introduce her account of abuse in her absence, successfully arguing that the defendant had forfeited his right to confront her as a witness due to his wrongdoing from the jail. The jury received evidence of the victim's account of the violence committed against her as well as evidence of the defendant's continuous contact with her from the jail. Pettaway was convicted on two counts of Aggravated Domestic Battery after a jury trial.

Deferred Prosecution-DIVERT

DIVERT is designed for offenders to keep a conviction from being permanently entered on their record. In exchange for voluntarily completing requirements which may include community service, counseling, attaining education or employment goals, charges are dismissed. Since 2015, our office has enrolled 1,085 total participants with a successful completion rate of 93%. In March '22, we obtained grant funding allowing us to increase participation by eliminating the entrance fee and in turn lowering the barrier for entry. This contributed to an average enrollment increase of 73% while maintaining successful completion goals.



Mental Health Initiatives

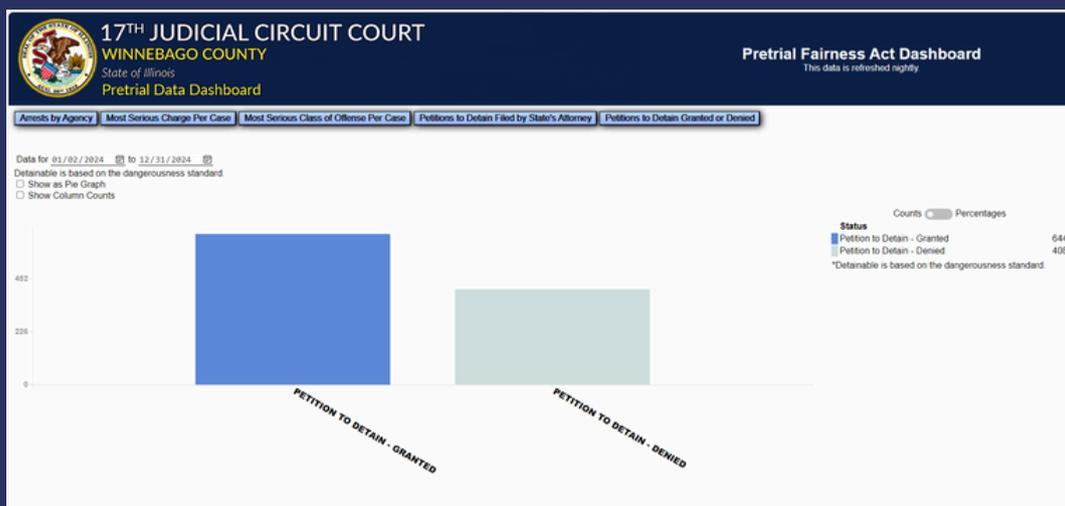
Our office has a dedicated, specially trained Assistant State's Attorney who serves as the prosecutor in all the matters in Drug Court, Therapeutic Intervention Program (TIP) Court (Mental Health Court), Veterans' Treatment Court, Youth Recovery Court and in one of the 17th Judicial Circuit's newest programs, the Wellness Track. Each program has a specific goal of providing those charged with criminal offenses in Winnebago County an opportunity to address substance abuse/mental health/behavioral health needs through appropriate treatment programs within the community. The ultimate goal is to have a positive outcome for the individual by meeting and addressing their needs as well as promote community safety by decreasing recidivism.

In 2024, the State's Attorney's Office had grant-funding from the Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board renewed to keep the specially trained prosecutor active in the behavioral health/treatment court programs. This grant is funded by the ½ cent sales tax implemented in Winnebago County.

- In Drug Court, there are currently 81 participants enrolled. There was a total of 15 successful graduates of the program in 2024.
- In TIP Court, there are currently 76 participants enrolled. There was a total of 12 successful graduates from this program in 2024.
- In Veterans' Treatment Court, there were 4 participants enrolled with one graduate.
- In the Wellness Track, approximately 75 people entered the program, with 38 participants successfully completing the requirements, resulting in their misdemeanor charges being dismissed.

Pretrial Fairness Dashboard

In September 2023, as part of the Pretrial Fairness Act, Illinois no longer has the cash bail system. Our office has filed over 1,000 petitions to detain individuals arrested for eligible offenses. In 2024, the SAO sought detention in approximately 47% of the cases eligible for detention under the dangerousness standard with a judge granting those requests approximately 62% of the time. The 17th Judicial Circuit Court has established Pretrial Data Dashboards for Winnebago County. The community may view up to date information on the court's official website: <https://pfa.wincoil.gov/>.



Victim Services

Our office has 11 Victim Service Providers on staff. They are assigned to different courtrooms and provide advocacy, support and resources to victims, witnesses, and their families. On average, our VSPs assist an average of 300 new victims in each courtroom every year. They serve at all times with understanding and compassion for all stakeholders in the criminal justice system, including victims, witnesses, and defendants.

The core mission of the Office is to seek justice. Seeking justice includes providing support to the victims of crimes committed in Winnebago County. Our Victim Service Providers help victims assert their rights as defined in the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act. They notify victims of court proceedings, assist with compensation and restitution and assist with victim impact statements. In addition, our VSPs facilitate communication between the victims and our attorneys, coordinate witness testimony and assist with filing orders of protection. In some cases, our VSPs will also help get property returned to victims if it was associated with a crime.

Our VSPs work with outside agencies like the Carrie Lynn Center and Rockford Sexual Assault Center to coordinate services to victims of sexual abuse and assault. Our VSPs are there to help see that victims are updated on the court process and resolution to criminal cases.

Homicide Victim Memorial

For two decades, our office has hosted a service and annual reunion of families whose loved ones have fallen victim to violent crime. The Carol McFeggan Homicide Victim Memorial Service gives families and friends of the victims the ability to share memories of their loved ones and pay respects to them. The memorial aims to ease the pain of grief by bringing families together to show the community's support and remembrance of the victims. In addition to the memorial service, our office partners with Kevin Polky, CADC, LCSW, to host monthly Homicide Victim Support Group meetings.



Community

Our commitment to the Community remains strong. We educated hundreds of students about the role of the office in the criminal justice system and participated in dozens of meetings and trainings about the Pretrial Fairness Act. We are more than just a workplace. Our culture is built on respect, support and a shared commitment to seeking justice. Contributions are valued and celebrated.

