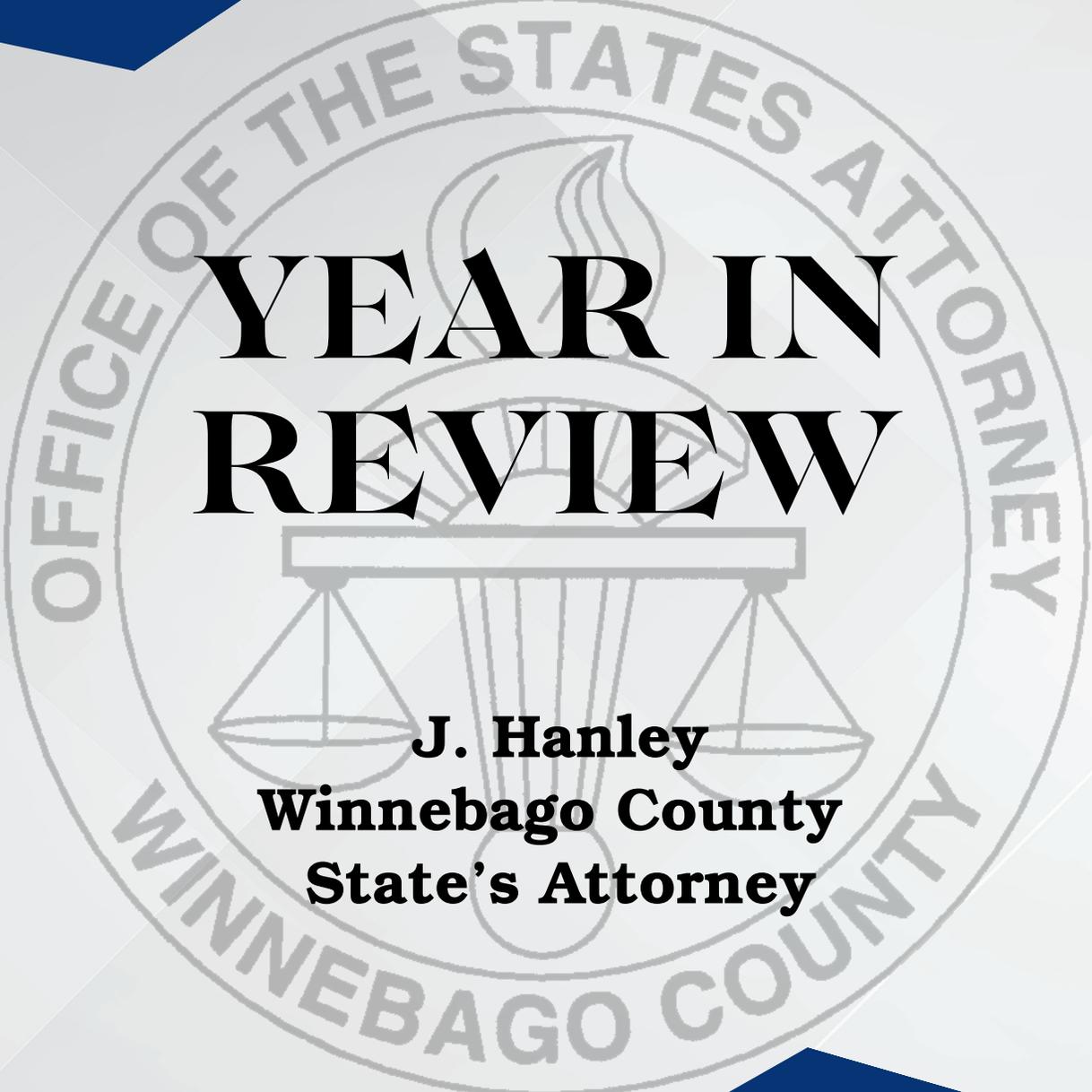


2025



**YEAR IN
REVIEW**

**J. Hanley
Winnebago County
State's Attorney**



Message from SA Hanley

Collaboration. Each day, our Assistant State's Attorneys enter the courtroom seeking justice on behalf of victims and the community. But our efforts are not limited to the courtroom. Indeed, our office is *present* in the community—collaborating with our criminal justice partners in our shared pursuit of justice. We work closely with law enforcement, service providers, and community organizations to address the root causes of crime and enhance public safety. Through open communication and coordinated strategies, these partnerships strengthen outcomes for victims and the community as a whole. In the last five years, our office has built a culture of collaboration, evidenced by our participation in more than 15 task forces focused on human trafficking, juvenile crime, illegal firearms, domestic violence, and mental health.



About the Office

The Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office employs 95 people. Our employees include 43 full time and 5 part time Assistant State's Attorneys, 11 victim service providers, five investigators, and two enhanced criminal liaisons. The office handled 3,409 criminal felonies, 2,395 misdemeanors, 20,633 traffic/major traffic and 862 DUI cases last year. Felony and DUI numbers increased from 2024.

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

Phone: 815.319.4700

Email: StatesAttorney@sao.wincoil.gov

Website: www.winnebagocountystatesattorney.com

Community Recognition

Legacy Award

Assistant State's Attorney Alison Meason was selected by the 17th Judicial Circuit Court's Family Violence Coordinating Council to receive the Legacy Award. The award recognizes an individual whose years of service have made a lasting impact on the community's approach to serving survivors and holding offenders accountable. "I am truly honored. I have spent a good portion of my career prosecuting domestic violence cases. I have spoken to so many victims over the years and heard their emotions as they speak to me. Emotions of fear, anger, frustration, sadness, and love. Being abused by a person that they are or were emotionally close to is a complex situation. These victims have experienced so much and are so strong, even when they do not feel strong. I am proud to be able to speak for them." ASA Meason has been a prosecutor for our office for 30 years.



Hero Award

For the second consecutive year, Assistant State's Attorney Joe Lesner received the Hero Award from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, an honor recognizing prosecutors, judges, and law enforcement officers who demonstrate exceptional dedication to protecting communities from impaired drivers. According to the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration, approximately 37 people in the United States lose their lives each day in crashes involving drunk driving.

As supervisor and lead prosecuting attorney of the office's DUI Unit, ASA Lesner has shown unwavering commitment to holding reckless and impaired drivers accountable.

The office is proud to see his tenacious advocacy and pursuit of justice for victims recognized with this distinguished award.

40 Leaders Under 40

Assistant State's Attorney Alex Ronning was selected as one of the Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce's 40 Under 40 Leaders, an honor recognizing emerging leaders who transform challenges into opportunities through innovation, service, and the courage to think and act differently. As supervisor of the office's Domestic Violence Unit, ASA Ronning is known for seeing possibility where others see obstacles. When a case appears unwinnable, he identifies a path to accountability for violent offenders and has developed innovative strategies to pursue justice for victims. Ronning credits his family as the driving force behind his relentless commitment to justice, inspiring him to prove that help and accountability are always within reach.



Murder Cases

Our office achieved a 78% conviction rate in murder trials in 2025. Our overall murder trial conviction rate (bench and jury) for 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 is 78%.

Cases of Note:

Eric L. Brown, Jr. was sentenced to 120 years in prison for First Degree Murder, Armed Robbery and Unlawful Possession of a Firearm by a Repeat Felony Offender. Brown was convicted of killing Robert Wash in 2019.

Mario E. Williams was sentenced to 85 years in prison for First Degree Murder. Williams was found guilty by a jury of killing Robert Brooks in 2019.

IDarrell D. McLin was sentenced to 165 years in prison for the offenses of First Degree Murder and Attempt First Degree Murder in July of 2025. McLin shot and killed Latonya Whitfield and injured another man at a Rockford gas station in 2021.

Eric Jackson was sentenced to natural life in prison for killing Keandra Austin and her three children on September 17, 2016.

COLD CASE CHARGED: Our office joined with the Rockford Police and to announce charges in the murder of Natasha Cleary and her two young children that occurred in 2011. Charges of First Degree Murder, Aggravated Arson, and Concealment of a Homicidal Death were authorized against Katonka Friar and Taurean Thomas. Katonka Friar was arrested on March 24, 2025, and Taurean Thomas is in federal prison on unrelated charges. The cases against both men are currently pending.



Firearm Cases

Our commitment to prosecuting some of our community's most violent offenders remains a top priority. In unlawful possession of a firearm by a repeat felony offender cases, the office achieved a 90% success rate with an average sentence of 8.7 years in prison.

Cases of Note:

Ricky J. Guinyard was sentenced to a total of 50 years in prison for Aggravated Battery with a Firearm, Armed Robbery, and Unlawful Possession of a Firearm by a Repeat Felony Offender. The charges stem from a shooting in the 1300 block of Broadway.

Jerry D. Hudgens was sentenced to 16 years in prison for the offense of Unlawful Possession of a Firearm by a Repeat Felony Offender.

Nyreek Williams and Franquon Wright were subsequently sentenced to 20 years each in prison for Attempt First Degree Murder. They both plead guilty to the offense after a shooting at Auburn High School that occurred in 2022.



Child Advocacy

The office works in close partnership with the Carrie Lynn Children's Advocacy Center to investigate and prosecute cases involving the physical and sexual abuse of children. In 2025, the office received approximately 169 referrals involving suspected child physical or sexual abuse, resulting in the filing of criminal charges in 64 cases. Our office remains steadfast in its commitment to holding offenders accountable while safeguarding the safety and well-being of our community's most vulnerable children.

Cases of Note:

Charles Jones was convicted of eight counts of Predatory Criminal Sexual Assault of a Child after a jury trial in September of 2022. The defendant was sentenced to 48 years in prison.

Charles Hancock was sentenced to 16 years in prison on Predatory Criminal Sexual Assault, and 10 years on Aggravated Criminal Sexual Abuse involving two different child victims. Hancock was a registered sex offender at the time of the offense.

Joseph Ciancio-Fuchs was sentenced to Natural Life in prison for Predatory Criminal Sexual Assault involving two child victims. Detectives learned that the defendant had inappropriate contact with both victims at various residences between 2020 and 2022. One of the victims was only five years old at the time of some of the assaults.

Juvenile Unit

Our Juvenile Unit consists of five Assistant State's Attorneys, two administrative assistants, and one victim service provider. This unit handles abuse and neglect cases as well as delinquency cases involving minors.

Highlights:

- The unit handled 491 abuse and neglect petitions – an 11% increase from 2024.
 - The unit handled 331 delinquency petitions – an 18% decrease from the previous year.
 - 61 cases referred to the Deferred Prosecution Program with a 76% successful completion rate.
 - Discretionary Transfers: 13 Filed; 2 Granted; 4 Withdrawn per Plea; 7 Pending.
(from juvenile to adult court)
- 

Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence Unit includes six attorneys, two victim services providers, three administrative assistants, two enhanced criminal response liaisons, and two investigators. In 2023, the DV Unit adopted an intentional, evidence-based prosecution strategy that, by 2025, has resulted in the disposition of 1638 felony cases. The success rate of those prosecutions was 78.9%. In 2025, the DV Unit successfully prosecuted 19 stalking cases compared to 20 in 2024.

Case of Note:

Stillman J. Cunningham was sentenced to 25 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections for Attempted First Degree Murder and an additional 14 years for Witness Harassment.

In 2016 and 2017, the victim 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. 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.

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. 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.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is defined as the recruitment and transportation of persons within or across boundaries by force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploiting them economically. If the victim is under the age of 18, there is no requirement to show force, fraud, or coercion.

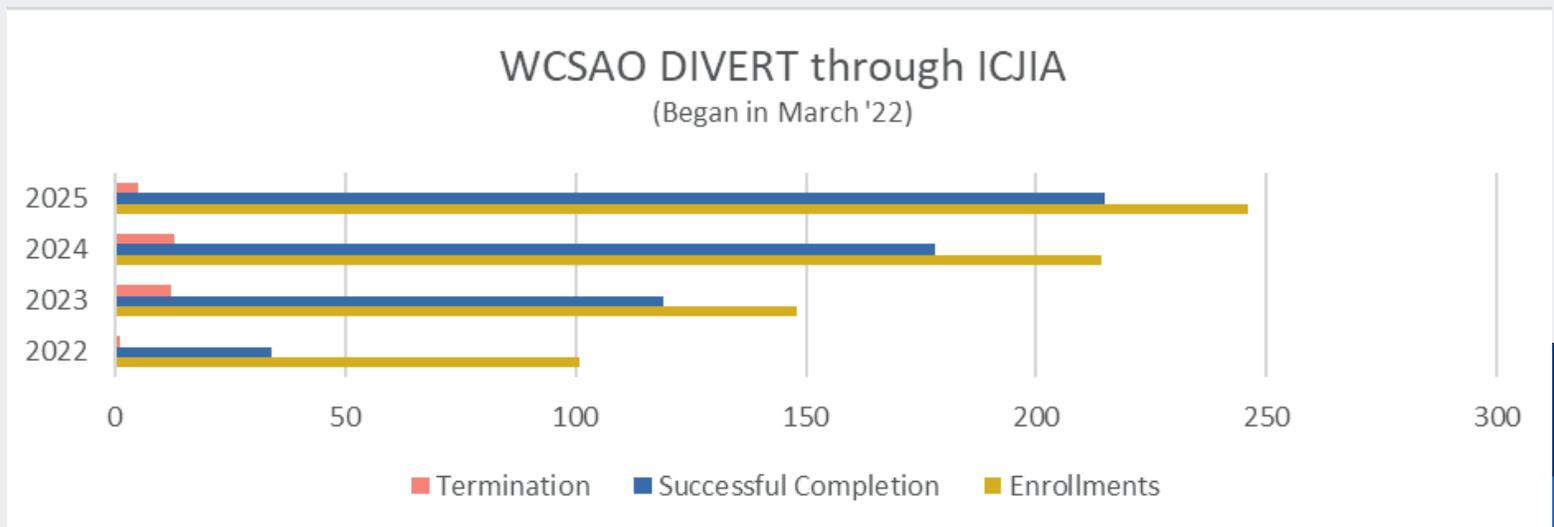
Cases of Note:

Timothy J. Glass, Jr. was sentenced to 7 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections for the offense of Involuntary Servitude, a Class X Felony. Glass held a woman against her will and brutally beat her with an extension cord after she could not pay him because an escort date cancelled an appointment.

In late 2024, Illinois State Police conducted a two day human trafficking enforcement operation. The operation focused on individuals seeking to engage in commercial sex acts. Six men were charged as a result. In 2025, the cases against four of the six men were resolved per plea. Two of the cases are still pending.

Deferred Prosecution-DIVERT

DIVERT is designed for low-risk offenders. 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 1,331 total participants into deferred prosecution with a successful completion rate of 93%. In March '22, we obtained grant funding for DIVERT allowing us to increase participation by eliminating the entrance fee and in turn lowering the barrier for entry. As of 2025, DIVERT participation has grown by 146% since its initial funding in 2022.



Mental Health Initiatives

Our office assigns a dedicated, specially trained Assistant State's Attorney to serve as the prosecutor for all problem-solving courts, including Drug Court, the Therapeutic Intervention Program (TIP) Court (Mental Health Court), Veterans' Treatment Court, Youth Recovery Court, and one of the 17th Judicial Circuit's newest initiatives, the Wellness Track.

Each of these programs is designed to provide individuals charged with criminal offenses in Winnebago County the opportunity to address underlying substance use, mental health, or behavioral health needs through appropriate, community-based treatment and services. By focusing on accountability, treatment, and support, these programs aim to achieve positive outcomes for participants while enhancing public safety through reduced recidivism.

From 11/01/24 to 10/31/25, there were 413 active individuals in problem-solving/treatment courts in Winnebago County. Since the programs began (dating back to 2005), more than 2,800 individuals have received services through the various treatment courts in Winnebago County.

DRUG COURT

- Accepted – 70
- Active during this period – 153
- Successful completions – 18

VETERANS' COURT

- Accepted – 1
- Active during this period – 5
- Successful completions – 2

TIP COURT

- Accepted – 47
- Active during this period – 124
- Successful Completions – 12

WELLNESS TRACK

- Accepted – 95
- Successful Completions – 57

Civil Bureau

Our Civil Bureau consists of six full-time attorneys, two part-time attorneys, and two administrative assistants. The civil ASAs serve as legal counsel for the Winnebago County Board and other county departments (including its elected and appointed officials). The Bureau currently has approximately 41 state, federal, appellate and administrative matters pending. In calendar year 2025, it closed out approximately 42 matters through motions for summary judgment, motions to dismiss, voluntarily dismissals and settlements. In addition to civil litigation, the Bureau also handles civil forfeitures, administrative code hearings, involuntary mental health petitions, and drafting and reviewing various legal documents.

Forfeitures:

A forfeiture case is a civil legal action that allows law enforcement to seize property connected to criminal activity. These cases typically involve money, vehicles, or other assets that are believed to be proceeds of a crime or used to facilitate illegal conduct, such as drug trafficking, DUI offenses, or other felony activity. Successful forfeiture cases remove the financial incentives of crime, disrupt ongoing criminal activity and help prevent seized assets from being returned.

Our Civil Bureau handled 169 forfeiture cases in 2025. The office collected a total of \$630,991.20. Per State law the money is split between various law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies. Our office gets a percentage which for the fiscal year, amounted to \$78,873.90.

Only one other County in Illinois collected more in drug forfeiture funds than our office last year.

Victim Services

Our office employs 11 Victim Service Providers (VSPs) who are assigned to various courtrooms and provide advocacy, support, and resources to victims, witnesses, and their families. On average, VSPs assist approximately 300 new victims per courtroom each year. Their work is grounded in compassion, professionalism, and respect for all participants in the criminal justice system.

In support of the Office's core mission to seek justice, VSPs help victims assert their rights under the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act by providing court notifications, assisting with compensation and restitution, facilitating victim impact statements, coordinating witness testimony, and helping obtain orders of protection or the return of property when applicable. VSPs also serve as a vital link between victims and prosecutors and work closely with community partners such as the Carrie Lynn Center and the Rockford Sexual Assault Center to coordinate services for victims of sexual abuse and assault.

For more than 20 years, the office has also supported families affected by violent crime through the Carol McFeggan Homicide Victim Memorial Service, which brings families together to honor loved ones and foster healing through community remembrance. In addition, the office partners with Kevin Polky, CADC, LCSW, to host monthly homicide victim support group meetings.



Investing in Our Future

Our internship program continues to be a meaningful pathway for individuals seeking hands-on exposure, skill development, mentorship, and insight into the practice of law. Designed to prepare college students and future law students for the courtroom, the program offers practical experience in a supportive, learning-focused environment. Many of our interns go on to join our office as full-time employees after graduating from law school and passing the bar—a testament to the strength of our mentoring and our commitment to developing the next generation of legal professionals.



Community

Our commitment to the community remained strong throughout the year. We engaged with hundreds of students to educate them about the role of our office within the criminal justice system and participated in dozens of meetings and trainings. More than a workplace, our office is defined by a culture of trust, collaboration, and a shared dedication to justice. Individual contributions were recognized, valued, and celebrated.

