

TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Dennis Watkins, prosecutor
REPEAT VIOLENT OFFENDER NEWSLETTER
Six-month UPDATE Nov. 30, 2023

Approximately six months ago, the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office received a \$495,000 grant (without a local match) from the state of Ohio, through the office of Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, to fund a Repeat Violent Offender Unit in Trumbull County to assist the current office staff in prosecuting violent offenders in the county and promoting a more-efficient local criminal justice system in an effort to protect public safety.

Two persons were hired to work with Project Direct and Assistant Prosecutor Charles Morrow in this effort:

1. Assistant Prosecutor Kevin Trapp and
2. Investigator/ Public Information Officer Guy Vogrin.

As the year 2023 has progressed, the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office has seen a marked increase in violent crime with a record-equaling number of capital offense indictment totaling five plus a significant number of other violent crimes perpetrated by repeat violent offenders who went to a jury trial and were convicted at or near record pace. In fact Assistant Prosecutor Gabe Wildman, , child assault division staff member, tried or was co-counsel in 11 jury trials, a high for this office..

Our office boasts a wealth of experience in the legal field, including attorneys and staff in the Civil, Criminal, Appellate and Child Assault Divisions, totaling more than 300 years. As a result of this experience, 2023 has proved successful in prosecuting many crimes perpetrated by violent offenders. As examples:

1. In March 2023, a Trumbull County jury found a Youngstown man guilty of all counts of sexually abusing three girls under the age of 13. The case was prosecuted by Diane Barber, chief of the office's Child Assault Prosecution Division, and investigated by Roy Anne Rudolph who helped Barber prepare the young victims for trial. Rudolph said the defendant Darri A. Mack, 25, is a repeat violent offender who was sent to adult prison for violent offenses at the age of 16. In April, Judge Cynthia Rice sentenced Mack back to prison on two life sentences without the possibility of parole. The child victims were ages 6, 8 and 10 at the time of trial.
2. In June, a Trumbull County jury found Shane Newton guilty on three of four charges involving the sexual assault of a then 9-year-old girl at a Warren home. Newton of Girard was later sentenced by Judge Andrew D. Logan to a term of 25 years to life in prison. Assistant Prosecutor Diane Barber called five witnesses to the stand, including the victim who is now 11 and had to be flown into Texas to relive the horrible crime before a jury. The victim testified about the abuse which took place at a Belle Street home in Warren, sometime between March and June of 2021.
3. First Assistant Christopher Becker led the prosecution team which saw two murder defendants during the summer be found guilty by separate Trumbull County juries. On Aug. 4, a jury took about an hour to return all seven guilty verdicts plus guns specifications against Ronique Requel, 26, who was convicted of the Feb. 5, 2023, shooting death of Adam Sapid in his Milton Street SE, Warren home. He later received a prison sentence of life without the possibility of parole. In October, Becker again led prosecution efforts in gaining a jury conviction of an 18-year-old

Warren man, who was charged with the November 2022 shooting death in a southeast Warren neighborhood. On Oct. 4, 2023, Gavin Roberts was found guilty in the murder of Brice Hilton, 37, of Farrell, Pa, who had come to Warren in search of a cheap cellphone to purchase off the streets for his son.

Roberts was given by Judge Cynthia W. Rice a prison sentence of 42 to 47 ½ years to life.

4. Assistant Prosecutor Gabriel Wildman, Chief of the Child Pornography/Cyber Abuse Division, assisted Becker in several successful murder trials and also helped Barber gain many convictions of sexual offenders during 2023. Wildman also successfully prosecuted two juvenile cases and worked on 13 trials during the year. On June 23, Francis LaCamera of Summit Street NW, Warren, was found guilty by a Trumbull County jury of all 10 counts involving the sexual assault of a then 12-year-old Hubbard girl during the pandemic months. Wildman asked Judge Cynthia Rice to give LaCamera consecutive sentences because of the repeated acts that lasted for almost a year. She obliged by giving LaCamera a life sentence with his first chance at parole coming after he serves 25 years. On Sept. 28, a 43-year-old Leavittsburg man was sentenced to a life prison sentence with his first chance of parole coming after he serves 15 years. Wildman successfully saw to it that Brian S. Harvey pleaded guilty to a bill of information charging him with a life/rape charge. He also pleaded guilty in a second case to seven first-degree rape charges, one third-degree sexual imposition charge and six counts of illegal use of minors in nudity-oriented material or performance. Harvey was convicted of rapes and sexual assaults of three female relatives over a period of about six years. Wildman always says his goal is to get plea deals in these sexual assault case involving children so that the young victims do not have to relive their horrors by testifying in front of jurors and anyone else in the courtroom. "Anytime that happens is a good day," Wildman has told media members many times this year.
5. Becker and Wildman in November tried and successfully convicted Kashaun Williams of capital murder charges in the April 2, 2023, shooting death of James Chapman who was slain outside his Lener Avenue SW home in Warren. Williams will be sentenced by Judge Ronald J. Rice on Thursday, Nov. 30 after jurors spared the defendant of a death penalty sentence, instead recommending a life without the possibility of parole prison sentence.
6. Other assistant prosecutors like Chuck Morrow, Mike Burnett and Gina Thomas also successfully prosecuted violent and other offenders through trials and plea deals before the four Common Pleas Judges Ron Rice, Cynthia Rice, Andrew D. Logan and Sean O'Brien. As chief of the Criminal Division, Morrow in January was the prosecutor as Antuan M. Parker was convicted by a Trumbull County jury in the 2021 shooting death of Desirae Boss, whose body was found in November of that year after it was dumped on a secluded area of southwest Warren. Burnett, who specializes in prosecuting OVI and vehicular assault/homicide cases, successfully obtained convictions against a Kentucky driver, Josephine Steele, 52, who was impaired when her vehicle crashed severely injuring an elderly couple in December 2022. Burnett stated the case involved a crash where Steele admitted she was impaired, and that she wasn't sorry for hurting them. Steele was sentenced by Judge Cynthia Rice to 30 months in prison and was given a 10-month driver's license suspension. Thomas, who handles hundreds of drug cases investigated by the various task forces and street crime units in the county, successfully gained many convictions on possession and trafficking charges. One of Thomas' efforts saw a conviction of Warren drug defendant Deon Rogers in October which saw him receive a prison sentence ranging from eight to 12 years.

7. Trumbull County's long-standing Drug Court, supervised by Judge Andrew D. Logan, has successfully diverted qualified, non-violent offenders from becoming repeat offenders through treatment programs. The prosecutor's office has worked closely with the court to help see that offenders follow the court's order in the rehabilitative process. Assistant Prosecutors Stanley Elkins and Kevin Trapp most recently have provided Judge Logan with their assistance.
8. Assistant Prosecutor Stanley Elkins, Chief of the Juvenile Division, has overseen the prosecution of hundreds of cases in Juvenile Court during 2023, including bindovers to adult court in two separate murder cases involving 17-year-old defendants Christian Chaney and Gavin Roberts. Elkins reports a marked increase in gun violence by juvenile offenders.
9. Ryan Sanders is chief of the prosecutor's appellate division, arguing cases before the 11th District Court of Appeals. Sanders saw 27 out of 29 verdicts and sentences upheld by the court in 2023 as well as 13 others being declined jurisdiction by the Ohio Supreme Court. A major case argued by Sanders resulted in the affirming of the life sentence and rape/kidnap charges of repeat violent/sexual offender David Honzu, 64, who was successfully prosecuted by Wildman twice before juries in late 2022. Our successful prosecution of criminal cases time and time again has further demonstrated that the trial judges of the Trumbull County Common Pleas Court have shown good stewardship in seeing that fair trials take place in the courtrooms.

Additionally, many repeat, violent criminals have appeared for parole hearings this year – including Prosecutor Watkins' oldest case, Gary Betz, who was convicted by a Trumbull County jury of murder of a Lake Milton area tavern owner back in 1977. After serving more than 46 years in prison, Betz will soon face a parole board in another bid to gain freedom. Watkins has written his 10th letter opposing Betz's bid.

During 2023, Watkins also successfully saw two sex offenders – William Fisher and Willis Reitz – have their prison terms extended through the parole hearing process. Fisher had his prison stay extended to the maximum 10 years before he is eligible for another parole hearing.

This newsletter was started in the summer of 2023 to provide information about our office activity in the courts in a timely fashion to both the public and the news media. Guy Vogrin is one of a only a few public information officers at prosecutor's offices in Ohio. Vogrin has 42 years journalism experience with 34 ½ coming here in Trumbull County. Attached is some of Vogrin's work on newsletter updating cases since June.

To move forward and complement our staff, the new unit and facilitate victims and witnesses of crime, the office plans to convert its current law library into a more modernized audio-visual media center while still having the appearance of a law library. This new media center can allow staff to attend training and seminars for credit via remote or allow victims and witnesses to view clemency hearings by the Ohio Adult Parole Authority rather than traveling to Columbus. And via a Zoom hookup, staff members will be able to be interviewed by mass media outlets. On Dec. 15, 2023, a child rape victim who testified in the State vs. David Lockney rape case, will appear before the parole board regarding the defendant's bid for release from prison. That victim will have to use an audio/visual hookup in a Common Pleas courtroom.

The funds for this library renovation project will have to come as a budgetary line item for 2024. Also included in this report is an attached newsletter that summarizes some of Prosecutor Watkins' goals for 2024 and beyond. Some of the repeat violent offenders who made news in 2023 were featured in newsletters posted on the office's revamped website. They include:

- The manhunt for repeat violent offender Tyrell Williams who is being prosecuted on child endangering and domestic violence charges connected to a July 11 incident involving an 18-month-old child at a West Market Street address.
- The Ohio 11th District Court in October affirmed the convictions and prison sentences for Kemari James, 30, accused of murdering a pregnant woman in her Warren home back in 2020 and Michael A. Rivers, 40, who was sentenced to 20 to 23 ½ years for the aggravated burglary of a Champion home in March 2020. James is serving a 38 year to life sentence at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility. James' case was prosecuted by First Assistant Christopher Becker.
- The Ohio Adult Parole Authority in 2023 denied release for a Hubbard area murderer and one-time rapist, Alfonsia "Mickey" Perry, 65, who beat his girlfriend to death by striking her 71 times with a bed slat and ax handle.
- While rapists Willis Reitz and William Fisher have had their prison time extended as previously mentioned, pending cases before the Ohio Parole Board include torturous child rapist David Lockney and serial criminal and shotgun killer Gary Betz.

- For more information, contact newsletter editor Guy Vogrin of Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office at 330-675-2485.