



March 2024 Volume 3, Issue 1

# JUSTICE JOURNAL

Presented by the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office  
Gina DeGenova, Prosecutor

## Prosecutor's Office announces Special Victims Unit

Mahoning County Prosecutor Gina DeGenova is proud to announce the implementation of a new Special Victims Unit of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. The Special Victims Unit (SVU) will be staffed by Assistant Mahoning County Prosecutors devoted to seeking justice for vulnerable victim groups. The SVU will handle Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence and Domestic Homicides, crimes against children, including child endangering and child pornography, human trafficking, crimes against individuals with developmental disabilities, elder abuse, physical and financial, and animal cruelty. "I am always looking to impose best practices. Adding a specialized unit will help ensure the protection of the most vulnerable members of our community," said Prosecutor DeGenova. "I am especially pleased that career prosecutor Jennifer McLaughlin Bonish will serve as Chief of the SVU. Chief Bonish has extensive experience in prosecuting sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse cases in Mahoning County. In her 18 years as an attorney, she has prosecuted numerous criminal jury trials and secured the first jury verdict finding a defendant guilty of Human Trafficking. Chief Bonish is also passionate about animal welfare, recognizing that animals lack the ability to protect themselves from their abusers." Joining Chief Bonish is a team of experienced assistant prosecutors including Caitlyn Andrews and Kevin Day, along with our new additions, Katie Jones and Daniel Yozwiak. Each of these Assistant Prosecutors shares the passion for seeking justice and protecting these vulnerable groups within our community.

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# NEW UNIT SET TO HELP PROTECTED CLASSES

## Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking

A distinguishing feature of the SVU will be vertical prosecution, meaning that the same prosecutors will handle the cases from pre-indictment through sentencing. Many incidents of physical and sexual abuse are not reported to law enforcement. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in five women will be raped in their lives. However, a staggering 63% of sexual assaults are never reported to police. The report rate is even lower when the victim is a child, with only 12% of child sexual assaults being reported to law enforcement.

Through the SVU's vertical prosecution model, victims will know who their prosecutors are early in the process. They will know who to contact with questions and concerns as their cases move through the criminal justice system. Furthermore, vertical prosecution spares victims the trauma of describing their victimization to numerous prosecutors in various stages of prosecution. The SVU prosecutors are prepared to address the specific needs of these victims during the criminal justice process.

## Crimes Against the Elderly

Alarming statistics consistently demonstrate the need for the SVU to encompass crimes against elderly victims. The United States Department of Justice reported in 2023 that 10% of adults in the United States over 60 years of age are victims of elder abuse each year with two-thirds of those victims being women. Elderly victims are particularly vulnerable to call center scams, reporting more losses in such scams in 2022 than all other age groups combined. Only 1 in 24 cases of elder abuse is reported to law enforcement. In cases of financial abuse by a friend or family member, 87.5% of elderly victims did not report their victimization.

## Animal Cruelty

Turning to the protection of animals, the link between abuse of animals in the home and the abuse of family or household members is well established. As the Animal Legal Defense Fund explained, "violence is violence; and those who commit violence rarely limit their victim pool to a single species." When animal cruelty takes place in a home, it is more likely that other family members are being abused. In fact, animal abuse is one of the top four risk factors for domestic violence. Domestic abusers also commonly use animals to instill fear in their victims or to prevent their victims from leaving their abusive situations. In homes where domestic violence is occurring, 50% of children reported that their abusers threatened to hurt or kill a pet. More information about our Special Victims Unit can be found on our website.



From Left to Right: Joe Caruso C.E.O of Compass Family and Community Services, Jane McMurphy Animal Charities C.E.O, Prosecutor Gina DeGenova, Bill Walsh Director of MCBDD



From Left to Right: Ralph Rivera Chief, Criminal Division, Kevin Day Assistant Prosecutor, Prosecutor Gina DeGenova, Daniel Yozwiak Assistant Prosecutor, Caitlyn Andrews Assistant Prosecutor, Isabella Caruso, Director of Programming, Jennifer Bonish, Chief of SVU.

# OFFICE NEWS

## NEW APPOINTMENTS



Jack Phillips - Clerk

Jack Phillips is currently employed as a Clerk in our Delinquent Tax Division.

He is a second-year student at Youngstown State University, where he is enrolled in the Honors College, majoring in Business Human Resources and minoring in Criminal Justice.

Jack plans to attend law school in the future. He graduated from Cardinal Mooney and is actively involved in his work within the Delinquent Tax Division.

Brooke Schantz is currently employed as our Community Outreach Intern.

Brooke studies Criminal Justice Legal Processes. She is in her second year at YSU, where she is working to receive her bachelor's degree.

Within our office, Brooke works alongside Isabella Caruso, Director of Programming, and Alan Rodges, Director of Communications, to aid them in the planning and brainstorming current and future programs.

After receiving her bachelor's degree, Brooke hopes to attend law school at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law.



Brooke Schantz - Community Outreach Intern





# OFFICE NEWS

## Community Outreach

### PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE HOSTS TOWN HALL

This quarter, Prosecutor DeGenova has launched her highly anticipated Town Hall series. This series is a chance to connect with the community and continue to engage with those who have questions about the Prosecutor's Office. At each session, Prosecutor DeGenova will provide information on various facets of the criminal justice system, the Grand Jury process, the newly created Special Victims Unit, and community programming initiatives.

Residents are invited and encouraged to attend. DeGenova said, "I look forward to sharing my insight and to creating an informal and accessible environment for community members to provide input that will assist in improving the safety of the residents of Mahoning County."

Throughout 2024, the town hall series will be hosted at various locations across Mahoning County, ensuring accessibility for residents from different neighborhoods. Light refreshments will be provided.

#### Upcoming Town Hall dates:

##### SEBRING

Where: Sebring Township Administration Building, 135 E. Ohio Ave. Sebring OH

When: Tuesday May 14th, 2024 at 6:30 PM

##### CAMPBELL

Where: Campbell City Hall 10613 Mahoning Ave, North Jackson, Ohio 44451

When: Wednesday, June 12th, 2024 at 6:30 PM

##### AUSTINTOWN

Where: Austintown Town hall 82 Ohltown Rd. Austintown OH.

When: Wednesday, July 17th, 2024 at 6:30 PM





# OFFICE NEWS

## Community Outreach



This quarter we held two STOP classes around the county, one class was held in Austintown Township and the other was held at South Range High School. We would like to give a huge thank you to everybody who made this event possible. We want to extend our gratitude to Austintown Township Park and South Range High School for lending thier facilities to our office. We also would like to thank the Mercy Health Chief of Police, Ryan Bonacci, for taking the time to instruct our class. Lastly, the classes are not possible without the community members who came out to participate. If you, or anyone you know, is interested in our future S.T.O.P. events, feel free to check out our website for more information.



Prosecutor DeGenova speaking on an informative and empowering panel at Youngstown State University. She was tackling the topic of what it is like to be a women in male-dominated fields.

Members of our office visiting YSU during the Social Impact Fair. Students were able to gather info on internships and jobs in the area.

Prosecutor DeGenova speaking to the residents of the Ursuline Sisters of Youngstown about the dangers of scams and fraud.



Prosecutor DeGenova was invited to the YMCA to speak during the organization's Munch and Learn! The Prosecutor talked to everyone about frauds and scams. More information on our Speakers Bureau can be found on our website!



# OFFICE NEWS

## Community Outreach



Prosecutor DeGenova was the featured speaker at the Youngstown Business and Professional Women's Club! The Prosecutor spoke about the inner workings of the office and new programs offered to the public!

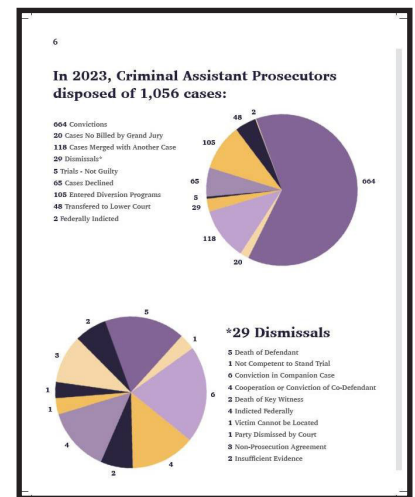
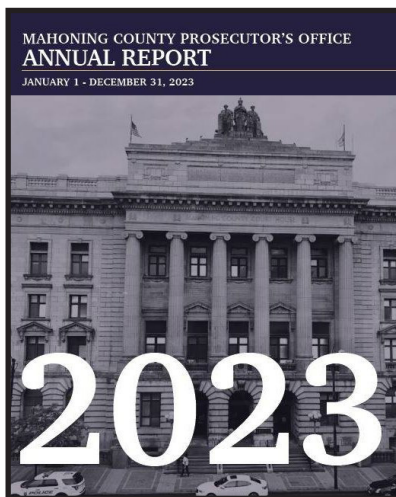


Members of our office, along with family and friends, enjoying the Mahoning Valley St. Patrick's Day Parade this quarter. Thanks to all involved who helped organize the parade and those who attended. It was cold as always!



Thank you to Akiva Academy and the Jewish Community Center of Youngstown for allowing Prosecutor DeGenova to speak to students and parents about cyber safety! Prosecutor DeGenova discussed various cyber related topics with attendees, such as understanding the digital footprint, catfishing, cyberbullying, and more.

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023



We have unveiled our 2023 Annual Report! This comprehensive 31-page document chronicles the year's key events, including a special message from our Mahoning County Prosecutor, Gina DeGenova. The report includes a synopsis of significant cases, the work performed by each division in the office, and the office's community involvement.



# OFFICE NEWS

## Community Outreach



Thank you to the YSU International Programs Office and Youngstown State University students for participating in the initial YSU International Student Court Tour.

Our office hosted International students and was able to answer questions about the Mahoning County Common Pleas courthouse and criminal law in Mahoning County and the state of Ohio.

Prosecutor DeGenova and other members of the prosecutorial staff spoke to the students and gave them a tour of the courthouse. Students could also talk to Judge Anthony D'Apolito, who answered questions and hosted students in his courtroom.

Thank you to all who participated and helped put together this fantastic event.

## HOPE'S CORNER



This year, Hope has been highlighting different friends from Animal Charity of Ohio. We call this new campaign Hope's Paw Partner of the month! As a rescue herself, Hope will be featuring an adoptable pet each month as her "Paw Partner" from our community partner, Animal Charity of Ohio. Help them find their "forever home!" Hope highlighted two different friends, including Xavier, a 2-year-old dog, and Sissy, a Labrador Retriever mix. You can find each of these paw partners on our Facebook page. You can find where to adopt Xavier and Sissy on the Animal Charity of Ohio's website.

# CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

## NOTABLE CASES State v. John Eugene Morgan

In July of 2022, John Eugene Morgan went to the home of Daniel A. Peek, Sr. to pick up his daughter and grandson. John Morgan is the ex-husband of Mary Morgan. Mary Morgan's boyfriend was Daniel Peek. Upon his arrival to the home, witnesses stated that upon exiting his vehicle John Morgan had a gun and fired a shot into the ground. He then gets into a physical altercation with Daniel Peek and Peek's son which caused John Morgan to drop the weapon he was carrying. Daniel Peek then flees to the rear of the house. As he runs away John Morgan picked up the gun and shot Daniel Peek in the back. John Morgan was charged with two counts of Murder (UF); Felonious Assault (F2) and various Firearm Specifications. The trial went forward on February 20, 2024. A guilty verdict was returned on February 28, 2024. Defendant was found guilty of Lesser Included Count One: Voluntary Manslaughter (F1), with a Firearm Specification; Count Two, Murder (UF), with a Firearm Specification; and Count Three, Felonious Assault (F2), with a Firearm Specification. The Defendant was sentenced to life in prison with a chance of parole after 18 years.

Patrick R. Fening, Assist. Prosecutor, First Chair  
Robert J. Andrews, Chief Assist. Prosecutor, Second Chair



Patrick Fening  
Assistant Prosecutor



Robert Andrews  
Chief, Criminal

## State v. Davelle Lamar Heath

Davelle Lamar Heath was charged with Attempted Murder (F1); Felonious Assault (F2); and additional Firearms Specifications after shooting Katrina Turner in the head on March 21, 2022, in the driveway of her residence. Ms. Turner could not speak however was able to write. When asked who shot her she wrote the name "Davelle Heath". The victim knew Davelle Heath as a former drill student of hers. His family also lived in her neighborhood. The victim believed the shooting was a hate crime against transgender individuals. At trial the Defendant was found guilty on both counts and added Firearm Specifications. The defendant was sentenced to twelve to thirteen-and-a-half years in prison.

Katherine M. Jones, Assist. Prosecutor, First Chair  
Stephen M. Maszczak, Assist. Prosecutor, Second Chair



Katherine Jones  
Assistant Prosecutor



Stephen M. Maszczak  
Assistant Prosecutor



# CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

## NOTABLE CASES

### State v. Carlos Flores

On February 14, 2024, Carlos Flores entered pleas of guilty to reduced charges of Voluntary Manslaughter (F1) and Felonious Assault (F2) with attached Firearms Specifications, stemming from an incident that occurred on July 18, 2021, involving 17-year-old Reshaud Marquel Biggs, Jr. The juvenile was shot and killed in the parking lot of the Gate Way Gas Mart at South and East Avondale Avenues. The juvenile was found laying face down with an apparent gunshot wound to his head. Witnesses stated that the juvenile was shot from across the street by "LOS" aka Carlos Flores whom they had been feuding with for a period of time. The Defendant was identified as the shooter. He was sentenced to 20 to 25.5 years in prison with 934 days credit for time served.

Joseph J. Maxin, Former Assist. Prosecutor, First Chair  
Robert J. Andrews, Chief Assist. Prosecutor, Second Chair



Joseph Maxin  
Former Assistant Prosecutor



Robert Andrews  
Chief, Criminal

### State v. Todd W. Perkins

Todd Perkins was indicted in 2019 on six counts of Rape (F1) and two counts of Gross Sexual Imposition (F3) against two girls related to him. In 2021, he pled guilty and was sentenced to 15 years to life in prison. The Defendant's lawyers filed an appeal saying that the cases should have been separated. The Seventh District Court of Appeals agreed and in August, 2022, the Defendant was released from prison. The trial of the instant case focused on one of the girls who was four years old at the time the sex acts were forced upon her. After two hours of deliberations a jury found the Defendant guilty of Rape (F1) and Gross Sexual Imposition (F3). Perkins was sentenced to life in prison with a chance for parole after 20 years. The case involving the other girl relative will be set for trial.

Kevin R. Day, Assist. Prosecutor, First Chair  
Daniel Yozwiak, Assist. Prosecutor, Second Chair  
Robert J. Andrews, Chief Assist. Prosecutor, Third Chair



Kevin Day  
Assistant Prosecutor



Daniel Yozwiak  
Assistant Prosecutor



Robert Andrews  
Chief, Criminal

# CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

## NOTABLE CASES State v. Brandon Crump

On Thursday February 15, 2024, a jury found 21 year old Brandon Crump, Jr. guilty of the Aggravated Murder of 4 year old Rowan Sweeney, the Attempted Murder and Felonious Assault of Andre McCoy, Yarnell Green, Alexis Schneider, and Cassandra Marsicola, Aggravated Burglary, Aggravated Robbery, Conspiracy, and Firearm Specifications.

“The cold blooded murder of Rowan Sweeney is finally vindicated,” said Prosecutor Gina DeGenova. “While we acknowledge the impact of Crump’s brutal crimes on his adult victims, Rowan’s family is forever changed by this senseless act of violence. Our office and law enforcement partners dedicate our lives to ensuring justice for victims of these types of vicious acts.”

On September 21, 2020, Crump burst through the front door of 111 Perry Street in Struthers, Ohio, and unloaded a 45 caliber handgun on the five people in the home’s living room. Four adults sustained gunshot wounds. As 4 year old Rowan’s mother begged Crump to spare his life, Crump shot Rowan 4 times. He then grabbed cash from the coffee table and fled the residence.

“I congratulate the hard work of my team of lawyers, (former) Grand Jury Prosecutor, Mike Yacovone, career Assistant Prosecutor, Jennifer Paris, and SVU Chief, Jennifer Bonish,” said Prosecutor DeGenova. “I also want to thank our dedicated support team of legal secretaries, paralegals and victim advocates.” “To prosecute a case of this magnitude, takes a tremendous amount of work and coordination with the lawyers, witnesses, surviving victims, and law enforcement.”

“My sincere sympathy goes out to Rowan’s family and to all the community members who supported them. For a family to lose a young child over a measly few thousand dollars shocks the conscious and is truly heartbreaking,” said DeGenova. “I and my team of career prosecutors, and now with our newly formed SVU unit, remain committed to bringing about justice for all victims, and especially innocent young victims who cannot protect themselves, like Rowan. Today we again mourn the loss of Rowan but rejoice that his killer will cease to be a menace to this community, and any, other hopefully for a very long time.”

Michael J. Yacovone, Former Assist. Prosecutor, First Chair  
Jennifer M. Paris, Assist. Prosecutor, Second Chair  
Jennifer McLaughlin Bonish, Assist. Prosecutor, Third Chair



Michael J. Yacovone  
Former Assistant Prosecutor



Jennifer M. Paris  
Grand Jury Prosecutor



Jennifer McLaughlin Bonish  
Assistant Prosecutor



# CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

## Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office Role in the Wind and Solar Farm Issue

Ohio Senate Bill 52 (SB 52) was signed by Governor DeWine on July 12, 2021 and became effective on October 10, 2021. SB 52 enacted new laws allowing county commissioners the authority to restrict the siting of large solar facilities and large and economically significant wind farms in unincorporated areas of their county.

Codified in Sections 303.57 through 303.62 of the Ohio Revised Code, the new law defines large wind farms and large solar facilities as major utility facilities capable of producing 50 megawatts or more. An economically significant wind farm is capable of producing greater than 5 megawatts but less than 50 megawatts all with a single connection to the grid.

When the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners (BMCC) received a request from Green Township Trustees, via a resolution, requesting the restriction of these facilities in Green Township, the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO) was tasked with researching the new laws to advise the Commissioners. Options were evaluated based on the BMCC taking action, what kind of action could be taken, or not taking any action. These options included researching the power siting board of the Ohio Public Utilities Commission and their extensive process for evaluating applications for the placement of power plants. The MCPO also discerned the codified process for public notice of meetings where this issue was discussed. The MCPO even hand-delivered notices and maps to all the public libraries in the county for the first public hearing.

After much discussion of legal options and considerations with the BMCC, the MCPO prepared the legal notice and prepared the resolution. The MCPO repeated the public meeting procedure for a second resolution to include other townships that had requested similar action. The Green Township restrictions were approved in Resolution 23-11-007 on November 9, 2023 and restrictions for Austintown, Beaver, Berlin, Canfield, Coitsville, Goshen, Jackson, Milton, Poland, and Springfield Townships were approved in Resolution 24-03-003 on March 7, 2024.



# CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

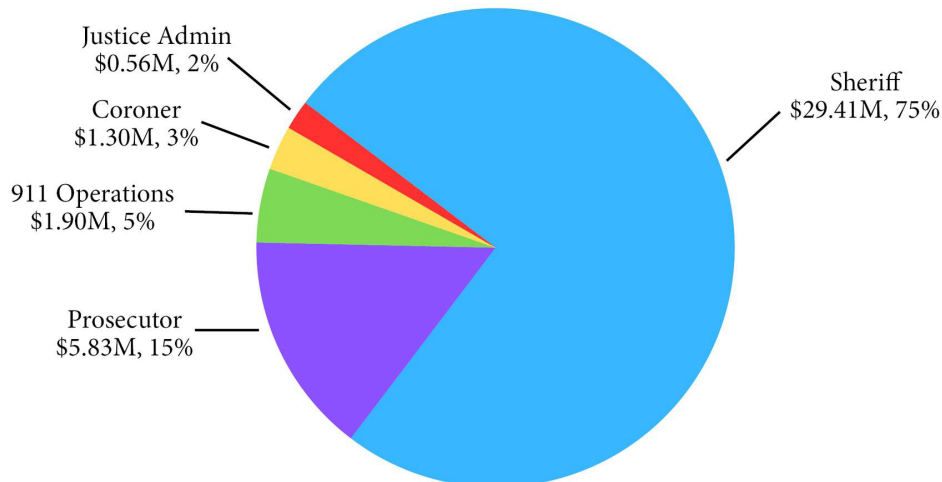
## Mahoning County Prosecutor Cuts 2024 budget

The voters of Mahoning County chose to pass the 5-year renewal of the Criminal Justice Tax. This is a .75% sales tax that funds several organizations within the county, including the Mahoning County Sheriff's Office, the jail, the Coroner's Office, 911, and the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. The criminal justice fund is 8.3% higher than in 2023, and the general fund budget is about 5.4% higher than in 2023. While the Criminal Justice fund is higher than in 2023, our office has redemed our budget request. Our office asked for \$6,047,737, and this year's request was \$5,877,799. Prosecutor DeGenova was able to help reduce the budget by not filling several vacant positions. Our office has been able to reduce the budget while also increasing services within the community.

**Chief Assistant Prosecutor Linette Stratford explaining the proposed budget for fliscal year 2024. Also in attendance is the Mahoning County Sheriff's Office, the Mahoning County Commissioners and Mahoning County Administrative staff.**



**2024 JUSTICE FUND PROPOSED BUDGETS**  
(In Millions)





# NEWS AROUND TOWN



## Solar Eclipse fun!

This quarter our office had a once in a lifetime experience, a Solar Eclipse! People across the world took a quick break to take a look at the sky, there was no difference at the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. Ongoers had to use the specialized glasses to take a peak at the solar event. They all stood together, looking up, like they were watching a big magic show in the sky. Members of our office couldn't resist the chance to see something so amazing together. It was like they all had a mini adventure right there in the parking lot!



## Good luck and Farewell!

This quarter, our office said goodbye to two hard-working attorneys who have provided their combined services for several decades. Former Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Maxin and Former Grand Jury Prosecutor Michael Yacovone have parted ways from our office to pursue goals of their own. Both attorneys will remain in the practice of law. We want to thank both attorneys for their years of service, congratulate them for their new positions and wish them good luck!



Michael J. Yacovone  
Former Grand Jury Prosecutor



Joseph Maxin  
Former Assistant Prosecutor