



County of Kenosha District Attorney

Michael D. Graveley
District Attorney

Carli A. McNeill
Deputy District Attorney

Heather M. Beasy
Victim Witness Coordinator

Tina A. Burke
Office Manager

Brian P. Stuht
Office Investigator

912 56th Street
Molinaro Building
Kenosha, WI 53140
Phone 262 653-2400
Victim Witness (262) 653-2408
Fax (262) 653-2783 – 2nd Floor
Fax (262) 653-2411 – 3rd Floor, West
Fax (262) 653-2487 – 3rd Floor, East

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News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kenosha County prosecutors praise local, state leaders for addition of much-needed Assistant District Attorney positions

County receives 2 of 3 new prosecutors added statewide

KENOSHA — District Attorney Michael Graveley and members of his staff convened a news conference today to spotlight a major win for public safety in Kenosha County in the recent Wisconsin state budget process.

Graveley credited members of the local legislative delegation, County Executive Samantha Kerkman and Gov. Tony Evers for their support of the permanent funding of two Assistant District Attorney positions that would have otherwise lapsed with the expiration of the grants that are funding them presently.

Had this funding not been awarded, Graveley said, the Kenosha County District Attorney's Office likely would have been no longer able to devote two ADA positions to the specialized functions of prosecuting sexual assault and shots-fired cases. This, he added, would have come as the office's criminal caseload has increased by 125 percent since 2016.

“We as a community must give credit where credit is due, and our legislators and County Executive Kerkman advocated strongly to ensure my office will not lose key staff amid a tragic rise in violent crime in Kenosha County,” Graveley said, “Gov. Evers and the Republican-led Legislature heard their call and worked to ensure our needs are met.”

In particular, Graveley credits Rep. Amanda Nedweski, R-Pleasant Prairie, and Sen. Van Wanggaard, R-Racine, for their tremendous efforts at placing and preserving these positions within the Legislature's budget proposal, as well as the efforts of Rep. Tip McGuire, D-Kenosha, for his advocacy with the Governor's Office.

"This bipartisan collaboration is exactly what Kenosha needed to further the common goal of public safety," Graveley said.

Kerkman, Graveley added, was a key ally locally and on the state level.

As a result of this joint effort, Graveley said, Kenosha County was a recipient of two of the only three ADA positions funded statewide in the 2023-'25 budget package that Evers signed into law last week.

"This was a tremendous win for Kenosha County," Graveley said.

Kerkman said this effort is the latest example of a long tradition of Kenosha County's state legislators and local elected officials working across party lines on issues of local importance.

"The district attorney had a strong case for the continued funding of these positions, and I was pleased to help him make it in Madison," said Kerkman, who served as a state lawmaker for more than 21 years before becoming county executive in 2022. "I'm thankful to the Legislature and the governor for hearing our call on this urgent public safety need."

The two ADA positions that otherwise would have expired were funded by American Rescue Plan Act dollars that were allocated in 2022 to address a backlog of cases that mounted during the pandemic.

"Republicans continue to prioritize our commitment to public safety in the 2023-'25 biennial state budget," Rep. Nedweski said. "In addition to increasing salaries for ADAs, DDAs, and elected district attorneys statewide at levels greater than proposed in the governor's budget, Republican legislators listened to the petition of Sen. Wanggaard and me to recognize the unique needs of Kenosha County based on compelling crime data provided by District Attorney Graveley. Of three full-time prosecutor positions approved for the state, two are for Kenosha County. This is a big win for our communities."

Nedweski noted that she also voted for the addition of the temporary prosecutor positions in 2022 in her other elected role as a County Board supervisor.

"By strongly advocating for victims, Sen. Wanggaard and I made the case for funding these critical positions permanently," Nedweski said. "Republicans recognize that rising violent crime in Milwaukee and Chicago has bled into Kenosha, and we remain steadfast in supporting our law enforcement and criminal justice agencies by putting public safety first."

McGuire, a former prosecutor in Kenosha and Milwaukee counties, praised the funding of the new positions here.

“Our community is a safer place thanks to these additional prosecutor positions,” McGuire said. “I’m extremely grateful to DA Graveley for his advocacy and to Gov. Evers for making these additional district attorneys a reality for Kenosha County.”

Wanggaard said he, too, was pleased to support the District Attorney’s Office’s request.

“Public Safety has always been my top priority. So when Mike Graveley called me about Kenosha’s need for additional district attorneys, Rep. Nedweski and I went to work,” Wanggaard said. “Armed with the facts about crime in Kenosha County from the District Attorney, Amanda and I were able to convince the Republican legislature about Kenosha’s need. The fact that Kenosha County got two of the three new Assistant District Attorney positions created in the budget shows the teamwork that Amanda, Mike and I had to push this across the finish line for Kenosha County.”

With an increase in crime rates in recent years, the Kenosha County Circuit Court in August 2022 expanded its allocation of judicial resources to criminal cases, from three and a half full-time criminal branches to four.

Even with the additional permanent positions, Kenosha County’s prosecutors continue to bear an enormous caseload, Graveley noted.

Graveley said that earlier this year there were 3,833 pending criminal cases in the courts, compared with 1,691 cases in January 2016. General assignment prosecutors, who currently handle an average of 311 cases each at any given time, would have seen their workloads grow to an average of 373 cases if the positions were not funded.

Based on a workload analysis provided by the state Department of Administration, the Kenosha County District Attorney’s Office is 6.5 full-time prosecutors short of what would be considered fully staffed, which Graveley said is a staffing shortfall of over 25 percent.

Graveley emphasized that the bipartisan efforts to preserve these two positions as well as enact significant pay raises for frontline prosecutors represent real and substantive strides to combat crime and make Kenosha County safer.

“To be clear, our office — like many others around the state — remains challenged by growing caseloads and the emergence of police body cameras and other technologies that add many hours to the time needed to fully review cases,” Graveley said. “Our success in the recent state budget process is certainly a step in the right direction, but one of a number we will likely need to take in the coming years. I look forward to a continuing dialog with our advocates on the state level.”

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