



FROM THE OFFICE OF
 SUMMIT COUNTY PROSECUTOR
SHERRI BEVAN WALSH

**A MESSAGE FROM PROSECUTOR WALSH
 HELPING MAKE
 SUMMIT COUNTY BETTER**

Every day I strive to make Summit County a better and safer place to live and work. My prosecutors work hard to find the best solution to the cases we have. We ask the question—what is best for the victim and our community?

But I also want my office to help improve Summit County by not just working in a courtroom. That is why I am so proud of our relationship with many local organizations whose main mission is to improve the lives of our neighbors.

Recently, a group of employees from my Child Support Enforcement Agency volunteered their time with Habitat For Humanity of Summit County to help with a new construction for a well-deserving family.

Employees rolled up their sleeves and put in a lot of sweat equity by helping level the front yard and driveway of the new home in the Southwest area of Akron.



Rakes and shovels were put to good use as the volunteers moved and leveled several piles of landscape gravel as well as smoothed out dirt which, come spring, will become a plush, green front yard.

But that was just the morning. After a lunch break, everyone went inside to sand and paint the rooms! As you can see, the event was a lot of fun and everyone had big smiles on their faces!

I am very thankful my employees were able to take part in this worthwhile event.



I am also proud of all of the community outreach my office does. Each month we are in communities throughout Summit County providing safety information and tips to help people stay safe and minimize their chances of becoming a victim of crime.

My office also collaborates and coordinates with many local businesses and organizations to build a better life. Working with Habitat For Humanity is just one way we work to build a better Summit County.

I would also like to congratulate Habitat For Humanity of Summit County on the agency's recent groundbreaking of the Silver Maple Ridge community in Akron. Sixteen homes will be built on Evans Street near Dan Street, the largest project in the agency's history!

As always, stay safe.

Sherri B. Walsh



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 @ProsecutorWalsh

IN THE COMMUNITY

The Summit County Prosecutor’s Office was busy during September, taking part in several events throughout the County.

Prosecutor Walsh was honored to take part in last month’s Drug Court graduation with Summit County Common Pleas Court Judge Joy Oldfield. Congratulations to everyone involved!



Prosecutor’s Office employees provided safety information at two local events targeting seniors.

At the Senior EXPO in Green, about 100 local seniors stopped by our table to discuss the wide variety of programs we offer.



Leslie Knoblauch, who runs the Office’s Take Me Home program, and part-time law clerk Malina Hagan are seen here interacting with those in attendance.

And in Richfield, Prosecutor’s Office employees participated in the “Safe At Home” EXPO held at the Richfield Senior Center.



Seniors learned about ways to be safer at home and in the community.

We also provided lots of safety information and giveaways.

GUILTY VERDICTS

September 2023

Congratulations to the following assistant prosecutors for obtaining convictions at trial.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Matt Kuhn | Zachary Neumann |
| Kevin Mayer | Chuck Roman |
| Joseph McAleese | Brian Stano |
| Jamila Mitchell | Jennie Shuki |
| Seema Misra | |

GREAT JOB PROSECUTORS!

TOUGH PROSECUTIONS

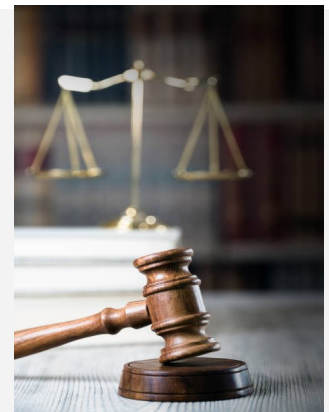
These defendants will be locked up for a lengthy period of time thanks to our dedicated Assistant Prosecutors:

Sydney Powell, 23

- Murder
- **LIFE IN PRISON**

Christopher Blue, 19

- Murder
- **LIFE IN PRISON**





ADAM'S CORNER!

EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

As my buddy Avery slowly eases into retirement, I figured I'd say hi and show you all the fun things I get to do as the Prosecutor's Office new Facility Dog!

This is me with my good friends Brynn and Grover.



We had to get something called re-certified—and we all passed!

Brynn and Grover both work at Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

I've known Brynn for a while. We even graduated together from our training at Canine Companions.

Besides sitting with crime victims and witnesses I get to meet a lot of new friends in the community.



Recently, I got to spend time with my good friend Avery at the Summit County Children's Services employee appreciation picnic.

We had such a good time lying in the grass!

It was really great to be out and about—I hope I get to do it more often!



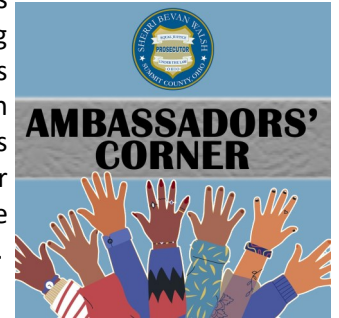
Follow Adam on Social Media at:

Adam—<https://www.facebook.com/AdamVIISCP0>

Instagram—@SCPOAdam



The Summit County Prosecutor's Office "Ambassadors for Equity & Social Justice" was formed to work toward bringing people of different backgrounds and cultures together. Each month the Ambassadors share thoughts in making our community a better place to live. Here is an article from one of the group's members.



Has someone ever told you, "You wouldn't understand"? We might feel the urge to explain to the person everything we've ever learned to prove that we do understand. This is an example of cultural competence. Cultural competence may involve studying other cultural backgrounds to learn their beliefs, language, values, and customs. However, it's impossible to have a strong understanding of every culture in the world.

That's where cultural humility comes in. A blog post from Soundscaping Source titled, "Cultural Humility Vs. Cultural Competence," simply explains this concept. "Cultural humility involves an ongoing process of self-exploration and self-critique combined with a willingness to learn from others. It means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values. It means acknowledging differences and accepting that person for who they are."

So how do we respond when someone tells us we don't understand? First, acknowledge that you may not understand that person's full identity. Next, respond with openness and empathy. A common phrase is to meet someone where they're at, not where you believe they should be. This can help us be more open and empathetic to their beliefs, customs, and values. A simple "tell me more" can let the person know we are open to hearing and learning. Finally, listening to the needs of that individual is crucial when practicing cultural humility. Cultural competence is helpful but can lead us to make overgeneralizations. Actively listening to the person will allow us to take a more individualized approach when addressing their needs.

For more information and resources regarding cultural humility, please visit www.inclusion.uoregon.edu/cultural-humility.



Help Us Go Green!



Contact Melanie Hart at hart@prosecutor.summitoh.net to receive this newsletter by e-mail

TOP COP

CUYAHOGA FALLS DET. JOSEPH BITONG

NOMINATED BY ASST. PROS. SEEMA MISRA & KEVIN MAYER

Murder cases can be the most difficult cases we prosecute. The collection of the evidence, the questioning of witnesses, the tracking down of suspects—it can be a daunting task.



Thankfully the lead detective on a recent case was Cuyahoga Falls Detective Joseph Bitong. His exceptional work was vital in securing a conviction and life sentence. That is why we are nominating Det. Bitong as this month's TOP COP.

Det. Bitong was the lead detective in the May 2022 murder of 23-year-old Giovannie Stanford and the shooting of 22-year-old Dezah Robertson.

Det. Bitong's investigation was incredibly thorough and organized. He followed every single lead, conducted multiple interviews, and executed search warrants on multiple houses, phones, and vehicles.

His investigation did not end even after three people were arrested.

Det. Bitong listened to nearly every single call made by the three suspects while they were in custody in the county jail.

Throughout all of this, Det. Bitong kept in constant contact with prosecutors. As we prepared for trial, Det. Bitong was always willing to go the extra mile. He also did an excellent job testifying at trial.

All of that hard work led to a jury finding 29-year-old Deair Wray guilty of murder. Wray is currently serving a life sentence with his first chance at parole after he has served 29 years in prison.

Co-defendants Durell McDowell and Jameir McDowell pled guilty to lesser charges and agreed to testify against Wray at trial.

Great job and congratulations Det. Bitong!

ST. MARY'S SAFETY SPEECH

Prosecutor Walsh continued her mission to help keep seniors safe by speaking to about 60 people at Hudson's St. Mary's Church.

Prosecutor Walsh provided information on the latest scams targeting our senior population as well as ways to stay safe in the community.

Thank you to St. Mary's Church for inviting us and to those in attendance.



OPEN M

The Summit County Prosecutor's Office is dedicated to making our community a better and safer place to live.

As part of that mission, employees volunteer at many local events. Recently, employees served lunch at Akron's Open M Ministries.

Volunteers served around 100 people. The Summit County Prosecutor's Office will be back at Open M in 2024!



WHY I'M A PROSECUTOR

MICHELLE DRAGO

"Why I'm A Prosecutor" gives our prosecutors the chance to tell their own story and why being a prosecutor is so important to them.

Their dedication to the community, and to finding justice, hasn't changed.

Assistant Prosecutor Michelle Drago, who works in our Child Support Enforcement Agency, talks about why being a prosecutor is so important to her.



• WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF BEING A PROSECUTOR?

The best part of being a prosecutor is walking out of the courthouse knowing that I have done everything that can be done at that moment to help the person who needs help. My role is to do what I can to make the life of a parent and their child more financially stable.

• WHY DID YOU BECOME A PROSECUTOR?

I became a prosecutor following a conversation I had with the son of a good friend of mine in the summer of 2022. At the time he was looking at applying to medical school. We discussed how this was a long-time dream of his and that he shouldn't let anything get in his way. That made me think about my own life.

Although I passed the bar over 20 years ago, being a prosecutor is something I had wanted to do since reading *To Kill A Mockingbird* in the 3rd grade. After years of working in the financial field, I decided it was time to fulfill that life-long dream.

• WHAT'S THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF BEING A PROSECUTOR?

The most difficult part is knowing there is sometimes so much more to do just to make a child's life better. In my opinion, the least a parent can do is to support their child financially. I wish I could do more to help families become more financially stable through our Child Support Enforcement Agency.

You can watch Michelle's complete video on our website, Facebook and YouTube page.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS

The Summit County Prosecutor's Office held another successful "Responding to the Needs of Victims" conference with nearly 300 law enforcement officers, victim advocates, attorneys, and others who work with victims of crime.

Our 8th annual conference brought in Florida Law Enforcement Special Agent Jennifer Spears and Ryan Backmann who discussed his experience as the son of a murder victim.

Thank you to everyone who attended and those who helped make this year's event a huge success!



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