



### **Statement from Gallatin County Attorney Audrey Cromwell**

As the Wardle case remains pending before the District Court, Montana law and prosecutors' Rules of Professional Conduct prohibit me from publicly discussing certain facts or evidence involved.

These rules exist for a reason: to protect the integrity of the process, the rights of everyone involved, and the justice system as a whole - the Attorney General understands that.

What I can discuss is the critical work my office is doing every day to strengthen our prosecutions of intimate partner violence in Gallatin County and ask the public for their continued trust as this case proceeds.

Addressing the public health crisis of domestic violence is one of my highest priorities. When I took office, my colleagues and I discovered over 600 unprosecuted cases - hundreds of them involving sexual assault. When possible and appropriate, my team and I resolved each of those cases. Now, and going forward, all cases brought to my office are addressed in a timely manner - not ignored.

Domestic violence is not an abstract policy issue.

Our office works closely with HAVEN and our law enforcement partners to establish county-wide protocols. We successfully implemented the APR AIS model, an evidence-based tool that helps first responders identify victims who are at the greatest risk of being seriously injured or killed, allowing our community to intervene sooner and connect victims with lifesaving services.

We are currently working on a county-wide strangulation response protocol. Medical research has consistently shown that non-fatal strangulation is one of the strongest predictors that domestic violence will become deadly. Successfully prosecuting these cases requires coordinated work beginning with the 911 call, continuing through medical evaluation, and ending with thorough law enforcement investigation and evidence collection.

Missoula County adopted this type of coordinated protocol in 2022 after recognizing the importance of improving the detection, documentation, and prosecution of strangulation cases.

That protocol includes:

- asking the right questions during the 911 call;
- ensuring appropriate medical evaluation and documentation;
- conducting trauma-informed interviews;
- collecting evidence that accurately reflects the danger posed to victims.

Communities across the country have demonstrated that coordinated strangulation protocols save lives and strengthen criminal prosecutions. The Missoula County Strangulation Protocol is available here: <https://www.missoulacounty.gov/media/htkomreu/2022-strangulation-protocol.pdf>

I remain committed to implementing a similar collaborative model here in Gallatin County, and I call on all County law enforcement agencies; including the Bozeman Police Department, Gallatin County

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Sheriff's Office, Belgrade Police Department, Montana State University Police Department, and every other law enforcement agency serving Gallatin County - to join us in this effort. Protecting victims is not about politics. It is about building the strongest possible cases through the strongest possible investigations.

As one of the few women serving as a county attorney in Montana, I have spent my career listening to survivors whose lives have been shaped by abuse, coercive control, and violence behind closed doors. Those experiences reinforce my belief that we must continue improving our response, not only in the courtroom, but from the moment a victim calls 911.

Every survivor deserves a system that takes these cases seriously. Every law enforcement officer deserves the training and tools necessary to build the strongest possible investigation. Every prosecutor deserves the evidence necessary to seek justice. And every member of our community deserves confidence that decisions are made based on the law, the evidence, and the ethical obligations that govern prosecutors.

That work is harder than issuing press statements. It requires collaboration, evidence-based practices, and a shared commitment to protecting victims.

My office will continue doing that work every day.