

AUSTIN KNUDSEN



STATE OF MONTANA

July 8, 2026

Audrey Cromwell  
Gallatin County Attorney  
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Via email: Audrey.Cromwell@gallatin.mt.gov  
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County Attorney Cromwell,

I am contacting you regarding the Christopher Wardle criminal prosecution case in Gallatin County. No doubt you are aware of this case, as it has garnered much media and public attention. My office has been inundated with public communications and requests about this case since late last week, when news of a plea deal from your office became public. Your constituents are incredibly upset, and I am being implored to exercise supervisory control on this case to “undo” this plea agreement. I will note that my office was neither apprised of nor involved in this case until both your office and the Defendant Wardle signed and filed this plea agreement with the District Court. Hence, my office is unable to intervene and stop this plea agreement; only the District Court judge can reject the agreement at this point.

To say the least, I am concerned that a defendant with conditions violations from a previous Partner Family Member Assault (PFMA) conviction, as well as multiple new PFMA, Partner Strangulation, Witness Tampering, and Destruction of a Communication Device charges, was offered a deal to plea down to one felony Witness Tampering and one violation of a protection order charge. Even more concerning is the 2 ½ year suspended sentence and no jail time that his deal contemplates.

I am also troubled that the Bozeman Police Protective Association took the extraordinary step of publicly commenting on social media and condemning this plea agreement as business as usual from your office. According to the BPPA’s July 3, 2026 Facebook post, “...similar plea deals and case dismissals around strangulation have been occurring in our jurisdiction.” This indicates a dangerous lack in local law enforcement trust in your office. Such a lack of trust inevitably leads to low officer morale and then a decline in serious law enforcement investigations, due to those officers’ belief that you will simply ignore their work.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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Your political social media account touts how your team “now trains in strangulation, sexual assault, domestic violence, DUI enforcement...” etc. This case contemplates multiple of these very charges, yet the Wardle plea agreement hardly amounts to a slap on the wrist. It is not hyperbolic to suggest that you are sending a very dangerous message to domestic abusers in Gallatin County: that Gallatin County tolerates this kind of horrendous behavior and that domestic abusers will not be held to account for their crimes.

As a former County Attorney, I understand that shifting and/or bad facts and circumstances often dictate the outcome of plea deal. No doubt, the death of the victim/lead witness in this case - in another instance of Wardle violating court conditions - makes confrontation difficult for a prosecution. However, your lack of transparency in the Wardle case has left your constituents: 1) in the dark; 2) angry; and 3) clamoring to my office for relief.

Pursuant to Montana statute, I hereby request that you submit to me a written report, no later than by July 31, 2026, detailing the criteria used by the Gallatin County Attorney’s Office to determine when, and under what circumstances, a domestic violence/partner family member assault/partner strangulation defendant is offered a plea bargain. Additionally, I hereby request a list, no later than by July 31, 2026, of all Gallatin County District Court domestic violence/partner family member assault/partner strangulation prosecutions that have been disposed of by your office through either dismissal or plea bargain, and each case’s final court dispositions, from January 3, 2022 to present.

With great concern,



Austin Knudsen  
Montana Attorney General