

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL



P.O. Box 30217
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909

BILL SCHUETTE
ATTORNEY GENERAL

July 17, 2017

Sheriff Kelly J. Hanson
Huron County Sheriff
120 South Heisterman Street
Bad Axe, MI 48413-1399

Re: Allegations of willful neglect of duty by public officials

Dear Sheriff Hanson:

Thank you for bringing to our attention allegations of possible willful neglect of duty by a number of public officials. We have thoroughly investigated those allegations and have determined that they do not merit us bringing any criminal charges.

Upon taking office, Attorney General Schuette identified public corruption cases as a priority for his administration. Attorney General Schuette has repeatedly brought charges against state and local officials and obtained convictions against them for everything ranging from embezzlement, racketeering, bribery, falsifying police reports, and smuggling drugs into prison. He has not been afraid to prosecute corruption when he sees it, and has not been intimidated at the thought of going head-to-head with public officials, no matter how popular, who fail to follow the law and who violate the trust of the very people they are elected to serve. As you are aware, Attorney General Bill Schuette created a new Public Integrity Unit in early 2011 to ramp up this fight against corruption in state and local government.

It is for these reasons that Attorney General Schuette took very seriously your allegations that there were a number of public officials who illegally colluded to protect the son of Huron County Judge, Richard Knoblock, (Michael Knoblock) who had been arrested for operating a motor vehicle while impaired – high blood alcohol level and three counts of child endangerment in November of 2014. Our best investigators and criminal attorneys conducted a full investigation of the allegations. They interviewed, and in some cases, re-interviewed witnesses, examined documents, and discussed the evidence. Ultimately, after discussing

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their investigation with their superiors, including myself, we determined that there was no basis for bringing charges against anyone in this matter.

You seem to believe that the purported willful neglect of duty occurred in this case in part because of how we appoint special prosecutors in the State of Michigan and that, once appointed, the special prosecutor has no accountability. In the end our investigation found that nothing improper occurred in how the special prosecutor was appointed in this case.

You indicted to Special Agent David Dwyre in February of 2015 that you were unhappy with that process and felt that there was no accountability. The Attorney General is a part of that process and I can assure you that each and every time a special prosecutor is appointed in a case, it is done so in a legal, ethical, and accountable manner.

Our investigation revealed that the Huron County Prosecutor, Timothy Rutkowski believed that he should not preside over the case because of all of the cases that he handled before Judge Knoblock, Michael's father. It is not surprising to us that Rutkowski would not want to try the son of the sole circuit judge sitting in his county and would consequently seek to disqualify himself from the case.

Our investigation further revealed that, in preparation to file a petition to for prosecutor disqualification, Rutkowski contacted the prosecutor of adjoining Sanilac County, James Young, and asked him if he would take the case as a special prosecutor. This is not at all uncommon. In fact, I have personally seen many requests for prosecutor disqualification where the requesting prosecutor indicating in his petition that he has contacting a nearby prosecutor and obtained her assent to take over a case as a special prosecutor. So rather than cast suspicion on the special prosecutor process in this case, it demonstrates that this case simply followed the norm.

Moreover, as already noted above, our extensive investigation into the matter revealed that, in our opinion, there was no misconduct by any public official in the handling of this matter after the special prosecutor was appointed. In other words, we could find no basis for bringing any criminal charges against anyone in this matter, whether in the process of appointing a special prosecutor or in how this case was handled and ultimately disposed of.

I hope this letter explains our position in this matter, and why we find no wrongdoing in the handling of this matter much less criminal conduct. Moreover, we hope that our closing of this investigation will lead to a reconciliation between yourself and Prosecutor Rutkowski if that has not already occurred. It is very important that the Prosecutor and Sheriff of a county work together as full partners in law enforcement.

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Please do not hesitate to contact me if you should have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of John S. Pallas, appearing as "JSP".

John S. Pallas
Criminal Practice and Victims'
Rights Manager / Criminal Appellate
Division Chief
517/373-4875

JSP/jsp