

Ozaukee County DA Admits "Terrible Outcome" In Lenient Sentence For Man Involved in Multi-County Crime Spree

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

A Sauk County man involved in separate police chases in two local counties, one of which left another driver injured and the other of which saw two children abandoned, was sentenced to minimal time in Waukesha County. Ozaukee County District Attorney Adam Gerol, who allowed all of his county's cases in this situation, to be consolidated in Waukesha County tells me the sentenced are a "terrible outcome" and he regrets the decision to consolidate the cases.

Richard Cowgill, 43, who has an extensive prior criminal record, was arrested in Ozaukee County in 2019 after a police chase in which he allegedly abandoned his two small children in his car, fled the scene and hid out in a field. He was eventually caught. While on bail on those charges, Cowgill racked up many more in Waukesha County including retail theft, drug charges and ultimately numerous felonies in connection with a chase that ended in a crash that totaled another man's vehicle and left him injured. He was charged in all of his Waukesha County cases last year.

Gerol, the Ozaukee prosecutor, tells me he agreed to have all of the cases consolidated in Waukesha County, a decision he acknowledges was a mistake. The case ended up in front of Laura Lau, a Waukesha County judge known for soft sentences. Lau sentenced Cowgill to three and a half years in prison on one count and one year on another but then credited Cowgill with 414 days time served for time he has been in the Waukesha County Jail. Lau's sentence is exactly what was recommended by Waukesha County Assistant District Attorney Randy Sitzberger.

Numerous charges were dismissed as part of the plea bargain. The man injured in the Waukesha County crash tells me he has spent one year in physical therapy and lost his vehicle. He's very unhappy with the outcome of the case.

The Ozaukee County chase received statewide attention after Cowgill allegedly abandoned the children on a freeway ramp in Mequon after driving away from a traffic stop. He was found in a field on Shady Lane in Mequon after a manhunt. Cowgill had an extensive record prior to that incident covering both Wisconsin and Texas and dating back a decade.

Cowgill was freed on bail by Ozaukee County Judge Sandy Williams and didn't show up for a court date in January of last year. There was a warrant for his arrest when he was involved in the chase and multiple offenses in Waukesha County in May of last year.

The judge who handed down the sentence, Laura Lau, has not responded to my questions. In her defense, the sentence she gave Cowgill is all that the Waukesha County prosecutor asked for. It appears as though Ozaukee County's case was treated by Waukesha authorities as insignificant

In Ozaukee County, DA Gerol tells me this sounds like a "terrible result" and said normally consolidating cases into one county is an efficient way of disposing them. In this case, the Waukesha County officials essentially ignored the serious crimes in Ozaukee County and cut a plea deal on their own cases. If you add up all the charges Cowgill initially faced, he ended up receiving only a small fraction of the time for which he was eligible.

I asked Ozaukee County's Gerol why he would ever trust any of his county's cases to Waukesha County, given that county has two lenient judges in Lau and Ralph Ramirez. Gerol said it hasn't been a problem in the past.

It's a problem now.

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