

A LETTER FROM YOUR STATE ATTORNEY:

Dear friends,

I am pleased to share with you the 2020 Office Report. I'm so fortunate to be able to lead a team of hard-working and dedicated public servants. Our prosecutors, investigators and staff are among the best in Florida. Because of our strong partnership with law enforcement in the Tenth Judicial Circuit, we've enjoyed yet another year of record low crime rates. In 2019, we found new ways to engage with the citizens we serve; including the successful inaugural SAO Citizens Academy. We look forward to our second Citizens Academy this Spring and many other exciting programs in the year ahead.

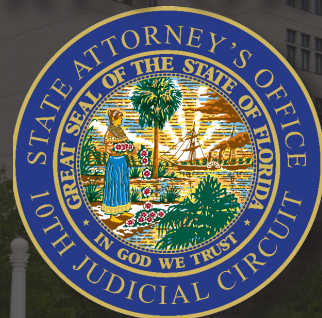
I am confident you will enjoy reading this Office Report. I am thankful for the opportunity to fight for justice for the victims of crime and work hard to keep our Circuit a great place to live, work and visit.

Sincerely,



BRIAN HAAS

2020 OFFICE REPORT



BRIAN HAAS
STATE ATTORNEY
10TH CIRCUIT
*Polk, Hardee and
Highlands Counties*



THE TENTH CIRCUIT



HARDEE



POLK



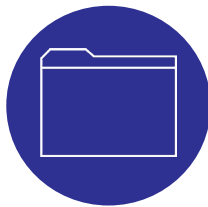
HIGHLANDS

The Office of the State Attorney, 10th Judicial Circuit, represents the people of the State of Florida in all criminal prosecutions in Polk, Highlands and Hardee Counties. This office also advises the grand juries for those three counties.

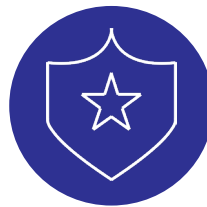
The Office prosecutes cases ranging from misdemeanor to felonies. In 2019, the Office had:



**97 Assistant
State Attorneys**



**9 investigators
& 114 clerical staff**



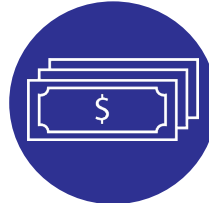
**Cases from
20 agencies**



**40,067
cases handled**



**371 cases tried
before a jury**



**\$79 M collected
in child support**

VICTIMS SERVICES DIVISION FORMED

Our office is committed to serving the victims of the Tenth Judicial Circuit.

In 2019, to improve the service we provide, a new Victims Service Division was formed.

Through a partnership with the Florida Attorney General's Office our office was able to secure funding to assist in creating this unit.

Members of the Victims Service Division's primary duty is assisting victims in their journey through the criminal justice system.

We are able to provide assistance to the victims by explaining the legal procedures and available resources, along with encouraging and supporting the victim through the court process.

Our prosecutors, investigators and staff are dedicated to serving the victims of crime and seeking justice on their behalf.

To find out more information about this service, visit our website www.sao10.com or call 863-534-4040.

HOMICIDE DIRECTOR RECEIVES STATEWIDE HONOR

Assistant State Attorney Paul Wallace was named the prosecutor of the year for the State of Florida at the summer conference of the Florida Prosecuting Attorney's Association.

Paul, a Haines City native, started his career with the State Attorney's Office in January of 1979 after graduating from Stetson University of Law.

After working in several divisions of the office in 1987, Paul returned to the trial division where he prosecuted all first-degree murder cases.

Over the next 30 years, Paul continued to work in the homicide division where, in addition to handling a case load, he assisted in training attorneys that were new to the division.

Even after his retirement in 2014, Paul continued serving the citizens of the Tenth Judicial Circuit. There were several cases that he was unable to see to conclusion before his retirement.

He told State Attorney Brian Haas he would continue to work at the office, on a volunteer basis, to see these cases through. During this time Paul carried a case load equal to that of a full-time homicide prosecutor, as a volunteer.

In August of 2018, the director of the homicide division, who Paul had trained, was appointed as a County Judge. This left a void in one of, if not the most important divisions in the office.

State Attorney Haas asked Paul if he would come back to work full-time as the director of the homicide division. Paul agreed to come back to work



to help fill the gap left by the judge's appointment. Over Paul's more than forty-year career he has prosecuted seventy-seven first degree murder trials. Of the seventy-seven trials, seventy-two were found guilty.

Paul will continue to mentor younger assistant state attorneys, preparing them for tough

cases and retrials in the spotlight.

Younger colleagues have described Paul as cool under pressure, and someone who has organizational skills "second to none." One assistant state attorney in his division said, "He has confidence and faith that the right thing will happen."

In addition to his dedication to the pursuit of justice, Paul is just as dedicated to his church. In 1989, Paul and his wife began going on mission trips.

Much like his calling to be a prosecutor, Paul had a calling to help those less fortunate than him.

He has been to Central and South America and East Africa. From building churches and schools, teaching educational programs and spreading the word of God, Paul does it all.

Paul is the epitome of what a career prosecutor should be, dedicated to the pursuit of justice, and to helping his fellow man.

When Paul finally decides to retire, the Tenth Judicial Circuit and the State of Florida will suffer a great loss. However, Paul will leave a legacy for future prosecutors to live up to.

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY



ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY



State Attorney Brian Haas was the keynote speaker at the Lakeland NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet in April, 2019.



In May, 2019, State Attorney Brian Haas was the featured speaker at the Polk County Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial Service.

ENGAGING OUR STUDENTS



FORMER PROSECUTORS TAKE THE BENCH

We were proud to watch Judge Sharon Franklin, former chief of the division that oversees crimes against children, fill a circuit judge vacancy in the 10th Judicial Circuit.

In addition, Judge Lori Winstead, who oversaw the economic crimes division for the State Attorney's Office, was sworn in as a new county judge to fill Franklin's vacancy. Congratulations to the two new judges!



TWO SENTENCED IN SEPARATE DEATH PENALTY CASES

In March, Johnathan Alcegaire was sentenced for shooting and killing three people in a home invasion in 2016.

The 30-year-old Miami resident was one of three men who traveled to Lakeland for a drug-related home invasion robbery. He then murdered 24-year-old David Washington, 31-year-old Stacy Branch, and 23-year-old Angelica Castro.

The same jurors who convicted Alcegaire in September, unanimously recommended that he should be sentenced to death. Circuit Judge Jalal Harb handed down the death sentences.

Alcegaire was convicted of three counts of first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, burglary of a dwelling with an assault.



Johnathan Alcegaire, 30, of Miami.



Michael Gordon, 39, of Lakeland.

Michael Gordon, 39, was convicted of fatally stabbing Patricia Moran, 72, and her daughter, Deborah Royal, 51 in 2015.

The women lived in the Chanler Ridge subdivision in Haines City.

After killing Moran and Royal, Gordon stole their car and crashed it through their garage door.

He was arrested soon after the crash. Devonere McCune, and Terrell Williams, two co-defendants, have already been convicted of murder in the case. Jovan Lamb is scheduled to stand trial for murder in 2021.

Gordon was convicted in February 2019. Circuit Judge Jalal Harb sentenced Gordon to die for killing the women in February 2020.

PROTECTING SENIORS FROM SCAMS



State Attorney Brian Haas regularly speaks to senior communities about ways to prevent scams and fraud from occurring.

He has been visiting communities across this circuit to talk about ways they can protect their personal information from criminals. He discusses recent phone, email, and computer scams that target residents. Since the program started in 2017, thousands of senior citizens in the Circuit have been educated on how not to fall victim to scams.

If you would like Mr. Haas to speak to your community, please call 863-534-4801.



PRE-ARREST DIVERSION



In 2019, we continued to expand our Pre-Arrest Diversion program.

This program provides law enforcement with the option to cite a first-time non-violent offender with a direct referral to the State Attorney's Office Diversion program.

This option requires the first time offender to admit guilt, receive sanctions, but avoids an arrest record.

The early results have been very positive, and we look forward to expanding the program Circuit-wide in 2020.

Some charges that could qualify for this program are: possession of cannabis, possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of cannabis resin, petty theft, worthless check, failure to redeliver and dumping.

STATE ATTORNEY BRIAN HAAS PRESENTS

The 10th Judicial Circuit's Inaugural

CITIZENS



ACADEMY

Ever wonder what it's like to be a prosecutor?

The first Citizens Academy in 2019 gave 25 residents that opportunity by providing an inside look at the criminal justice system and how a case is prosecuted.

Participants were selected for the inaugural class after completing a competitive application process.

Topics covered during the academy include the criminal justice system as a whole, the jury trial process, homicide investigations, crimes against children, vehicular crimes, cyber crimes and more.

After nine weeks of working alongside assistant state

attorneys, participants were involved in a mock trial in a courtroom. A graduation ceremony was held at the end of the course.

The State Attorney's Office will launch its second Citizens Academy this spring.

"We're excited to again welcome residents interested in learning about the judicial system, how prosecutors prepare for cases, and the actual process of a jury trial from start to finish," State Attorney Brian Haas said.

Those interested in applying can go to www.sao10.com. The courses will be from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Thursdays.



LAW ENFORCEMENT RECOGNITION

State Attorney Brian Haas recognized law enforcement in 2019 during the office's annual awards ceremony.

“We are blessed in the Tenth Circuit to have many wonderful officers and deputies. Each day and night, they put on their uniforms to protect us, not knowing if they’ll ever return home,” Mr. Haas said. “They investigate cases and do not give up until every lead is pursued and every angle is worked.”



DETECTIVES RONALD BRACKLEY AND MICHAEL BROOKS



Polk County Sheriff's Detective Ronald Brackley was honored for his work investigating a hit-and-run crash that killed a driver and seriously injured a fellow deputy. Assistant State Attorney Mikaela Perry described Brackley as the difference-maker in the case. He worked tirelessly as he prepared for the trial, meeting with Perry numerous times. The preparation paid off.

He was a flawless witness during the trial. Charles Lewis, who left a party after a night of drinking alcohol, was convicted.



Polk County Sheriff's Detective Michael Brooks was honored for his work in the investigation and prosecution of Jerry Salter. Salter started molesting a child, who was five-years-old. A difficult case, it was tried twice.

After the first trial ended with a hung jury, Detective Brooks investigated further and made the case even stronger for the second trial. The defendant was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Detective Brooks was dedicated to seeking justice and it paid off.

JUVENILE CRIME: AVOIDING ARREST RECORDS

In June 2017, this office collaborated with multiple Polk agencies to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in an effort to minimize the criminal history of juveniles who commit eligible, non-serious criminal acts. Before the MOU was implemented, all juvenile defendants received a formal arrest record.

Since the program went live on June 19, 2017, more than 2,000 juveniles have been entered on the “Prevention Web.” These juveniles will not receive a formal arrest record, as long as they successfully complete Teen Court.

- Our circuit ranks near the top of the state in the area of juvenile program participation.
- The statistics for 2019 substantially increased for juveniles in diversion programs.
- In 2020, the program will expand to Hardee County.

THANKS FOR YOUR SERVICE

After nearly 30 years, Pete Mislovic has hung up the Ohio State lanyard.

Mislovic, 67, will leave a legacy of mentoring young, up and coming lawyers into successful prosecutors, judges and defense attorneys.

“Pete has been such an important part of our team for many years,” State Attorney Brian Haas said. “We will miss him a great deal, but hope he enjoys his well-deserved retirement.”

Born in Hamilton, Ohio, Mislovic and family left the small town in 1969 for New Jersey after his father received a promotion and transfer from the paper company where he worked.

Living near New York City, it was a culture shock for the 16-year-old Mislovic who was used to having short haircuts and wearing button down shirts. “It took about a year to get used to it,” Mislovic said.

But soon Mislovic adjusted, returned to Ohio to attend The Ohio State University in the early 1970s, then enrolled in Stetson University Law School.

He graduated from law school in 1978, worked in Tallahassee for a short stint, then was drawn to Lakeland because his brother, Joe, and sister-in-law, Kathy, lived there.

Mislovic began a job in criminal defense and family law with a firm run by Greg Ruster and the late Ted Weeks. After several years there, Mislovic started his own firm, but an overload of paperwork prevented him from practicing law as much as he would have liked.

“I wanted more trial experience,” Mislovic said.

Former State Attorney Jerry Hill hired him, and Mislovic worked his way through the misdemeanor division to felony, then to overseeing the Lakeland division.

In June of 1997, Hill named him chief of misdemeanor intake.

He loves the job, describing working with incoming lawyers as invigorating.

He’s been around some good ones.

State Attorney Haas worked as an intern in misdemeanor intake. A number of circuit and county judges worked for him or along his side in misdemeanor.



He has a bit of advice for the new lawyers: Try not to get too overworked with the massive number of cases, pay close attention to potential technicalities in cases that may arise and don’t let either the highs or lows in the job impact you too much.

What will Mislovic miss the most? All the people he worked with on a daily basis.

“Everybody I run into has been fun to work with,” Mislovic said.

The people will miss him too.

In December, current and former colleagues, judges, and family members packed into a courtroom to wish Mislovic well.

So what are his plans for retirement?

Spending more time with his wife, Piper, children and grandkids, and some golfing and fishing. One thing he won’t be doing is attending Ohio State University football games.

Wearing an Ohio State tie and the lanyard, Mislovic said he’s been bad luck for the Buckeyes since he’s lived in Florida.

“I’m O-for-Florida,” Mislovic said, describing how it was tough to tolerate Florida Gator fans in 2006 and 2007 after the team defeated Ohio State in the football and basketball championship games that season.

“It was unbearable,” he said.

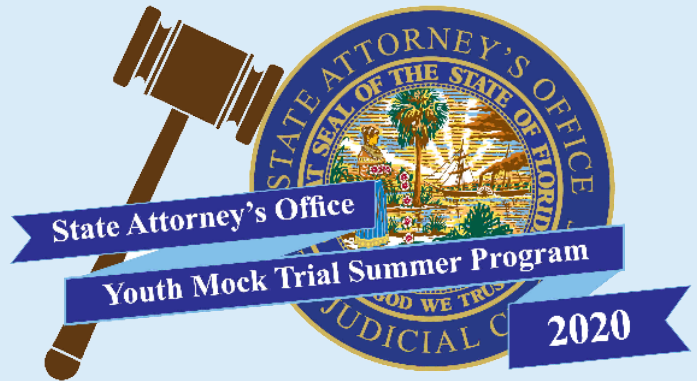
YOUTH MOCK TRIAL SUMMER PROGRAM

In June, high school students joined the State Attorney's Office for the annual summer mock trial program, which covered the inner workings of cases and how prosecutors prepare for trials.

Each student was assigned a role in the courtroom, from prosecutors to bailiff, witnesses to judge. Students worked alongside prosecutors to prepare opening and closing statements and discuss best practices for examining and cross-examining witnesses.

During the mock trial, students presented their opening statements, questioned witnesses, and gave closing arguments in a courtroom with a jury made up of employees from the office.

The fourth-annual mock trial program will occur again this summer. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter and check www.SAO10.com for registration information in April.



HIGH-PROFILE CASES

Janitor sentenced to 15 years for lewd conduct with 6-year-old girl



Baez-Ortiz, 50, of Davenport

Assistant State Attorney Lauren Randall told jurors that Jose Baez-Ortiz worked as a school janitor and had already been chastised twice by the school's principal for being overly friendly with students.

Baez-Ortiz was specifically instructed to stay out of the cafeteria while students ate lunch. On April 17, 2017, Baez-Ortiz walked into the cafeteria and sat down next to a 6-year-old girl. A worker in the cafeteria saw him sitting next to the girl with his hand up her skirt, rubbing her thigh.

Baez-Ortiz was sentenced to 15 years in prison followed by 15 years of probation.



Assistant State Attorney Lauren Randall

Man who assaulted officer, led authorities on 100-mph chase sentenced



Pelham, 35, of Arcadia

Daniel Pelham led police from Wauchula north to Polk County. Pelham drove on the wrong side of the road and through residents' groves in Hardee County.

He reached speeds of 100-mph, ran multiple stop signs and red lights during the chase. The hour-long pursuit ended in a GEICO parking lot in South Lakeland when Polk and Hardee deputies were able to stop Pelham's vehicle and surround him. On Jan. 11, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Pelham drove his vehicle in a reckless manner that put law enforcement and members of the community at risk. Pelham is a prison releasee re-offender and habitual felony offender.



Assistant State Attorney Michael Nutter

Lakeland man convicted of killing his baby



Graham, 27, of Lakeland

Robert Graham told law enforcement he slammed his baby on the bed three to four times and shook him for about four minutes.

After about two hours of deliberation Jan. 23, jurors convicted Graham of manslaughter and child abuse.

Assistant State Attorney Ashley McCarthy told jurors Graham admitted he was playing with his son Princeton on Dec. 28, 2014, but was "overly rough." The next morning, Princeton was limp and had stopped breathing.

Doctors later discovered he had retinal hemorrhages, injuries indicative of the baby being shaken. Graham was sentenced to 15 years in prison.



Assistant State Attorney Ashley McCarthy

Bartow man sentenced to life for 2016 murder



Manns, 28, of Bartow

In an interview with law enforcement, Victor Manns admitted to shooting Jeff Morrow after Manns stole an iPhone from a friend of Morrow's.

Jurors found Manns guilty of first-degree murder, robbery with a firearm and burglary with a firearm.

Assistant State Attorney Steve Alamia told jurors the altercation occurred in the parking lot of a Lakeland Family Dollar. Blake Fitez and Morrow met Manns in the parking lot about 10 p.m., and they showed Manns the phone. Manns reached into the truck, snatched the iPhone from Fitez's hand, and took off running across the parking lot. Shots were fired and seconds later Fitez saw Morrow on the ground.



Assistant State Attorney Steven Alamia

HIGH-PROFILE CASES

Lakeland vet convicted of cruelty to animals



Nichols, 68, of Lakeland

Gail Nichols was sentenced to 90 days in jail and 10 years of probation for four animal cruelty convictions. The cruelty cases centered around a lack of treatment of her miniature horses. “She knew exactly what was going on,” Assistant State Attorney Jessica Fisher said as she described some of the injuries to Circuit Judge Wayne Durden. “She took an oath as a vet and there was a lack of simple, basic care.” As part of the sentence, Durden said Nichols cannot own or care for any animals once she is out of jail. Three of the horses had to be euthanized after they were found to be in such poor condition. Nichols was convicted after jurors deliberated for four hours.



Assistant State Attorney Jessica Fisher

Lakeland man sentenced to life for sexually assaulting 8-year-old girl



Baker, 49, of Lakeland

Gary Lee Baker, Jr. was sentenced to life in prison after he was convicted on charges he molested a child under 12 years old. The victim, now 21, told detectives Baker began raping her when she was 8 years old. A six-member jury took one hour to convict Baker. Assistant State Attorney Monica Smith talked about a controlled phone call, describing a statement Baker made to the victim about her inability to prove anything if she went to the police. She told jurors the phone call pointed to Baker’s guilt. “Is that a reasonable response from somebody who didn’t actually do what he’s being accused of? No, because he did do it,” said Smith.



Assistant State Attorney Monica Smith

Sebring man sentenced to 145 years in prison for possession of child porn



Queen, 51, of Sebring

The case began in 2017, when an online company sent a tip to the FBI about a user visiting child pornography sites and downloading child pornography. The FBI tracked the IP address to Christopher Ray Queen’s home and began a deeper inquiry with the Highlands County Sheriff’s Office. Months later, the HCSO executed a search warrant, found that Queen was in possession of at least one thousand child pornographic images and arrested him. Assistant State Attorney Richard Castillo said it was one of the more disturbing cases he’s worked, describing numerous graphic images of young children found on Queen’s computer.



Assistant State Attorney Richard Castillo

Appeals court affirms conviction, judge orders Lakeland man to serve sentence



Halstead, 26, of Lakeland

Dustin Halstead was found guilty of vehicular homicide in 2018, but the 2nd District Court of Appeals ordered that Halstead be allowed to post bail as appellate judges considered the appeal. In July, the appeals court rejected the appeal, resulting in the judge ordering him to begin serving an 11-year sentence for vehicular homicide and leaving the scene of a crash. Assistant State Attorney Jennifer Swenson prosecuted the case. Halstead killed the victim on July 23, 2014 when he veered off the road into a construction zone, knocked over construction cones and slammed into the man. His body was thrown 80 feet. Police investigated extensively. Through DNA evidence, the victim’s blood was found on the hood of Halstead’s Jeep.



Assistant State Attorney Jennifer Swenson

HIGH-PROFILE CASES

Lake Wales man sentenced for attacking police



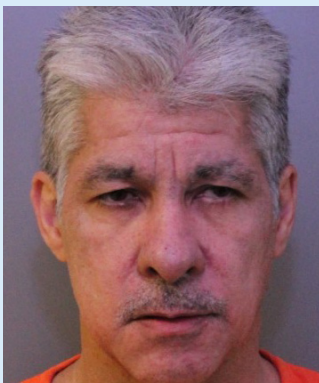
Heyward, 40, of Lake Wales

Jurors deliberated for 20 minutes on charges of battery on a law enforcement officer, making threats and other related charges. Maurice Heyward became violent with Lake Wales Police officers, causing one to fall into and damage one of the department's Ford Explorers. "I'm going to kill y'all," Heyward yelled at the officers as they handcuffed him. After deliberating, a jury found Heyward guilty as charged. A judge sentenced Heyward to five years in prison. This was not Heyward's first run-in with the law. Heyward previously served 15 years in prison for three armed robberies.



Assistant State Attorney Joe Concepcion

Orlando man convicted of lewd battery, traveling to meet minor



Mujica, 55, of Orlando

An Orlando man who had lengthy sexually explicit text exchanges with a Polk Sheriff's detective posing as a 14-year-old girl then traveled 30 miles to meet the teen faces up to 30 years in prison. Sentencing has been scheduled for later this year for Joseph Mujica, 55. Mujica was convicted of two second degree felonies, traveling to meet a minor and attempted lewd battery. A six-member jury deliberated for one hour before reaching a verdict. During the trial, Assistant State Attorney Jake Orr described sexually explicit correspondence in 2018 on MocoSpace, a social networking site, between Mujica and the undercover Sheriff's detective posing as a girl named, "KT."



Assistant State Attorney Jacob Orr

Winter Haven man sentenced to 25 years for molesting 3 girls



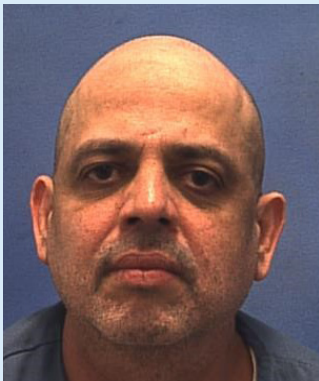
Whitchard, 32, of W. Haven

David Kelly Whitchard pleaded guilty to sexually molesting three girls on numerous occasions in 2017. The girls ranged in age from 8 to 11 years old. In December 2017, Whitchard checked into Winter Haven Hospital to tell staff that for the last year he had been molesting three children. Winter Haven Police were called to the hospital where Whitchard confessed. Whitchard continued telling a detective that he had a drinking problem and felt remorseful for what he had done to the children. Whitchard was later arrested. Assistant State Attorney Randall Daugustinis prosecuted the case.



Assistant State Attorney Randall Daugustinis

Sebring man sentenced to life for sexually assaulting girl



Sanchez, 53, of Sebring

Jose Angel Sanchez, 53, was found guilty by a jury of two counts of sexual battery after jurors deliberated for about an hour. County Court Judge Anthony Ritenour recently sentenced Sanchez to two separate life sentences for each count. Assistant State Attorney Courtney Lenhart prosecuted the case. Lenhart told jurors how the victim reported the sexual abuse by writing a letter to a teacher. The victim said abuse began when she was seven and continued till she was 14.



Assistant State Attorney Courtney Lenhart

HIGH-PROFILE CASES

Teen sentenced for beating his mother with baseball bat



Gravitt, 19, of Lakeland

A 19-year-old Lakeland man was sentenced to five years in prison after severely beating his mother with an aluminum baseball bat inside their home. His mother had told him he could no longer speak with his girlfriend.

Ray Gravitt, who was 16 when he struck Kelly Rayn, was convicted of attempted first-degree murder.

Jurors took 55 minutes to convict Gravitt.

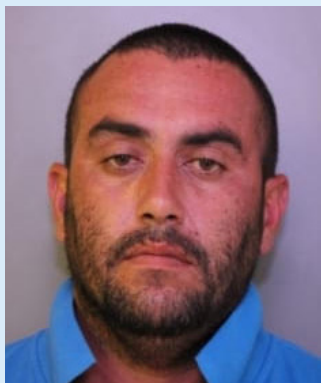
Assistant State Attorney Bill Beaver prosecuted the case.

He described to jurors how on April 3, 2016, neighbors heard Rayn scream for help. When they ran next door, they assumed a dog was attacking the woman. Instead, they saw Gravitt pulling Rayn, bloodied and beaten, by her hair.



Assistant State Attorney Bill Beaver

Lakeland man sentenced to life for sexually assaulting 12-year-old girl



Vargas, 39, of Lakeland

Jurors took 80 minutes in October to convict Jose Vargas of sexually assaulting the girl.

Vargas, 39, of Lakeland, was sentenced to life in prison in November.

Vargas and his lawyer asked for leniency, but Assistant State Attorney Courtney Durden said Florida statute required a sentence of life.

The case broke in September 2016, when the victim told her teacher about repeated sexual assaults. The teacher then notified the Polk County Sheriff's Office. Durden proved to jurors that DNA evidence linked Vargas to the assault.



Assistant State Attorney Courtney Durden

Lakeland man who fired at deputies sentenced to life in prison



Imhoff, 34, of Lakeland

Joshua Imhoff received a life sentence for the charges of seven counts of attempted murder of a law enforcement officer.

Imhoff, 34, was convicted in November after jurors deliberated for about 90 minutes.

Imhoff led deputies on a chase on State Road 33, was struck by a deputy's cruiser when the deputy attempted to stop him, then later tried to run away after stop sticks caused the tires on his truck to deflate. Imhoff got out of his truck and started firing shots at deputies. The incident started in Davenport about 4 a.m. on Jan. 12, 2018 when Imhoff began exchanging Facebook messages with his ex-girlfriend. He became angry when she told him that she couldn't see his child at that particular time.



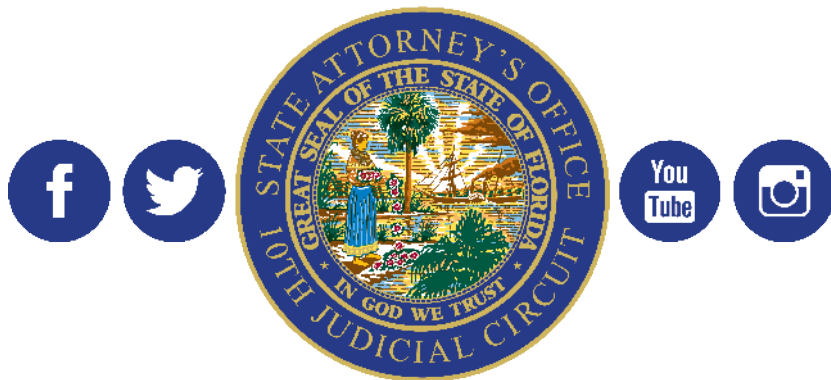
Assistant State Attorney Seth Solomon





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