

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