



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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March 31, 2023

RESPONSE TO INVESTIGATION BY EAU CLAIRE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

I was appointed special prosecutor by Eau Claire District Attorney Peter Rindal to review this case for criminal charges. After reviewing the report from the Eau Claire Sheriff's Office regarding the Human Service Department, I am declining to issue any criminal charges. The ECSO provided me with numerous materials including a lengthy summary of their investigation and an audit done by accounting firm WIPFLI. While I can agree there were issues in Eau Claire County Human Services regarding some of the accounting records and the handling of finances, I found no facts that were deserving of a criminal offense, especially considering the burden of proving a crime beyond a reasonable doubt.

I commend the ECSO for their thoroughness and dedication to the investigation. Having seen many embezzlement and fraud cases over my career, I can see why they felt there were "red flags" raised by several county board members which warranted further investigation. It seems there existed a lack of trust and transparency between the County Board, administrator, Human Services, and the Sheriff's Office which aggravated the situation and made the investigation necessary.

I have no comment on whether internal policies, ethics rules, or personnel issues need to be addressed. I was only reviewing the case for violations of criminal law and I have found none worthy of pursuing. Where there existed even a possibility of pursuing a criminal charge, I considered the fact that it appeared nobody profited personally from any funds or misused taxpayer funds to enrich themselves. (Other than one employee who had already been convicted in Eau Claire County).

I believe a jury would not convict an employee of a crime when there is no personal gain or intentional misuse of funds for some illegal motive.

I hope that this decision ending the criminal investigation into individuals in Eau Claire County can begin to heal what seems to be an environment lacking cooperation and transparency both within the levels of government and amongst the departments. It is obvious from the e-mails and messages in the report this entire process of the investigation has taken a toll on the morale and working environment of the entire county government. Hopefully the County Board can rectify any shortcomings revealed in the report and begin to move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Gruenke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tim" and last name "Gruenke" clearly distinguishable.

Tim Gruenke

District Attorney