

Stanalonis Disputes Attacks



Photo By Carrie Munn

Judge David Densford



Photo By Frank Marquart

Joseph Stanalonis

By Guy Leonard
Staff Writer

In the days leading up to Tuesday's primary election, which could decide in one day who will sit as one of three Circuit Court judges, Assistant State's Attorney Joseph Stanalonis is disputing claims that he lacks experience in the courtroom and has a mediocre track record when it comes to prosecuting serious felony cases.

Stanalonis referenced a campaign ad purchased by incumbent Judge David Densford that includes statements from two former local prosecutors attacking Stanalonis' record as a prosecutor.

"Since 1996, Mr. Stanalonis has only tried six jury trials, three of which were losses ... Mr. Stanalonis' claim that he has tried more cases than any other prosecutor is patently false," former local prosecutors Frank Cubero and Christina Taylor wrote in a letter sent to local media, of which sections appeared in Densford's ads.

The two former prosecutors go on to say that Stanalonis dismissed or "stetted 35 serious felony cases he personally indicted, including 11 child sex abuse cases, two rape cases and one attempted murder case.

"Mr. Stanalonis would rather offenders go free out of spite than provide justice for St. Mary's County victims; such intemperance is not the demeanor of a judge."

Stanalonis slammed the claims as "patently false" but said they have actually aided his campaign.

"The negative attacks against me have benefited me," Stanalonis said Wednesday. "People are tired of negative campaigning.

"I've been a prosecutor but I've handled a lot of different cases and I've had a lot of jury trials."

Stanalonis said he has had at least two-dozen jury trials he could easily remember and dozens of court trials in his career.

Densford told The County Times he stands behind the comments in his ad made by Cubero and Taylor and criticized Stanalonis' trial record as a prosecutor calling it "sad."

He especially criticized his handling of a case in which a defendant was accused of raping an under-aged girl. The defendant John Edison was acquitted in that case.

"He passed that case to someone else who promptly lost," Densford said. "When you're in private practice you don't get to turn to someone else and say 'can you take this for me.'

"When Christina Taylor and Frank Cubero say something about their former colleague it's true, period."

Stanalonis replied saying that particular case was prosecuted by two other attorneys.

"Why am I be criticized for a case I did not try," Stanalonis said. "I had an aunt ... who died from breast cancer unexpectedly two days before the trial and her funeral was on the day of the trial."

Other attorneys were prepared to go forward with the case, he said, and it would have been unfair to all parties to delay it.

Taylor told The County Times that their research was done with on-line public records at the Maryland Judiciary website.

"I spent quite a large amount of time doing that," Taylor said. "Nobody has to take our word for it."

Taylor admitted, however, that a case that was indicted by State's Attorney Richard Fritz could still be given to another attorney to prosecute but their name would not show up on the on-line records as the prosecuting attorney.

She said, however, in her experience such a practice was rare.

"That's just not true," Stanalonis said. "The cases they're citing for dismissals were superceded by indictments, which means the cases were prosecuted just not under the original charging documents."

Fritz told The County Times that both Cubero and Taylor "were stretching the truth" about Stanalonis to benefit Densford's campaign.

Fritz said that not only does he sometimes indict cases and give them to other attorneys to prosecute, but that his name still shows up in on-line records as the chief prosecutor simply because he is the elected official.

"I read that letter and I was absolutely amazed ... my name is on maybe 80 percent of those cases," Fritz explained. "But it is not a reflection on the number of cases Mr. Stanalonis has handled and they should know that."

The judiciary website is "notoriously in error on who the actual prosecutor is," said Fritz, adding that Cubero and Taylor resigned from his office to take higher-paying positions. He said Taylor was technically fired on her last day for not appearing in court as scheduled.

Editor Sean Rice contributed to this story.

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