



**Laura Austin Thomas**  
**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

February 10, 2023

In response to questions about the possible criminal investigation of a county official, District Attorney Laura Austin Thomas provided the following information.

Although District Attorneys do not typically comment on criminal investigations before they are complete, I want our citizens to understand some unique aspects of this matter. In addition to other duties, state statutes make the District Attorney the legal advisor to all elected county officials regarding the performance of those jobs, county business related to those jobs and other civil law issues. In that regard only, the elected county officers are clients of the District Attorney. The District Attorney does NOT represent elected county officials in any criminal prosecutions. A District Attorney's primary duty is to prosecute and protect our communities from the effects of criminal activity committed by anyone. Nonetheless, a legal conflict of interest occurs when a District Attorney receives a completed investigation implicating an elected county official. When such a conflict occurs, the D.A. is ethically required to recuse themselves from the criminal prosecution. This conflict applies to elected county officials only and not their employees. The recusal process involves the conflicted District Attorney contacting the Office of the Attorney General, advising them they must recuse, and asking the A.G. to determine where the presented investigation should go. The Attorney General can decide to prosecute any crimes from the investigation himself or he can assign the matter to an outside District Attorney for prosecution. Once the conflicted District Attorney recuses, normally she/he has no further involvement with the criminal matter.

Very recently a criminal investigation conducted by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation was presented to my office alleging possible embezzlement charges against a Logan County elected official. Now that the matter has been presented, I have recused for the reasons explained above and the matter has been referred to the Attorney General.

As the District Attorney, I take criminal charges and criminal activity very seriously, particularly when allegations directly impact the tax payers of the community and public trust in their elected officials. It has come to my attention that some members of the community believe the above described county officer has engaged in "plea negotiations" with the District Attorney that would allow the elected official to retain his job if money is paid back. This is absurd and ridiculous on a number of levels. First, I have not engaged in any plea negotiations with any charged or non-charged elected official and would not do so. Second, embezzlement is not just about the money. It is about the violation of public trust and no one who is found to have violated that trust should ever hold any elected office again, in my opinion, and I would never accept that.

I do not know what the Attorney General's office will do in regard to this matter. They will need time to process the investigation. I have no doubt they will do what they believe is the best thing. In my many years of working with their office they have been diligent, highly competent and skilled in all their duties. I



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have never seen them let someone keep their job if they have committed crimes related to their office. It is simply not the way things work.

This pending investigation has also complicated the jobs of other elected county officials who must continue to conduct the business of the county while one officer is noticeably absent and/or unable to be reached. These other county officers have consulted with my staff, in our continuing role as their legal adviser, and we have requested the Attorney General's office to consider removal from office as a possible consequence for the absent official. In the meantime, we are advising our elected officials as to how they may proceed with business. This has been a complicated legal area to wade through but we do things the best and correct way only, and will continue to do so. Likewise, our other elected county officials are faithfully doing their own jobs with only their community's best interests at the core of every decision they make. Logan County traditionally has been blessed with outstanding, diligent and honest elected county officials, and we are proud to stand with them.