



FRIENDS OF PAUL CZAJKA
12 NORTH 7TH STREET, HUDSON, NY 12534

February 18, 2013

Dear Friend:

Having just completed my first year in office (during this, my third, non-consecutive term as District Attorney), I report to the people of Columbia County on our efforts to improve the criminal justice system in Columbia County

Conscious of taxpayer costs, I reduced my staff from eighteen to thirteen. By hiring seasoned trial attorneys, with many years of criminal law experience, we are able to handle more cases. In doing so, the County has realized substantial savings in salary and medical and pension benefits. In fact, the District Attorney budget has decreased over \$116,000 since 2011; a reduction of over 10%. In addition, by consolidating positions, we have saved County taxpayers over \$92,000 for fringe benefits such as health insurance and pension payments.

We have modernized computer technology, which allows us to communicate directly with the Sheriff and the New York State Police, allowing us to obtain criminal charges almost immediately and quickly begin the task of bringing defendants to justice. We have improved communication among various law enforcement agencies and defense attorneys and all Assistant District Attorneys have the authority to make important decisions on cases, thereby expediting resolutions.

The District Attorney's Office handled, and I personally prosecuted, several notable cases, including: Shafiquil Islam, a murderer Judge Jonathan Nichols sentenced to prison for life; Christopher Anderson, an armed burglar Judge Nichols sentenced to prison for seventy-five (75) years; Wesley Davis, a pedophile Judge Richard Koweek sentenced to prison for twenty-five (25) years; Robert and Lisa Perez, drug dealers who have long plied their trade in Philmont and neighboring towns and sentenced by Judge Koweek to prison.

Of course, with this job comes criticism. One vocal critic and perennial candidate has taken me to task for a variety of matters. One criticism that has been leveled is that I had the county build me a "private bathroom and shower." This is simply nonsense. Our entire staff needed restroom facilities that were separate from those utilized from time to time by the very defendants we prosecute. Needless to say, this was very dangerous for our staff. (I remind my critics that an Assistant District Attorney was recently murdered in Texas as he walked from his car to court.) Consequently, the Board of Supervisors authorized the construction of a restroom inside the District Attorney's Office for the entire staff of secretaries and lawyers.

Others have complained about how we've handled traffic offenses. For some time, it has become obvious that there has been an extreme lack of uniformity in the disposition of traffic tickets. For example, those charged with speeding received widely different treatment depending on the mile marker at which they were stopped, the police officer's uniform and the Judge before whom they appeared.

In order to remedy this inherent unfairness, we took over the prosecution of all traffic tickets, although this was a substantial increase in our workload. No longer will the officer who wrote the ticket, prosecute the ticket; and no longer will otherwise honest, law abiding citizens who are presumed innocent, be treated differently depending on factors that have nothing to do with their offenses.

I also decided to terminate the state grant our office received for crime victim advocates. This program, run by Albany bureaucrats, required staff to spend inordinate amounts of time writing reports, and then, compiling reports about those reports. Form was overtaking substance and crime victim advocacy suffered. Greene County DA Terry Wilhelm, a respected colleague, came to the same conclusion and terminated the program in his jurisdiction long before I did so.

Just because we aren't receiving a state grant doesn't mean we're ignoring crime victim advocacy. On the contrary, and for example, the Assistant District Attorney assigned to the Integrated Domestic Violence Court monitors the Family Court docket to ensure that we are not missing any opportunities to bring perpetrators of child abuse and domestic violence to justice. Moreover, we have availed ourselves of the services of the several agencies in the area that specialize in crime victim advocacy, including the Reach Center, the Children's Advocacy Center and the New York State Police Crime Victim Advocate.

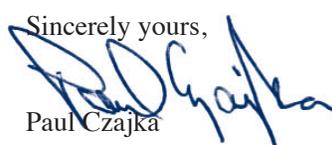
Last year, New York State law was amended to permit District Attorneys to hire Licensed Social Workers. The Board of Supervisors has approved my request to fund a licensed social worker to oversee the handling of crime victim advocacy in my office. We have not eliminated crime victim advocacy. We have improved crime victim advocacy. Importantly, the salary of the Licensed Social Worker is less than the County portion of the former state grant, saving more money for taxpayers.

In 2012, the Columbia County District Attorney's Office indicted 71 individuals for committing serious felonies. In addition, 70 individuals were convicted of Superior Court Informations. We closed 114 cases in Columbia County Court, of which 107 resulted in convictions. We closed 1289 cases in the County as a whole, excluding traffic tickets. Of those cases indicted by the Grand Jury, none were plea-bargained. All cases in County Court that began prior to 2012 have been closed.

I have kept my promise that defendants charged by indictment are not permitted to plead guilty to lesser charges. Columbia County is regaining its reputation: those who commit serious crimes, who break into homes, who commit crimes armed with a gun – will go to prison. I believe that would-be criminals – those in gangs, up through and including "white collar" criminals, are getting this message loudly and clearly. Ask any police officer.

I am honored to serve Columbia County as your District Attorney. Our office is committed to continue the hard work of improving the quality of life for all our citizens.

I will always be grateful for having been given the opportunity to serve, and I am humbled by the serious responsibility the people of Columbia County have given me.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Czajka