

# OFFICE OF THE STATE ATTORNEY

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **State Attorney Monique Worrell Announces the Creation of the Special Victims Unit at the State Attorney's Office for the Ninth Judicial Circuit**

*State Attorney Worrell has taken on a caseload in the new unit that will be tasked with prosecuting sexual abuse crimes and domestic violence offenses*

ORLANDO, FL, February 28, 2022 — The State Attorney for the Ninth Judicial Circuit is creating a new, special victims' unit that will handle the prosecution of all sexual crimes and allegations of domestic violence. Consolidating these cases into a single unit will lower individual caseloads, allow prosecutors to give more attention to each case, and put a dedicated unit prosecutor in every courtroom. These attorneys will also receive specialized training, including training on trauma-informed practices, that are vital to providing victims with the service they deserve.

Previously, the Office assigned these cases to attorneys in two separate units, one tasked with handling sexual crimes and the other, crimes of domestic violence. Given the level of funding the State Attorney's Office receives, and the staffing deficiencies that are its natural consequence, maintaining two independent units is no longer feasible. Because these two types of cases require similar specialized training to provide victims with appropriate trauma informed support, we combined them into a single unit. Under the new organization, all attorneys assigned to the special victims' unit will prosecute cases.

Assistant State Attorney William "Will" Jay will be the Bureau Chief of the new unit. Will started with the State Attorney's Office in September 1997. In 1998, he joined the juvenile bureau where he was assigned his first sex crimes cases to prosecute, as well as domestic violence cases. After his rotation in the juvenile bureau ended in 1999, he prosecuted felonies and served as a DUI specialist until joining the Sex Crimes and Child Abuse Division in 2001. There he remained until 2007. In 2008, he was recognized by the Central Florida Victim Services Network for his outstanding work as a sex crimes prosecutor. Will has served as a Trial Unit Director, has handled a Major Crimes docket, a Sex Crimes/Domestic violence docket, and most recently was a member in the Homicide Unit since 2017, where he has prosecuted several domestic violence homicides.

While the COVID-19 pandemic, and the corresponding closure of courts and offices, has driven our attorneys' caseloads higher, salaries for state attorneys have remained stagnant in the face of rising inflation. Many current salaries are below what our attorneys need to cover their expenses, including the substantial law school debt most of them shoulder. These same prosecutors, many of whom have handled the most serious cases the legal profession addresses and litigated dozens of jury trials, can obtain private sector jobs that pay tens of thousands of dollars more than what the State Attorney's Office can currently provide. Under these circumstances, many have decided to leave the Office, a phenomenon that is happening state-wide. State Attorney Worrell has repeatedly asked the legislature for additional funding to address the staffing crisis these conditions have created.

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This crisis has weighed heavily on our sexual crimes and domestic violence units. Unfortunately, the pandemic also brought with it an increase in domestic violence nationwide, and our office has felt the impact of that surge. With caseloads in that unit skyrocketing, and staffing remaining stagnant or declining, working conditions for our attorneys have become untenable. State Attorney Worrell took the initiative to change these conditions by creating the special victims' unit, in part to respond to this crisis.

The organization of the new unit will spread caseloads more evenly, eliminate positions that are purely supervisory, permit the consolidation of key resources designed to serve victims of sexual and domestic violence crimes, and increase efficiency as attorneys will no longer need to bounce between courtrooms or coordinate trial schedules between different judges. Through these changes, the State Attorney hopes to improve both attorney working conditions and the care and support victims of these crimes receive.

State Attorney Worrell, along with Chief Assistant Mark Wixtrom and Deputy Chief Assistant Shana Manuel have each taken on a caseload to address the backlog. In taking on a caseload, State Attorney Worrell said: "It is critical that, even in the leanest of times, sexual crimes and domestic violence offenses are thoroughly investigated and prosecuted, and that victims of these offenses receive the support and attention they deserve. I am dedicated to this mission, and, regardless of what obstacles are thrown our way, will never waver from it."

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*The Office of the State Attorney for the Ninth Judicial Circuit is represented by The Honorable Monique H. Worrell and serves Orange and Osceola counties in Central Florida. A culturally diverse community, the area is home to nearly 1.4 million residents and is a vacation destination for millions each year. Our office is committed to making Orlando and the surrounding area a vibrant and safe place to live, work and play.*

For general media inquiries, please contact: [PIO@sao9.org](mailto:PIO@sao9.org).

For media records request, please contact: [mediarecordsrequest@sao9.org](mailto:mediarecordsrequest@sao9.org).

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