

District Attorney Angel Myers McIlrath Statement

As District Attorney for the 19th Circuit Court District of Mississippi, I want to talk directly to the people of Jackson County.

Our community is grieving the tremendous loss of Nolan Wells, who is loved and treasured by everyone. Nolan's family deserves answers, and our community deserves answers.

Every death in the county, except those of natural causes and non-criminal car wrecks, is presented to your grand jury. Many people don't know that. We have handled death investigations in this manner my entire career. Nolan's case is being handled the same way, with the same care and commitment to the truth that we give all death investigations.

I understand the public's urgency to know what happened to Nolan, but we are not taking time for time's sake. We are taking the time required to complete the work this investigation demands.

Since Nolan was reported missing, local, state and federal law enforcement agencies have worked around the clock investigating what happened to him. Every piece of evidence must be examined. Every credible lead must be followed to its conclusion. Every witness interview must be analyzed in the context of all other evidence.

The pressure for answers does not change what the work requires. Our responsibility to Nolan and our community is to complete this investigation thoroughly, carefully, without compromise, supported by the evidence and worthy of the confidence of the people we serve.

I also understand that many people have questions about why more information has not been released publicly. In Mississippi, the Rules of Professional Conduct restrict the information a prosecutor can release during an investigation.

Our restraint in communicating facts and evidence is not an effort to keep the truth from the public. It is an effort to protect the integrity of this investigation and the grand jury proceeding.

As your district attorney, I have an ethical obligation to avoid public statements that could influence witnesses, prejudice a proceeding or compromise the fairness of the legal process. My obligation extends to ensuring investigating agencies avoid making those statements as well.

These rules exist to protect the search for the truth, not to prevent it.

As divided as the discussion surrounding Nolan's death has become, I know we all want the same thing: to understand what happened to Nolan. With that being our shared goal, we must also protect the integrity of how the truth is discovered.

If we sacrifice the integrity of the process to satisfy today's questions, we risk undermining confidence in tomorrow's answers.

When the public asks, 'What about this?' or 'Have they looked at that?' or 'Did they think about this?' the answer is yes. Those are the same questions investigators ask. The difference is that we can't publicly discuss the evidence, interviews or what those efforts have uncovered while the investigation is underway.

Again, our restraint in sharing details is not a refusal to share the truth. It is our commitment to protect the process that allows the truth to be known with confidence.

There is a lot of information out there. And there is a heck of a lot of misinformation out there.

I simply want the community I serve to know that this investigation is being handled with the care, professionalism and commitment to the truth that every family in Jackson County deserves.

As we continue this important work, Nolan's family, his friends and all who loved him remain in our prayers.