



**Office of the Washington
County Attorney**

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MEDIA RELEASE

**FROM THE OFFICE OF
WASHINGTON COUNTY ATTORNEY DOUG JOHNSON**

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**THE WASHINGTON COUNTY ATTORNEY AND SHERIFF
PROPOSE LEGISLATION TO INCREASE VICTIM PROTECTION**

Washington County Attorney Doug Johnson and Washington County Sheriff Bill Hutton announced today that they are proposing new legislation to stiffen the penalties for those who ignore court orders requiring defendants not to have contact with victims and witnesses of crimes. The legislation, which will be sponsored in the Senate by Senator Kathy Saltzman of Woodbury and in the House of Representatives by Representative Karla Bigham of Cottage Grove, is designed to give additional protection to the victims of crimes who are currently protected by No Contact Orders issued by the court.

In many criminal cases, judges order people who are charged with crimes not to have any contact with victims and/or witnesses during the time they are waiting for a trial. This is done to protect the victims and witnesses from harassment, intimidation and assault. Current law does not give a lot of incentive to defendants to follow the court order since a violation is only a misdemeanor. The proposal by County Attorney Johnson and Sheriff Hutton is to increase the penalties for violating the no contact order. This proposal does not to create a new crime.

The bill introduced by Senator Saltzman and Representative Bigham is targeted at those cases in which the defendant is released from jail pending a trial for a felony or gross misdemeanor charge. If the defendant violates the No Contact Order, the penalty for the crime is increased to match the level of the underlying criminal charge. For example, an offender under a No Contact Order for a serious felony such as domestic assault, burglary, or criminal sexual conduct, who violates a No Contact Order would be charged with a felony for the violation. As a felony, more extensive law

enforcement resources, rapid response and interstate enforcement and extradition would be readily available for law enforcement. “The purpose of this change in the law is not to result in additional convictions,” said County Attorney Johnson, “but is rather to send a message to the defendant that violation of the order will result in another serious charge. This charge would also allow the members of law enforcement to move more quickly to take the offender into custody and thereby protect the safety of the victim.” Analysis by staff of Sheriff Hutton’s office indicates that in Washington County the new law would only result in a few additional felony prosecutions per year, but those felony prosecutions would be for serious and violent offenses such as 1st degree burglary, assault, and terroristic threats. Both County Attorney Johnson and Sheriff Hutton express their appreciation to Senator Saltzman and Representative Bigham for their willingness to pursue this important public safety goal.

For further information, please contact Washington County Attorney Doug Johnson at 651-430-6124 or Chief Deputy Mike Johnson at 651-430-7880.