

# Wells County State's Attorney

## Kathleen K. Murray

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May 31, 2017

### PRESS RELEASE – SEEKING ASSISTANCE FROM PUBLIC

**PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL PERSONS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY IN A COURT OF LAW.**

#### **Johnny Zip Lawson pending charges:**

- 1. Conspiracy to Deliver Methamphetamine**
- 2. Bribery – Unlawful Influence of Public Servant (Sheriff)**
- 3. False Information to a Law Enforcement Officer**
- 4. Neglect of Duty by a Public Official (Sheriff)**
- 5. Ingestion of Methamphetamine**



**Johnny Zip Lawson**  
**Former Wells County Sheriff**

On May 26, 2017, the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation (ND BCI) swore out a complaint against Johnny Zip Lawson, former Wells County Sheriff, pursuant to an ongoing investigation by ND BCI with assistance by the Wells County State's Attorney Kathleen K. Murray, Eddy County Sheriff Paul Lies, and the Harvey Police Department, that began in March of 2016 in and around primarily Harvey and Fessenden in Wells County, ND. At about 2:30 p.m. Honorable Judge Daniel Narum signed a warrant. Wells County officials looked for Johnny Zip Lawson in and around Wells County, as the Defendant currently resides in Harvey, Wells County, ND, but officials were unable to locate the Defendant initially. At around 6:36 p.m., ND BCI observed Johnny Zip Lawson in Bismarck, ND, and proceeded to follow him until such time as the Bismarck Police Department was provided with a copy of the warrant, and officers were able to assist in arresting Johnny Zip Lawson pursuant to the warrant of arrest.

At about 8:45 p.m., in the City of Bismarck, Bismarck Police Department Detective Mike Renton, a former Wells County Sheriff's Deputy, arrested former Wells County Sheriff, Johnny Zip Lawson, for the charges of Count 1: Conspiracy to Deliver Methamphetamine, Count 2: Bribery – Unlawful Influence of a Public Servant (Sheriff), Count 3: False Information to a Law Enforcement Officer, Count 4: Neglect of a Duty by a Public Official (Sheriff), and County 5: Ingestion of Methamphetamine.

On May 30, 2017, an initial hearing and a bail hearing were conducted telephonically by Honorable Judge Jay Schmitz, with the State appearing, and the Defendant appearing with his Attorney Peter Welte. The State requested \$100,000 Cash or Surety Bail, and a request for participation in the 24/7 program, and no contact with State's witnesses. The Defendant asked to be released on a Personal Recognizance (PR) Bond. Honorable Judge Schmitz granted bail as a \$25,000 unsecured PR Bond with conditions that the Defendant shall not contact the State's witnesses. A Preliminary Hearing will be scheduled for the felony charges in the Wells County District Courthouse, in Fessenden, Wells County, ND.

**The investigation regarding former Wells County Sheriff Johnny Zip Lawson is still an active and ongoing criminal investigation, and we are asking for help from any persons that have any tips, additional information, and/or evidence regarding any of the charges, including conspiracy to deliver methamphetamine, bribery of a public official, neglect of a duty by former Sheriff Lawson and/or ingestion of methamphetamine. Anyone with information please contact the Wells County Sheriff's Office at (701) 547-3211, and/or ND BCI at (701) 328-5500.**

**Since former Sheriff Lawson's resignation on April 25, 2017, Eddy County, Foster County and Sheridan County, and the ND Highway Patrol have been providing off duty officers to help patrol and assist in law enforcement duties in Wells County. Wells County is still actively seeking information relating to any unsolved investigations. If any persons have reported any criminal activity, and/or have any information relating to any law enforcement investigations, please call the Wells County Sheriff's Office at (701) 547-3211.**

The Wells County State's Attorney, Kathleen K. Murray, and the ND BCI are grateful for the assistance in the Lawson investigation by the following agencies: Eddy County Sheriff's Office, Eddy County State's Attorney, Benson County Sheriff's Office, Foster County Sheriff's Office, Fessenden Police Department, Harvey Police Department, Bismarck Police Department, Stutsman County Narcotics Task Force, Lake Region Narcotics Task Force, McHenry County Sheriff's Office, ND Border Patrol, ND Highway Patrol, ND Parole and Probation, ND State Radio Communications, and Sheridan County Sheriff's Office.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen K. Murray". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Kathleen K. Murray  
Wells County State's Attorney

KKM/cfl