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It's Time to Confront Wisconsin's Catch-and-Release Judicial Policies

With the [rate of violent crime](#) on the rise and a number of prominent recent cases involving individuals committing horrific acts of violence while free on inexcusably low bail for previous arrests, many Wisconsinites have been forced to reckon with the chronically lax judicial policies that have contributed to undermining the safety of our communities.

Most notably, in the tragic and devastating attack on this year's Waukesha Christmas parade, the [man accused](#) of killing six people and injuring several dozen others had inexplicably been released by Milwaukee County Court Commissioner Cedric Cornwall on a mere \$1,000 bond just a few weeks earlier following a domestic violence arrest for punching and driving over the mother of his child. This trivial bail amount determination came upon a recommendation from an assistant Milwaukee County district attorney, despite the severity of the charged offense and the suspect having an [outstanding arrest warrant](#) for out-of-state sex crime and bail-jumping charges.

Although the Waukesha case is perhaps the most prominent and catastrophic example of Wisconsin district attorneys and court officials failing to keep dangerous individuals in custody, it is just one in a long line of lax bail and charging decisions responsible for unnecessarily giving arrested suspects opportunities to commit further crimes. For instance, there have already been [several instances](#) this year of Milwaukee police officers being shot by individuals with pending criminal cases free on inappropriately low bail; of those, at least two of the suspects were free on mere signature bonds, belying the serious felony charges they faced.

While Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm's office is notorious for creating a proverbial revolving door for criminals into and out of the courthouse, this pattern of prosecutors and judges systematically failing to take simple steps to keep dangerous individuals off the streets is evident across Wisconsin. In Washington County, District Attorney Mark Bensen has [refused to answer](#) questions about his office's bail and charging decisions regarding why a suspect who nearly killed a DoorDash delivery driver with a shotgun in a drunken daze had posted only a single \$300 cash bond despite two [separate arrests](#) since last August involving three pending felony cases. In La Crosse, a [homeless suspect](#) free on a signature bond with a half-dozen pending criminal cases, including several felonies, fatally stabbed a passerby in a local park.

The common thread connecting these and myriad other cases throughout Wisconsin is that they were completely preventable: the individuals responsible should never have had the opportunity to commit

these crimes in the first place. They are representative of a misguided effort by prosecutors and judges to reflexively push to move individuals out of the justice system through indulgent bail, charging, and sentencing decisions without giving appropriate consideration to the danger they pose to society. It was at the same time shocking, yet unsurprising, to hear District Attorney Chisholm [tell the inquiry](#) into his office's failures in Waukesha parade attacker's case that he is "opposed to cash bail" when the potential consequences of such a policy were so glaringly apparent.

The officials charged with making these decisions have a duty to act in the best interest of the public that they serve rather than to leverage their positions to advance their naïve personal ideologies. These decisions have real consequences for the safety of communities across Wisconsin, and it is imperative that we expect diligence and accountability from those officials whom we task with these important responsibilities.

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The [15th Assembly District](#) includes most of West Allis and the northern half of New Berlin.