

Office of the District Attorney

County of Lebanon

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Jonathan Hess
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As your District Attorney, I am committed to serving our community and offering full transparency to the people who elected me into office. In February of 2021, the local branch of the NAACP filed a complaint with Pennsylvania's Disciplinary Board. This Board regulates, investigates and at times sanctions the conduct of any attorney licensed in Pennsylvania.

The Complaint alleged impropriety in the nature of 'conflict.' Specifically, it alleged I should not have participated in the investigation of an officer-involved shooting which occurred in March of 2020. With that shooting, a member of the Pennsylvania State Police took a life in the line of duty. Any loss of life – whether by law enforcement or otherwise – is both grave and sad. Our role in these cases, however, is to investigate and apply the facts and evidence to the law of 'justified use of deadly force' in PA. Our Office did just that and ruled the Trooper's actions justified.

As of the date of the shooting, our Office had a pre-existing conflict policy that enumerated instances wherein our Office could not handle any type of criminal investigation or case. One such area was in a case where my husband – currently a Corporal with the State Police – was a material witness or was actually involved. On the night of the shooting, my husband was not on duty and played no role in the incident. We followed our policy and believed it proper to do so. When I became District Attorney, I resolved to handle tough cases no matter how ugly the ramifications may be. When I handled this case, I simply wanted to do my job as best I could and in the manner I always have.

Once the complaint was filed, I followed the standard practice and responded to the Disciplinary Board through counsel. We argued no conflict existed due to my husband's utter lack of involvement. After a year and half back and forth, the Disciplinary Board issued its ruling. It found I should not have handled the shooting investigation because my husband worked out of the same barracks as the Trooper who used deadly force. In hindsight, I can understand the public scrutiny and the Board's decision, though I still stand by the investigation and its outcome. We accepted the determination. Neither the Board nor any other agency has ever questioned the outcome of our investigation – that the shooting was justified under the law.

The Board's determination is labeled as 'private reprimand.' It in no way affects my law license or status as an attorney and would have remained sealed from public knowledge absent my choice to share it with the community I honorably serve. This statement, and the accountability which comes with it, is my choice alone.

Prior to the determination (in the Fall of 2022), I decided to refer any officer-involved shootings or fatal incidents to the Office of the Attorney General. I crafted a new conflict policy to avoid a situation of this kind from ever occurring again. I now view this matter as closed.

Since taking office in 2020, I fight daily to ensure the work produced by my Office is worthy of your trust and your vote. We've handled more homicides and shootings in these past few years than ever before – and I personally handled every homicide case that went before jury, winning a First-Degree conviction each time. I will continue to work tirelessly to protect our citizens from the most heinous of criminals. The honor of being your District Attorney is more humbling than I can explain, and I thank you for your continued support.

Pier Hess Graf, Esq.