

Thank you, Madame Chair, for this opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Dave Silberman, and I am the High Bailiff of Addison County. For a brief while last June, I was also the county's Acting Sheriff.

I think it's safe to say that just about everyone in Addison County is relieved that our former sheriff is now, finally, our **former** sheriff. But the situation that we found ourselves in for seven months last year should be viewed as a warning sign, and something that all of our constituents, statewide, should never have to worry about again.

Last June, Peter Newton was arrested for a series of sexual assaults. The survivor of those assaults is a woman who initially came to him, as sheriff, for help. She was exiting an abusive relationship, and was scared. She needed protection. Instead, what is alleged, is that Newton trapped her in an even more abusive relationship, physically and emotionally, over the course of months.

By operation of law, from the moment Newton was arrested, until he was released following arraignment, I served as Acting Sheriff. But the moment he was released, again by operation of law, Newton resumed his elected office. Nobody could do anything about that; the legislature had adjourned, so impeachment was impossible. While Newton was barred by court order from engaging in law enforcement activities, he was still empowered as the chief administrator of the office. And even though, in fact, he never showed up, he kept drawing the paycheck, his name stayed on the side of the building, and the department continued to be sullied by association.

Meanwhile, many residents of Addison County felt unsafe. I fielded a lot of calls and questions. A neighbor of Newton's called me, telling me that they were afraid for their own safety. Selectboard members in towns that contracted with the department wondered how they could continue to receive services from a department led by someone so violent and immoral. A group of concerned residents protested with signs demanding his resignation. But he would not go. He wanted his salary; he wanted his pension.

We should be clear-eyed about what's going on here. Newton's alleged crimes may be particularly heinous, but his ability to stand above the law is not unique to Addison County.

One sheriff violently assaulted a civilian in his custody. Another embezzled nearly a half million dollars of taxpayer money. Another plain up and left the state but kept drawing his paycheck. The list goes on. It's tempting to chalk this up to a few bad apples, but when allow ourselves to do that, we're just letting ourselves off the hook for the failures of the system that we uphold. A system with no accountability and no clear job description – just raw, virtually unchecked power.

Plain and simple, if we're going to have sheriffs, they need to be held to the same standards as every other law enforcement professional. This is not the Wild West. Sheriffs must be accountable to the law.