

Watkinson Statement 1/12/24

The District Attorney's office has agreed to dismiss the charges originally filed against me in November 2022. While I am relieved to finally be vindicated by this decision, I am heartbroken at the cost to my family by this completely unnecessary ordeal that the state dragged out for two and a half years.

As I have stated from the very beginning of this nightmare, I flatly deny any wrongdoing. The DA has known from the start there was no basis for the terrible accusations against me. Accordingly, the DA has dismissed the Felony count effective immediately, and after some procedural maneuvering, will dismiss the Misdemeanor count as well.

Briefly, the facts of the case: I have an established record of working with law enforcement and supporting community policing efforts. In June 2021 I discovered some concerning images online that I thought might warrant further action by law enforcement. I did not download this material. Feeling compelled to take action but not knowing the best way to proceed, I took a screenshot to forward to the appropriate agency, and attached it to a draft email. A short time later Yahoo bots deleted my email account, and I could no longer access the email in question for follow-up. Simultaneously, a live-in family member had a serious heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. In the ensuing chaotic days and weeks, we focused on establishing a stable and calm household in order to bring the family member back to health, and the email matter lost priority. I reached out to Yahoo to restore access, but believing Yahoo had closed my account and the information couldn't be recovered, I moved on.

The rest of the events have been well established. In July Detective Jason Bosco executed a search warrant with a large team of officers at my home. In other cases Bosco has used a simple "knock and talk" interview, and a simple phone call could have easily cleared up his misunderstanding, but in my case Bosco inexplicably opted for a full scale raid of my home. I explained what happened, complied with questioning, and provided all of my devices, logins, passwords with the assurance that he would not find any evidence of criminal conduct. I said that they were making a terrible mistake and urged them to verify my explanation as quickly as possible. They did not find any evidence of any wrongdoing, and Bosco said the investigation was "a waste of time."

Once my devices were cleared, conversations with the Cumberland County DA were proceeding toward dismissal of the case. That is until Jackie Sartoris won a political primary in June 2022 and began conferring with DA staff, long before actually winning a general election for her position. Without any further communication from the DA, and to our complete shock, the case was surreptitiously rushed into formal charges against me just days after Sartoris's election. These fraudulent charges are now dismissed, but not before upending the lives of many.

After the Felony is dismissed outright, I have agreed to *temporarily* change my Misdemeanor possession plea to an Alford plea, which allows me to maintain my innocence while administratively treated as a "guilty" plea. Essentially it means we agree to disagree. This is NOT a conviction. Ultimately there will be a full dismissal of that charge as well. Importantly, the Alford plea is not an admission of any wrongdoing on my part. I want to remain clear and unambiguous about this. So why change my plea? I am simply out of money. This has cost my family \$140,000 to date, and 80% of my household income after I resigned from my employment. The prolonged damage my family has endured due to the public nature of the DA's frivolous pursuit can no longer be endured.

With both charges dismissed, the misdemeanor will be replaced with a broad “child endangerment” charge, which is the same statute used for a hunting family that kept a loaded rifle in their home, or a college student that buys beer for a teenager, for example. As the DA has not actually identified anyone I’m alleged to have endangered, the common term for this is a “legal fiction.” It matters little to me. The pain the DA has unleashed on my family is already done. The clear and simple fact is that both of the charges that were foolishly brought against me will have been completely dismissed.

Furthermore, there are a couple additional conditions that the prosecution requested during the deferred period. For years I have voluntarily and on my own volition regularly sought counsel from a licensed psychotherapist to help navigate the trauma caused by this ordeal. Still, the prosecution has seized upon the public stigma surrounding mental health in an attempt to further damage my reputation. Prosecution felt it necessary to make the redundant request that I periodically check in with a therapist and provide them details of the case - full well knowing I’ve already done so, and the therapist has already testified that I have a clean bill of mental health.

I reject the state’s attempt to leverage stigma and shame surrounding mental health services, and instead proudly own it. Mental health services should be normalized, not weaponized. More people should seek out therapy. I hope with time our society can regard mental health practices much as we have dentists or family medicine, so that people in crisis can find the help they need without shame.

Lastly, there is a condition limiting contact with young children during this deferred period of time. Again, a redundant and moot request. This was already addressed during my arraignment in January 2023, as the presiding judge clearly felt the request was baseless, so he implemented a compromise that would never actually need to be exercised.

The case is closed, the charges dismissed. In the aftermath, the question our community should be asking the DA is, What was the point of it all?

The figures that should be asked to answer for their actions are Cumberland County DA Jackie Sartoris and the Maine State Police detectives. Please know I am looking ahead to next steps and intend to hold those responsible accountable for such a cruel abuse of our legal system with maliciousness and reckless indifference toward the lives of the innocent.

In the coming days I may post a more detailed account on social media that attempts to address some of these questions. For now I will hold my family close, try to catch my breath, and close the chapter on this terrible ordeal. Thank you for the many cards, letters, and notes of support my wife and I have received throughout this nightmare. My heart breaks for my family and my community, but as we enter this new year with a fresh start, I hope we all can take time to heal.

Chris Watkinson