



RICE COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE CHARGING GUIDELINES

1. Prosecutorial Discretion

If a citation is not initially issued by an officer, the decision to initiate criminal charges (or in a rare case to present a case to a grand jury), rests within the discretion of the County Attorney's Office. By its very nature, the exercise of this discretion cannot be reduced to a formula. This discretion, however, should be exercised as fairly and uniformly as possible and in accordance with the following guidelines.

2. Propriety of the Charges

The County Attorney's Office should file only those charges which can be substantiated by available and admissible evidence at trial, but this office is not obligated, and likely will not, file all possible charges which might be supported by the available evidence. The charge or charges selected should adequately reflect the nature of the conduct in question and should be consistent with the interests of justice. It is within the sole discretion of the County Attorney to decide when it is necessary to seek the assistance of a grand jury in the charging process in all cases.

3. Law Enforcement Reports

Upon receipt of a completed investigation report from a Police Department, the Rice County Sheriff's Office or the Minnesota State Patrol, the reports will be reviewed as promptly as possible by the County Attorney's Office. A charging decision shall consist of the following:

- a. A complaint shall be drafted. Whether the complaint is a summons, warrant or order for detention is a factual determination also made by the County Attorney's Office; or
- b. The investigative agency shall be directed to issue a citation charging a particular offense(s); or
- c. The investigator/investigation agency shall be asked to provide further investigation so a charging decision can be made; or

- d. The investigating agency/LEC records shall be notified that no charges will be issued.
- e. In most cases, attorneys are expected to make charging decisions within two weeks of a referral. If a decision is not made within 30 days, the attorney assigned to the file shall present an explanation of the delay to the County Attorney, the Chief Assistant or the Attorney's Supervisor.

4. Factors to Consider

Factors which will be considered by the County Attorney in making the charging decision shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Whether or not sufficient probable cause exists to believe a crime has been committed and that a particular person committed the crime.
- b. Whether or not all necessary evidence has been gathered.
- c. Whether the investigation/arrest presents search and seizure or other constitutional concerns materially detrimental to a successful prosecution.
- d. The probability of a conviction based upon a review of the evidence that can reasonably be presented at trial.
- e. The characteristics of the offender (i.e., dangerousness, criminal history, the presence of obvious mitigating defenses, etc.).
- f. The nature and circumstances of the offense and the sanctions or punishments that would most likely be imposed if a conviction is obtained.
- g. The valid and substantiated interests of the victim(s).
- h. Undue hardship, or good faith reluctance of witnesses to testify.
- i. Any mitigating or aggravating factual circumstances.
- j. The deterrent value of the prosecution to the offender and to society in general.
- k. Application of community standards.
- l. A history of non-enforcement of the statute.
- m. The cost of prosecution (time and money) and the ability of this office to support that cost in relation to the seriousness of the offense.

- n. The availability of adequate civil remedies to a victim and whether a victim is "promoting" prosecution to accomplish primarily a civil or "collection" goal.
- o. The age of the offense (after reviewing the reasons for delay in investigation or prosecution).
- p. The willingness of the accused to cooperate with law enforcement and aid in the apprehension and conviction of others, equally or more culpable.
- q. The likelihood of prosecution by another criminal justice authority (jurisdiction/venue).

5. Inappropriate Considerations

- a. The County Attorney's Office should not charge more serious offenses only as a means to leverage the accused to plead guilty to lesser charges.
- b. The County Attorney's Office should not file charges for the purpose of obtaining from a defendant a release of potential civil claims against victims, witnesses, or law enforcement or prosecutorial agencies or personnel.
- c. The County Attorney's Office should not consider any personal or political advantage a prosecution may bring.
- d. The County Attorney's Office shall not consider in any way the race, gender, social status, sexual orientation or the economic status of the accused, victim and/or witnesses when making the charging decision.

6. Specific Charging Considerations

- a. Misdemeanors: As a general rule, lesser included misdemeanor offenses should not be charged with felony counts, though such counts may be added at trial where appropriate.
- b. Victims Contact: In cases involving a crime against a person, the victim should be contacted. If the victim cannot be contacted prior to charging, efforts should be made to contact the victim as soon as possible. Upon contacting the victim, the prosecutor or his or her representative (the victim advocate) should discuss with the victim the general allegations, charges, court procedures and victim's rights.
- c. Statements of the Suspect: Every effort should be made to obtain a statement from the suspect prior to charging. The requirements of **State v. Scales**, 518 N.W.2d 587 (Minn. 1999), must be met. (e.g., all *custodial* statements from a suspect must be recorded).

- d. Forfeitures: When law enforcement has seized potentially forfeitable property, law enforcement should notify the County Attorney's Office and separately request initiation of a civil forfeiture action or representation by the County Attorney's Office at an administrative forfeiture proceeding, if any is requested.
- e. Identification of Victims and Witnesses in Charging Instruments: Victims and Witnesses shall be referred to by generic terms or initials rather than by their name(s). Sexual assault victims shall be referred to as "the victim" or initials rather than by name.
- f. Firearms or where prior offenses have enhanced the offense: Whenever a firearm has been determined to have been used during the commission of a crime or where prior offenses have enhanced the offense, the charges shall reflect the appropriate mandatory minimum sentences under M.S. § 609.11.
- g. Drug Testing: It is the policy of this office that drug cases shall be charged on the basis of positive field testing and weighing.
- h. Enhanced Sentences: If the defendant would be eligible for an enhanced sentence for a third violent felony pursuant to M.S. § 609.1095 subd. 2 or subd. 3 or for career offender sentencing because of a sixth felony charge pursuant to M.S. § 609.1095 subd. 4, the charging document should include notice of eligibility for and an intent to seek such a sentence. If such language is not included in the complaint, the notice of intent to seek such a sentence should be filed with the court as soon as practicable.
- i. Warrants: In most cases, a summons must be issued. Under Minnesota law, a warrant may only be issued when "a substantial likelihood exists that the defendant will fail to respond to a summons, the defendant's location is reasonably discoverable, or the defendant's arrest is necessary to prevent imminent harm." Attorneys seeking to issue a complaint warrant must first seek specific written permission from their supervisor, the Chief Assistant, or the County Attorney.

Approved by: John L. Fossum, Rice County Attorney
January 20, 2015; Revised, February, 2016, July 2019, June 2021.
Subject to revision and amendment as appropriate.