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Wednesday, March 21, 2012



## Just looking for someone who could actually be impartial

Assistant state's attorney Joseph Stalonus, running for a St. Mary's County circuit court judgeship against recent appointee David Densford, has expressed disdain to The Enterprise that he wasn't among the four applicants sent to Gov. Martin O'Malley by a local nominating commission.

Notably, Stalonus speculated that the commission wasn't interested in recommending someone "who's labeled as a tough prosecutor," arguing that its purpose was "to send the governor the names he wanted, not necessarily the most qualified candidates."

While Judge Densford is running primarily on the merits of his 27 years of experience as a special prosecutor and private practice attorney, experience nevertheless takes a back seat to character.

Before St. Mary's County voters head to the polls April 3, they would be wise to consider the charges Stalonus once brought against a young man who was 16 when he was condemned to a government cage without bond on charges that he violently raped a 12-year-old girl on July 5, 2008 while he and his cousin were hanging out with her and her 15-year-old friend.

The problem? The girl's medical exam — conducted only hours after the alleged rape transpired — revealed no evidence that a physical or sexual assault had even occurred, much less a violent rape. Moreover, the 15-year-old initially claimed that the young man raped her, but when she went to the hospital to be examined, she retracted this allegation and instead said that he raped the 12-year-old.

Despite this absence of physical evidence and, inherently, absolutely no corroboration of these dubious allegations,

Stalonus nevertheless shackled the suspect with 51 years' worth of charges for a crime the boy not only didn't commit, but one that Stalonus either would've known he didn't commit if he were even minimally competent or knew he didn't commit but proceeded against anyhow. The case ended in an acquittal on all charges.

Let that sink in for a moment.

Instead of conducting an unbiased and thorough investigation, detectives and prosecutors merely assumed the young man was guilty. To say it was illogical for Stalonus to pursue this case would be to understate the obvious; his disregard for common sense and integrity should be appalling to anyone reserving even the slightest respect for civil liberties.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that Stalonus is endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police; his job is to work hand in hand with law enforcement to obtain convictions. If ever there were a day where prosecutors sought justice, today this idea is largely one of fairy tales. Far too many criminal defendants are viewed by the state as guilty until proven innocent.

Maybe the governor's nominating commission wasn't concerned that Joe Stalonus has a reputation for being a "tough prosecutor." Maybe it was just looking for someone who could actually be impartial.

Trevor Bothwell, Hollywood

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