

Media as of April 4-25-14



DA Ismael Ozanne: We must end bias, cycle of abusive parenting



MARCH 12, 2014 10:45 AM • ISMAEL OZANNE | DANE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

I am responding to the Rev. Alex Gee's recent comments about racial disparities. I do so as a lifelong resident of Dane County, a graduate of Madison West and the University of Wisconsin, a father and husband, the district attorney, and a black man. Rev. Gee's honest comments about his frustration with Dane County's racial disparities are justified. I say this from my own life and work experiences as a prosecutor and an executive at the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. The recent study of Dane County's racial disparities confirms we must do considerable work to meet our shared responsibility to ensure fairness and equal opportunities for all members of our

community, regardless of the color of their skin.

The complex problems of racial disparities and racial intolerance have roots deep within our country's history. But our shared American heritage is not just a list of grievances and injustices; it is also a heroic story of struggle by Americans of all races, creeds and colors to overcome hatred and bigotry and truly let freedom ring for all who call this nation home. This struggle has been long and hard. It also is not yet over.

Our fellow citizens of color have suffered from racial bias in the criminal justice system. This has produced toxic results of continuous fear and mistrust that lowers the effectiveness of that system to meaningfully protect victims of crime and rehabilitate offenders where possible. Racial bias deters victims and witnesses of color from coming forward and fully cooperating with a system that they see as unfair to their own kind, and it provides offenders with a psychological "out" to blame the system for their wrongdoing, instead of accepting that it is they who trespass against their neighbor and must atone for their behavior.

While we must work to end bias in the system, that is not enough. From 1998, when I first became an assistant district attorney here, through my time at the Department of Corrections, and since 2010, when I became your district attorney, I have seen the criminal justice system from front to back. What has struck me most is how so many offenders lived a childhood defined by being abused and maltreated. It is time for us to acknowledge that violence in our homes negatively impacts the development of our

children and makes them more likely to display aggression and anti-social behaviors. We must educate parents about early brain development and promote positive nonviolent parenting practices that teach our children self-confidence and healthy conflict resolution skills. By doing this, we will ensure that when these children start school, they will be ready to learn and grow in the classroom, and not atrophy in a principal's office, the back of a squad car, or the inside of a juvenile prison.

Let me be clear that I believe the justice system must protect us from dangerous offenders. I am partnering with the Madison Police Department and other federal, state and local agencies to support Madison's proactive focused deterrence model of law enforcement, the Special Investigations Unit, which focuses law enforcement and community resources on rehabilitating dangerous offenders or, when necessary, vigorously prosecuting those offenders to the full extent of the law.

At the same time, I have worked with the Dane County Criminal Justice Council to expand diversion programs, especially for young people. These programs are designed to hold low-level offenders accountable for their behavior and give them a chance to earn back the privilege to enter adult life without a criminal conviction. By inculcating personal responsibility in these young people, I believe we can better protect society and enable these young men and women to lead lives that will make them feel pride in themselves for becoming contributing members of society.

I am particularly proud of a new diversion program designed by my office and implemented last fall. This program seeks to swiftly move parents and caregivers who have engaged in violent parenting practices into a program where they will be taught responsible nonviolent parenting skills, monitored by in-home visits by support workers, and have the chance to avoid a felony conviction if they accept responsibility and commit to changing their ways. A component of this project is community outreach and education, which involves partnering with the American Family Children's Hospital. This project will have a multi-generational impact by reducing the risk that children will be victims of abuse or grow into abusers themselves.

Rev. Gee has reminded us that we have been complacent in our shared journey toward equality for all. I resolve to not be complacent. I resolve to remember what my own life has taught me and to build a better tomorrow for all. Together we will do great things.

Ismael Ozanne is Dane County district attorney and a Democratic candidate for attorney general.

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In abuse cases, Ozanne offers a break to minority parents who spank

April 8, 2014

One Democratic candidate for attorney general believes some parents who come from a culture in which spanking is the norm should catch a break if they are charged criminally with beating a kid.

And he has the program to do just that.

Dane County District Attorney **Ismael Ozanne** has launched a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at diverting from the traditional criminal justice system certain minority defendants charged with child abuse if they use corporal punishment as a "culturally acceptable form of discipline."

The program was created in response to the disproportionate percentage of minorities accused of child abuse in Dane County.

Ozanne says in a five-page report that his goal is to reduce criminal convictions for minority offenders by "recognizing corporal punishment as a culturally acceptable form of discipline and attempt to influence change utilizing culturally sensitive interventions."

The plan gives certain parents "deferred prosecution agreements" when they are accused of child abuse. These agreements allow defendants to avoid prison and have their

charges reduced or dropped altogether if they complete certain requirements and don't run into any more trouble during a specified period.

Among those considered appropriate candidates for deferred prosecutions in Ozanne's program:

"Any parent/defendant who utilizes corporal punishment as a culturally acceptable form of discipline and the current incident escalated to abusive conduct."

A campaign spokesman for Ozanne, one of three Democrats vying to be the state's top cop, said the Dane County DA is not going soft on anyone with this program. The program outline is dated Jan. 14.

"The priority of this program is to protect children," said **Stan Davis**, campaign aide for Ozanne. "We have learned over the years that doing things the old way is not necessarily the best or most effective way to protect children."

Other candidates skeptical

The other AG candidates were given copies of Ozanne's program, called "Deferred Prosecution Unit Child Abuse Initiative: Addressing Racial Disparities & Corporal Punishment."

All were highly skeptical of this kinder, gentler approach to child abuse cases.

Waukesha County District Attorney **Brad Schimel**, a Republican, said he would never put in place an initiative such as this with "culturally sensitive interventions."

"Under Wisconsin law, parents are permitted to use reasonable discipline, but no parent has a right to abuse a child, and they should be held accountable under the law," Schimel said in a written statement. "There is no justification for the abuse of children."

State Rep. **Jon Richards** was even more concise.

"When it comes to child abuse, protecting kids should be the one and only priority," said Richards, a Milwaukee Democrat.

According to Ozanne's summary of the program, police referred 174 cases of child abuse to the Dane County district attorney's office from June 2011 to June 2012. Of that number, 54% were minority offenders, even though minorities make up only 15% of the county's population.

In addition, parents who spank their children are nine times more likely to injure or abuse them, according to the report.

Ozanne put his program in the context of "peaceful childhood initiatives" going on elsewhere. He noted that Dane County has just added a specialist in "restorative justice" to its deferred prosecution team.

Those eligible for the deferred prosecution deals under Ozanne's program are parents or defendants who abused children as a result of excessive discipline, admitted their guilt, lacked a recent criminal background and showed remorse. Prosecutors then work with child protective services to come up with a specific program that these defendants must complete to clear or reduce the criminal charges.

For example, defendants can enter an 18-week comprehensive parenting program for those who use excessive corporal punishment. The program costs \$2,160 a person.

"Both minority parents and their children are likely to receive short-term and long-term benefits from a deferred prosecution model, which provides timely intervention addressing alternative discipline approaches," the summary states.

Davis said the program builds on a nearly decade-long practice in Dane County of diverting some child abuse cases from the traditional criminal justice system.

Since 2006, there have been 662 cases of child abuse or neglect in Dane County, with just about a quarter of those defendants receiving deferred prosecution deals. More whites than blacks were given these deals.

While Ozanne's summary of the program refers only to African-American families, Davis said other groups view spanking as a "culturally acceptable form of discipline."

Dane County has had abuse cases, he said, involving parents from faith communities that take literally the biblical passage to "spare the rod and spoil the child."

"It's not just for black defendants," Davis said. Of the 19 defendants currently in Ozanne's new deferred

prosecution program, 10 are black.

It appears the corporal punishment initiative is an outgrowth of something called the **Racial Justice Improvement Project**. A two-day conference on Ozanne's plan is set for June in Dane County.

Davis said the project has the support of other groups, including the **National Center for Effective Discipline** and the **University of Wisconsin Hospitals Department of Pediatrics**.

But this approach has its critics.

Especially among Ozanne's opponents.

Jefferson County District Attorney **Susan Happ** — the third Democrat running for the open AG's post this fall — said she is very cautious when recommending deferred prosecutions or other alternatives to incarceration, especially when the victim is a minor.

"Child abuse is something I take extremely seriously," Happ said. "I understand there may be cultural differences, but I do not condone child abuse under any circumstances."

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Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/watchdog/noquarter/ozannes-program-for-abuse-cases-offers-a-break-to-parents-who-spank-b99242874z1-254349931.html>

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UPDATE: Ozanne faces questions about diversion program for child abusers

Posted: Apr 08, 2014 11:27 AM CDT

Updated: Apr 23, 2014 11:44 AM CDT

By Greg Neumann - bio | email

MADISON (WKOW) -- Dane County District Attorney and Wisconsin Attorney General Candidate Ismael Ozanne (D) is trying to reduce the number of criminal convictions for minority parents arrested for child abuse.

Ozanne says minority parents are responsible for more than half of the child abuse cases that come into his office, even though minorities as a whole represent less than 15 percent of the overall population in Dane County.

"I think that there's informational studies out now that show there's a historical cultural component," said Ozanne, who says the cultural values of many minority groups allow for more corporal punishment, which can sometimes escalate to greater physical harm.

Ozanne has set up a deferred prosecution program where child abuse offenders who meet certain conditions can avoid a conviction. Instead of going to jail, they go through parenting classes so they can learn better disciplinary techniques.

While its open to people of all races, Ozanne says it will help minorities more, simply because they have a higher rate of offending. Of the 20 people currently in the program, 11 are minorities.

"This is about protecting children. This isn't about making some special program for any one group. It is about protecting children and all children, all families are eligible if they're appropriate," said Ozanne.

But fellow AG Candidate and District Attorney Brad Schimel (R-Waukesha County) says child abuse should never be excused.

Schimel says Ozanne's deferred prosecution program presents a very slippery slope.

"Wisconsin law already recognizes that parents have a right to use reasonable parental discipline in raising their children. But, we shouldn't be bending over backward to excuse conduct that goes further than reasonable parental discipline," said Schimel, who says he only believes in using deferred prosecution arrangements for non-violent, first-time offenders.

But Ozanne says simply putting those people in jail, without giving them the tools they need to be better parents, isn't helping anyone.

"We're looking to address the incident, which has brought the offender into the criminal justice system and we're looking to change behavior to protect that child or those children for the future," said Ozanne.

Schimel says the counseling and treatment of parents can still be offered as a condition of probation, without taking away the threat of a conviction.

The two other Democratic Attorney General candidates also expressed caution over the idea.

Jefferson County District Attorney Susan Happ put out a statement which read: "Deferred prosecution agreements and alternatives to incarceration programs can be of tremendous benefit to offenders and to our communities, but they should be carefully applied. When you are talking about violent offenses, public protection is paramount. This is especially true when you are talking about offenders who have committed an act of violence against a helpless child. It is up to those of us in law enforcement to ensure that all of our children are safe and secure. I understand that there may be cultural differences that may contribute to these offenses, but we cannot condone child abuse under any circumstance."

Rep. Jon Richards (D-Milwaukee) simply wrote: "When it comes to child abuse, protecting kids should be the one and only priority."

MADISON (WKOW) -- Dane County District Attorney and Wisconsin Attorney General Candidate Ismael Ozanne is trying to reduce the number of criminal convictions for minority parents arrested for child abuse.

To accomplish that, Ozanne set up a deferred prosecution program for parents whose cultural values led them to use "excessive discipline techniques." The program allows such parents to avoid jail time by enrolling in an 18 week comprehensive parenting program that teaches alternative discipline.

In a five-page report Ozanne put out last fall, he cites statistics from a one-year span in Dane County that shows 54 percent of the 174 child abuse cases referred to his office involved minority offenders, even though minorities only make up 15 percent the county's population.

"Both minority parents and their children are likely to receive short and long term benefits from a deferred prosecution model which provides timely intervention in addressing alternative discipline approaches," writes Ozanne.

Ozanne offers the following hypothesis for the increase in child abuse among minorities developed by Tim Wise, author of the book *White Like Me*.

"A paddle, after all, or the flat one one's hand will sting, it may even bruise, but it will not end one's life the way a bullet will. And for black parents, there is every reason to think that unless their children learn self control at an early age, even if it has to be taught by way of a mechanism they'd rather not see dispensed, the risk of future catastrophe involving those same children will only grow," writes Wise.

Ozanne writes the program will be evaluated for effectiveness based on child abuse recidivism rates and other measures.

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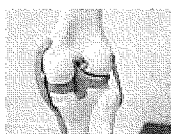
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ATTORNEY GENERAL RACE

AG candidate Ismael Ozanne defends diversion program for abusive parents

APRIL 09, 2014 5:45 AM • BY DEE J. HALL | WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne on Tuesday defended a program run by his office that provides counseling and services to some parents charged with abuse for excessively disciplining their children.

The program, which currently includes 20 offenders, has been criticized by Ozanne's opponents in the race to replace Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen.

One of the goals of the diversion program is to reduce the racial disparity in Dane County's criminal justice system.

But Ozanne said the program is open to parents of all racial groups. Nine of the 20 participants are white, one is Asian and 10 are black, he said. Charges against participants who complete the 18-month program are dismissed.

"We are looking to make sure we protect all kids with a program that addresses the incident and protects them in the future by giving the parents new parenting tools that are non-violent," Ozanne said.

While spanking and other forms of corporal punishment have declined significantly in recent decades, physical discipline remains acceptable in some cultures, according to the six-page memo outlining the program.

One goal of the program is to reduce the number of minority parents prosecuted for child abuse for instances of "excessive discipline" and to provide quick and "culturally sensitive" intervention in those cases.

According to the memo, the Dane County District Attorney's Office got 174 referrals for intentional physical abuse of a child between June 1, 2011, and June 1, 2012. Of those, 54 percent were minority offenders — more than triple the 15 percent of Dane County's population that is nonwhite.

Although parents of any race can participate, the program will help reduce racial disparities because more than half of such defendants are black, Ozanne said.

Specific parents targeted

The diversion program, which began last fall and was first reported on by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, is aimed specifically at parents who:

- Committed the abuse in the context of "excessive discipline."

- Have a recent history of alcohol or drug abuse who are willing to undergo treatment through Drug Court.
- Have made an admission of guilt, are showing remorse for their behavior and are working cooperatively with law enforcement or the Department of Human Services.
- Have no recent criminal behavior.
- Use corporal punishment as a “culturally acceptable” form of discipline.

Offenders undergo an 18-week comprehensive parenting program to help them learn how to manage children’s behaviors and emotions using “effective and healthy” discipline techniques. The cost is \$2,160 per person.

In recent years, Ozanne’s office has prosecuted several high-profile child abuse cases, including that of a Madison girl who was starved, sexually assaulted and confined to the basement.

Defendants in that case would not qualify for the program, he said.

“These (diversion cases) are not the most serious cases of abuse and neglect,” Ozanne said. “Those cases we prosecute to the fullest extent.”

In another case, four leaders of a Black Earth church that advocated striking the bare buttocks of children as young as infants with wooden dowels as discipline were criminally charged and convicted.

The Aleitheia Bible Church defendants would not qualify, Ozanne said, because “the person has to accept responsibility, they have to be willing to change their behavior, and those defendants were not willing to do that.”

Program works, expert says

Sharyl Kato, executive director of The Rainbow Project Inc. in Madison, said treatment and diversion work for certain parents, especially those whose abuse stems from alcohol or drug problems, or trauma from their own childhoods.

Kato said providing services and counseling for offenders and their families is preferable in some cases to locking parents up.

Her agency has been working with parents charged with child abuse as part of diversion programs since The Rainbow Project opened in 1980, including the current program.

“We’ve actually experienced it. It works,” Kato said. “We’ve seen it be very successful.”

But three other candidates vying for attorney general were critical of the approach.

“There are no excuses for child abuse,” said Republican candidate Brad Schimel, the district attorney of Waukesha County. “Children are the most vulnerable members of our society, and instances of abuse need to be taken seriously including holding the offenders accountable under the law.”

Schimmel added that "Wisconsin law acknowledges parents have the right to use reasonable physical discipline in raising their children. The Dane County District Attorney is forgetting who the victims are and he should not bend over backwards to excuse conduct that goes further than the law allows."

Jefferson County District Attorney Susan Happ, a Democrat running for attorney general, said she's wary of the program.

"I view deferred prosecutions and alternatives to incarceration as policies to be applied very carefully," Happ said in a statement. "Child abuse is something I take extremely seriously. I understand there may be cultural differences, but I do not condone child abuse under any circumstances."

State Rep. Jon Richards of Milwaukee, the other Democrat in the race, agreed.

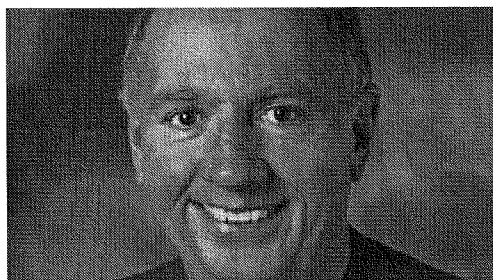
"When it comes to child abuse, protecting kids should be the one and only priority," Richards said.



Spare the rod, knee-jerk criticism of Ozanne

DA is right on handling child discipline issues

Published On: Apr 09 2014 06:10:43 PM CDT Updated On: Apr 10 2014 07:42:03 AM CDT



The criticism being leveled at Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne for a new program designed to provide criminal justice alternatives for some parents charged with excessively disciplining their kids is short sighted and unwise.

Over the last year or so, Ozanne and members of his staff have thoughtfully and carefully created a new position in the differed prosecution unit to identify parents entering the system for what they might argue is appropriate disciplining of their children, and get those parents counseling and services rather than a criminal record that might not be warranted.

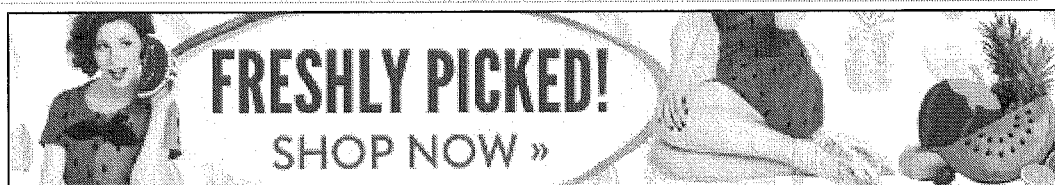
Make no mistake: this is NOT in any way a reduced emphasis on child abuse, which will be vigorously prosecuted and punished as much as ever. This is about experts identifying legitimate cases of misjudgment, lack of understanding or even family patterns that can be dealt with in ways that help everybody involved.

Granted the criticism identified in Wednesday's State Journal story seems overtly political given Ozanne's candidacy for Attorney General. This issue deserves better than that. Healthy discussion and listening are welcome. But knee-jerk rejection is not, because Ozanne is right on this issue.

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EDITORS' PICKS:

Wisconsin candidate defends abusive parents policy

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By DINESH RAMDE - Associated Press

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

MILWAUKEE (AP) - A Democratic candidate for state attorney general on Wednesday defended a Dane County program in which parents accused of disciplining their children too harshly could avoid abuse charges by taking parenting classes, a policy that drew skeptical reactions from his campaign rivals.

Ismael Ozanne, the Dane County district attorney, said the program keeps children safe while helping adults become better parents. He said it replaces a heavy-handed approach with parental assistance and education, which he called an innovative solution that still holds child abusers accountable.

"With the amount of supervision they're under, this is not a freebie," he told a panel of reporters at the Milwaukee Press Club. "They're not getting off."

The program gives parents who meet certain requirements the chance to avoid child-abuse charges. Instead they might have to take intensive parenting classes, go to counseling and perform community service, Ozanne said.

Parents convicted of first-offense child abuse typically get probation or a short jail term, but then return to their same habits, campaign spokesman Stan Davis said. Instead, by teaching them how to discipline their children without corporal punishment, the cycle of violence can end, he added.

To qualify for the program parents must admit their guilt, show remorse and cooperate with law enforcement.

Brad Schimel, the Waukesha County district attorney and the only Republican running for attorney general, questioned whether Ozanne's program truly does enough to protect abused children.

"The Dane County District Attorney is forgetting who the victims are and he should not bend over backwards to excuse conduct that goes further than the law allows," Schimel said in a statement.

Two other Democrats are also in the race. State Rep. Jon Richards, said that in cases of child abuse, "protecting kids should be the one and only priority." And Susan Happ, the Jefferson County district attorney, said policies that defer prosecution and provide alternatives to incarceration should be applied very carefully.

Ozanne, Richards and Happ will square off in an August primary. The winner will face Schimel in the November general election.

The current attorney general, Republican J.B. Van Hollen, isn't seeking re-election.

Ozanne spokesman Davis said the corporal-punishment program applies to parents whose spankings leave a mark, such as one left by a switch, belt, wire hanger or extension cord. Parents who spank their children on the buttocks with a bare hand would never even get referred to police, he said, and those who commit serious abuse would be prosecuted, he said.

Ozanne cited the case of a Madison girl whose parents were accused of keeping her locked in the basement and starving her until the 15-year-old weighed just 68 pounds. Ozanne prosecuted those parents and won convictions, he noted.

A number of other legal issues were raised during the hour-long discussion at the Press Club.

For example, Ozanne was asked whether he would defend the state's ban on same-sex marriage, or a law that requires that abortion providers have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals.

He said he would defend neither. He said marriage equality was an issue of fairness, and abortion restrictions infringe on a woman's right to choose.

He wasn't as definite on a question about whether he'd defend Act 10, the 2011 law championed by Republican Gov. Scott Walker that effectively did away with most union rights for teachers and other public workers.

Ozanne emphasized that he had filed a lawsuit in the case, alleging that lawmakers violated Wisconsin's open-records law during the run-up to the law's passage. But if called upon as attorney general to defend the law, he said he'd have to review whether the case provided a good-faith legal basis to challenge the law.

Online:

Ismael Ozanne campaign: <http://www.iozanne.com>

Jon Richards campaign: <http://www.jonforwisconsin.com>

Susan Happ campaign: <http://www.susanhappforwisconsin.com>

Brad Schimel campaign: <http://bradschimel.com>

Dinesh Ramde can be reached at dramde@ap.org.



Ismael Ozanne defends stance on corporal punishment defendants

By Lee Bergquist of the Journal Sentinel
April 9, 2014

Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne on Wednesday defended an initiative to divert some minority defendants from the traditional justice system, saying it doesn't prevent his office from criminally charging cases of child abuse.

Ozanne, a Democratic candidate for attorney general, developed a program in Dane County that removes from the court system some minority suspects who use corporal punishment as a "culturally acceptable form of discipline."

He launched the program because of a disproportionately high number of cases involving minorities in child abuse cases in his county.

"It is never OK to abuse children," Ozanne told a gathering at a candidate forum downtown sponsored by the Milwaukee Press Club. "This is not something that allows people to get off the hook."

Rather, the prosecutor said the initiative allows some parents to avoid prosecution if they meet requirements, such as attending counseling and parenting classes.

"We're trying to identify cases earlier, get services to those children sooner, protecting kids," he said. "These are cases that would have fallen through the cracks."

Ozanne is one of three Democrats running for state's top law enforcement post. The other two are Rep. Jon Richards (D-Milwaukee) and Jefferson County District Attorney Susan Happ.

The only announced Republican candidate is Waukesha County District Attorney Brad Schimel.

Replacing Van Hollen

The four are running to replace Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen, who is not seeking re-election. Van Hollen has endorsed Schimel. All of the candidates have appeared, or are expected to appear, at a Press Club event.

Ozanne said he is the most experienced candidate in the race, noting that he is district attorney of Wisconsin's second-largest county and he served as deputy secretary of the state Department of Corrections under former Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle.

The attorney general has the responsibility to enforce the state's laws, even if he or she doesn't agree with the law, Ozanne said. But there are exceptions. Ozanne said he would not defend the state in a suit

over a constitutional amendment on gay marriage because a ban on gay marriage is effectively state-sponsored discrimination.

Ozanne also said he could not defend a challenge to a state law requiring physicians in abortion clinics to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals.

But on whether he would defend a future challenge of Act 10, which stripped most public employees of many of their collective bargaining rights, Ozanne said it would depend on the circumstances.

"I would have to review it and see," said Ozanne, adding that, generally, the attorney general has the obligation to enforce state law.

Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/ismael-ozanne-defends-stance-on-corporal-punishment-defendants-b99244644z1-254642171.html>

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Your Views

April 12, 2014 | (42) Comments

*Milwaukee Journal
Sentinel***Diversion program works**

As a retired prosecutor and one who has worked for years on the issue of child abuse, I am appalled by the opportunistic criticism of Dane County's child abuse diversion program by candidates running against Ismael Ozanne for Wisconsin attorney general ("Initiative on spanking defended," April 10).

No one is put in a diversion program in Dane County without approval by a criminal court judge. People diverted into these programs must admit guilt and be willing to work hard to avoid conviction. Professionals screen their referrals to determine if they are appropriate for diversion. They are monitored more closely, and their families are offered more services than most on probation.

If diverted offenders can learn how to positively parent and avoid criminal records, families can be saved and taxpayers can save money because of this intervention. Dane County diversion programs work. Those who are unsuccessful — having admitted guilt — face a sentencing hearing by the criminal court judge.

Let's not use children as political pawns in this or any election, and let us continue to find ways to help children be safe at home.

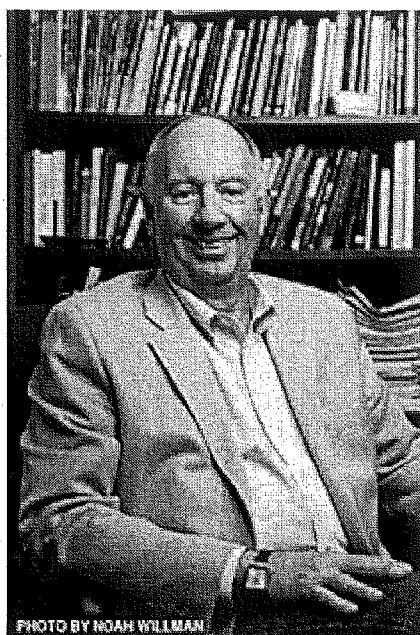
Judith Munaker*Fitchburg*

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Dane County District Attorney Takes on Criminal Injustice

Ismael Ozanne should be commended for work around corporal punishment

BY NEIL HEINEN



I don't remember the criminal justice system in this country ever being scrutinized as aggressively as it is today. Within the last twelve months, the civic dialogue regarding our prisons, who is in them and why, has gone from a statistically-supported argument that we have made some bad policy decisions to a growing conviction that the United States's criminal justice system is broken—that it is short-sighted, ineffective, susceptible to politics at their worst and decidedly un-just.

American jails and prisons, in addition to warehousing people in numbers way out of whack from other modern, first-world, democratic nations, have become examples of our society's worst shortcomings in the areas of mental health care, income inequality and racial disparities. But unlike the previous two decades at least, correction policies are being challenged and underlying issues are being addressed. And while we will no doubt have to drag our political leaders to reform kicking and screaming, current action on U.S. prison issues suggests it will happen. A couple of recent examples of this new thinking include Bill Keller's decision to leave the *New York Times* after thirty years to become editor-in-chief of a nonprofit journalism startup focused on the American criminal justice system, and intrepid reporter/author Matt Taibbi's new book, *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*, that makes the connection between America's growing income and wealth inequality and inequalities in our criminal justice system.

But even more important, given that the impetus for reform will need to come from citizens and leaders at the local level, is what's been going on in Wisconsin, especially here in Madison. To be sure, folks like the Rev. Jerry Hancock, Linda Ketcham from Madison Area Urban Ministry, Voices Beyond Bars and many others have been working tirelessly to

provide support and care for inmates both inside the system and re-entering the community. But a few local government leaders have also taken action to affect change that is measureable and sustainable. And there's no better example than Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne's work around corporal punishment. With the exception of the highly successful drug courts in Dane County, and restorative justice programs before that, re-thinking how we deal with parents and how they discipline their kids seems to me to have a direct impact on who enters the criminal justice system and, as a result, who gets trapped there.

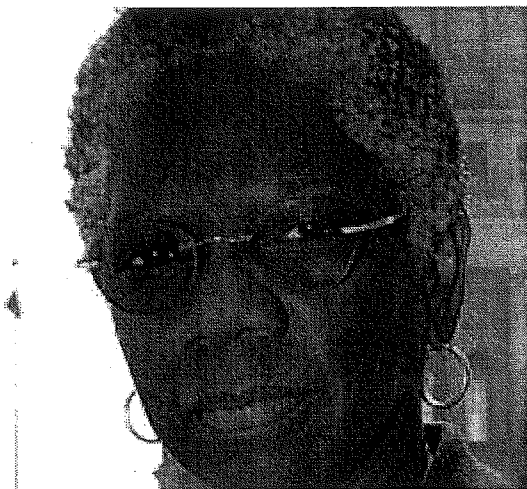
Of course, this particular issue also illustrates how difficult it is to initiate a strategic approach to racial disparities in the criminal justice system. How one disciplines one's child is about as loaded as a question of parenting gets. One person's spanking is another person's child abuse. A fair number of us remember a swat, or more, on the butt as a part of child rearing passed down through generations. And rightly or wrongly, and there appears to be at least some disagreement on the issue, there may be cultural differences in how one views punishing children. Regardless, some smart and thoughtful folks in the DA's office and concerned community members have identified problems with our standardized approach to corporal punishment cases, and Ozanne's office has created a new alternative approach that includes diversion to the deferred prosecution unit when appropriate. I'm confident these professionals can tell a child abuse case from an opportunity to educate and inform parental decision making. There's no doubt this office is not going to stop coming down hard on legitimate child abuse cases. But recognizing opportunities to help a parent re-think his or her approach to disciplining a kid, and perhaps identifying behavior or communications styles that might be misinterpreted and thus mishandled in the system, should keep some folks from a record that can impact their lives and at the same time make for a healthier family. That's just smart. To the extent it is also courageous I give Ozanne credit for taking this on.

Neil P. Heinen is editorial director of Madison Magazine.

Find more of his columns here.



Secretary Eloise Anderson: We all play a role in preventing child abuse



APRIL 22, 2014 10:00 AM • ELOISE ANDERSON |
SECRETARY OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Each year in the United States over 750,000 children and youths suffer from abuse or neglect. Sadly, the odds are that one or more of the children that you encounter today has been victimized by a person responsible for their care. Child abuse is something that knows no boundaries. It happens in big cities, suburban communities and small towns. It happens across all socio-economic classes. And it is happening right now. In fact, a report of abuse or neglect is made every 10 seconds.

April is Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month in Wisconsin, as proclaimed by Gov. Scott Walker. It serves as a reminder that despite the troubling statistics, people from all over the state dedicate their lives to protecting Wisconsin's most precious resource.

At the Department of Children and Families, we are continually striving to improve our efforts to keep children safe from harm. In the not too distant past, the norm for child welfare agencies was to react to abuse and neglect as if it took place in a vacuum. Now, thanks to extensive research and analysis, we know this not to be the case. The majority of people who inflict pain upon their children love them and do not set out to cause suffering. Most instances of child abuse or neglect occur because parents do not know how to cope with stressors or have been victims themselves.

In order to prevent child abuse and neglect, and not simply react to it, we have revamped our approaches to address the entire family. Our primary obligation is still to ensure the safety of children. If a child is deemed to be unsafe, we will work with the courts to place the child in a safe setting, while we work with the family to learn how to deal with the stressors that led to the unsafe conditions for the child. We help to establish a network of support within the family's community, so that they have resources to assist them in times of high stress. And in some cases, we help teach caregivers the basic skills of parenting that they might not have learned due to the lack of parental role models during their own childhood. After extensive work, if parents are able to demonstrate that they can provide for the care and well-being of their child, we work to return the child to their home. If despite all of the interventions and training made available, parents do not show that they can provide for the safety of their children, then we will work tirelessly to find them a loving forever family through adoption or guardianship.

In situations where it is deemed possible to keep families intact and children safe, the child welfare agency will work with the caregivers to learn to deal with the stressors that can lead to abuse or neglect while the child remains with their family. This approach of using intensive in-home services to work with a family is taken with the best long-term interest of the child in mind. Research into the effects of childhood trauma has shown that removing a child from their home can have long-lasting negative after-effects. Keeping a child with their family as we work with the parents is one way that we can take a trauma-informed care approach to reducing the impact of what the child has endured and improve their long-term outcomes. Through this method, we hope to lessen the generational cycle of harm caused by child abuse and neglect.

Many steps have been taken to change the way that DCF approaches dealing with child abuse or neglect cases. However, as the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We know that the best way to keep a child safe is to prevent abuse or neglect from happening in the first place. To this end, the department has implemented some truly groundbreaking initiatives like the Home Visiting Program, which identifies families in high-risk areas and works with them even before a child is born to reduce the factors that can lead to a child being a victim of abuse or neglect.

Even with all of the improvements to the child welfare system, we know that we cannot prevent child abuse and neglect without your help. If we are going to truly make a difference in children's lives, it will take all of us working together 24/7 to keep our children safe.

You have the greatest ability to help keep a child safe. Learn about the warning signs of abuse and neglect. Get involved if you suspect a child is being victimized. You can't assume that someone else closer to the child or to the family has already noticed the possible abuse or neglect and taken action. Pick up the phone and report your suspicions to your local child welfare agency. You might be the difference in whether or not a child gets the help that they need.

We also encourage you to connect with families and children in your community who may be experiencing unexpected or prolonged stress, due to the curveballs that life can throw at people, such as the loss of a job or a change in the family structure. By supporting these families through something as simple as offering to watch a child for a few hours, being willing to listen and offer advice, providing new parents with some helpful tips, or becoming a mentor to an older child who is looking for a positive role model, you can help them remain stable and prevent an occurrence of abuse or neglect.

We can win the battle against child abuse and neglect — if we all work together.

Eloise Anderson is secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

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