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Threats Hamper Court Operations and Undermine Judicial Independence

Idahoans who appear in court have a constitutional right to have their cases resolved impartially by an independent judge — [“without sale, denial, delay, or prejudice.”](#)

This concept is central to a fair justice system in our society. However, criticism of a recent criminal sentencing has descended into misinformation and threats that now disrupt court operations and jeopardize these rights.

What happened: In February prosecutors charged Candon Dahle with one felony count of *lewd conduct with a minor child under 16*.

Before the case even made it to district court, the prosecution and the defense reached a plea agreement through mediation. Dahle agreed to plead guilty to a different set of charges: two felony counts of *injury to a child*. Both sides agreed that Dahle would be sentenced to probation with potential prison time if he violated it. The specific lengths of the probation and prison time were left for a judge to decide at sentencing.

Importantly, this was a “binding” plea agreement, meaning the sentencing judge could accept or reject the agreement, but could not alter its terms. The amended charges meant that under Idaho law, Dahle could not be required to register as a sex offender.

On Aug. 26, a new judge to the case sentenced Dahle under the binding agreement: eight years of probation and a possible 10-year prison sentence if probation fails. The judge added 180 days of jail time for Dahle — more than either side requested.

The judge’s decision followed arguments from both sides, an impact statement from the victim, and other information on Dahle’s history and risk of reoffending — all factors Idaho law requires a judge to consider.

The results: After news reports on the sentencing, social media posts distorted the facts, spreading the claim that a judge had chosen not to sentence a rapist to prison.

That misinformation has fueled nationwide threats against the local court. In one instance, people thought they saw the judge at a local fair and encouraged others to track him down. Court staff have been told to expect a group that is coming to “get” the judge. In messages and posts, people have urged the judge and his children to be sexually assaulted themselves. The volume and detail of the threats has required additional security precautions at public expense.

These actions make it increasingly difficult for courts to effectively function. Delays or disruption caused by these threats can affect the timely delivery of justice in other cases.

Beyond that, it is never acceptable to threaten harm to a judge or to intervene in the independent, impartial handling of a case. If courts decided matters based on public opinion instead of evidence and legal standards, the consequences would reach far beyond this case — affecting business disputes, criminal prosecutions, and even the ability of citizens to challenge government actions in court.

The Idaho Judicial Branch urges an immediate end to these threats and calls on everyone discussing the case to pause and become acquainted with its facts. Idaho judges are accountable in multiple ways to their government and their public. Criticism of judicial decisions is fair and expected in a free society. Promising violence is never acceptable.

A timeline of this case is available to view at isc.idaho.gov.

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