



**LAURA AUSTIN THOMAS
DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

In response to a number of requests for comment regarding the State of Oklahoma's prosecution of Jesse Butler, District Attorney Laura Austin Thomas has provided the following statement:

The District Attorney's Office carefully evaluates every case submitted for prosecution to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the available evidence and potential defenses. The charges in this matter allege conduct by a 16 year-old male directed at similarly aged young women. Most crimes committed by persons under 18 must be filed in juvenile court where proceedings are confidential and have no potential for incarceration in the adult system. A significant number of more serious crimes provide the option of filing as a youthful offender. As a youthful offender, the accused has an opportunity for rehabilitation but can be transitioned to adult status and adult punishment if those efforts fail. A much more limited number of crimes allow the State to file the charges in adult court from the beginning. The youthful offender sentence imposed against Jesse Butler requires him to complete his rehabilitation plan successfully, including an aggressive schedule of therapy with a specialist in sex offender treatment, and should he fail, he faces reclassification as an adult and a sentence of ten years in prison.

Years of experience tell us that juries often struggle with convicting defendants based upon delayed reports of sexual assault between people in ongoing, consensual dating relationships and the trial process can be very traumatic for victims. Nonetheless, after consultation with the victims and their families, we chose to file this matter and to file it in adult court rather than juvenile court in order to bring the serious behavior at issue into the public eye and with hopes of avoiding a later reclassification of the case to juvenile status. In accordance with Oklahoma law, this filing decision then afforded the defendant the opportunity to seek certification of his charges to youthful offender or juvenile status. We explained that youthful offender was the most likely final outcome, particularly because the two counts of attempted rape were the only alleged crimes among the eleven charged that even qualified the case for filing in adult court and, additionally, because existing law strongly favors providing offenders under 18 an opportunity for rehabilitation. The ultimate resolution of the case, reached without either victim having to testify or face cross-examination in a contested proceeding, included the accused agreeing not to challenge any of the allegations and to be sentenced to the outcome described above, including the potential for imprisonment in the penitentiary.