

NEWS

Despite barrage of bipartisan criticism, Biberaj keeps all funding for now

BY COY FERRELL

cferrell@loudountimes.com

A March 13 budget work session was, on the surface, about a routine funding request for administrative support staff. Instead — and perhaps predictably — the meeting quickly went off the rails as the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors tried to answer a very different question: Can Commonwealth's Attorney Buta Biberaj, the county's top prosecutor, be trusted to perform her role adequately in the criminal justice system?

For now, county supervisors have kept all of Biberaj's funding in place, voting down a motion to reallocate some funding from Biberaj's office to pay for prosecutors who would report to another county agency. Supervisors decided to discuss Biberaj's funding needs further at an as-yet-unscheduled committee meeting.

But the fundamental question of Biberaj's competency has not gone away. Tensions have risen since a Dec. 30 memo from Biberaj, a Democrat elected in 2019 on a progressive-reform platform, to district court judges informing them of coming "changes" to her prosecutors' involvement in some cases. Namely, the memo outlined a list of misdemeanor criminal charges that would be "defer[red] to the court and law enforcement" to handle, as of Jan. 16. Biberaj's memo said that prosecutors were "inundated" by the need to review body-worn camera footage and "left with insufficient time to prosecute every infraction and low-level offense that is charged." The memo was leaked to the press, and Biberaj had not at the time informed local law enforcement agencies of the planned



Times-Mirror/Coy Ferrell

Loudoun County Commonwealth's Attorney Buta Biberaj addresses county supervisors during a March 13 work session.

"changes."

Now, Biberaj claims that the memo was only intended to inform judges of a return to the pre-pandemic status quo and that it is, in fact, against Virginia law for the commonwealth's attorney's office to involve itself in class 3 or 4 misdemeanors. (Class 1 and 2 misdemeanors are more serious charges.) The Dec. 30 memo does not mention either of these factors.

The heated exchanges with Biberaj lasted three hours, with the most searing criticism coming from the two board members who are also attorneys: Kristen Umstadd, D-Leesburg, and Caleb Kershner, R-Catoctin. Noting that the Dec. 30 memo stated that prosecutors would no longer be involved in some crimes charged

as class 1 or 2 misdemeanors, Umstadd twice asked Biberaj if she will rescind the memo. "It would appear you are currently contradicting the situation you described in your Dec. 30 letter," Umstadd told Biberaj.

Biberaj refused. "We haven't changed anything — I'm sorry that's the understanding you or others may have had," Biberaj told Umstadd. She added during another exchange, "Nothing has changed. [Prosecutors] are still in the courtroom, so we still support" law enforcement officers testifying in low-level misdemeanor cases. "We're not rescinding anything because there's nothing to rescind."

But Umstadd, like the majority of the board, wasn't satisfied with Biberaj's an-

swers, which often went far beyond the scope of any given question.

"I think clarity and brevity is your friend, and you have not embraced that friend tonight," Chair Phyllis Randall, D-At Large, told Biberaj. "I don't think you've been clear in your answers. I think you've been evasive," Randall added during a separate exchange. "You will help yourself by just answering the questions," she said during yet another exchange.

"I am utterly aghast — I do not understand what you're talking about," Kershner said in response to one of Biberaj's attempts to explain her Dec. 30 memo. He disputed Biberaj's claim that it is illegal for her office to become involved in low-level misdemeanor cases, citing another section of state law that permits a local governing body to direct a commonwealth's attorney to perform certain duties.

Umstadd moved to reallocate two attorneys and one administrative position from the budget of the commonwealth's attorney — an elected "constitutional officer" exempt from most formal oversight — to the county attorney's office, which reports directly to supervisors and usually handles county-involved civil litigation. Since the positions in Biberaj's office are currently vacant, no one would lose their jobs, Umstadd emphasized.

Because Biberaj refused to rescind her Dec. 30 memo, Umstadd argued, "I am very concerned that law enforcement is going to be left without support" in misdemeanor cases because of what Biberaj "is not willing to do in general district court." Without a commitment to rescind the memo, "I think this is the only option for

FULL TEXT: BIBERAJ'S DEC. 30 MEMO

our resources towards the more egregious cases that are being charged by law enforcement and threaten the safety of our community. The most appropriate way for us to do so is to redirect our resources towards the crimes of violence and felonious criminal acts.

To provide the resources necessary to address the volume and intensity of the violent crimes and felonies, beginning with violations having been committed after January 16, 2023 we will defer to the court and law enforcement those cases that involve the following:

1. Traffic Offenses

traffic infractions (the consequences are fines); reckless driving — speeding under 90 mph; first offense driving on suspended / no operator's license; hit & run — property damage; eluding; and registration and titling offenses.

2. Criminal Offenses — includes those offenses that are statutorily eligible for deferred findings:

Trespass (deferred finding eligible); Petty Larceny; Possession of Schedule III/IV (deferred finding eligible); Drunk in Public (max fine is \$250); Underage Possession of Alcohol (deferred finding eligible); Noise Complaints; Violations of Ordinances; Failure to Appear; and Trials in Ab-

sence (not punishable by jail / fine only).

Our need to dedicate more time on the more egregious cases in General District Court (such as DUIs and assaults), crimes of violence in the Juvenile courts (such as domestic violence, crimes against children, and the increase of violent crimes by juveniles), serious and violent crimes, felonies and trials in Circuit Court reduces our availability to prosecute the infractions and low-level, non-violent offenses.

As these changes will apply to offenses that are committed after January 16, 2023, it is anticipated that the current cases pending will not be impacted. We will collaborate with our law enforcement partners to provide trainings and guidance so that they are best prepared to present these cases to your courts.

Please let me know when you are available to meet with me (and anyone else in the Bar Association) if you are so inclined. As always, we are here to serve.

Thank you for your continued support and your service to the community.

Sincerely

Buta Biberaj

Commonwealth's Attorney

TO: The Loudoun County General District Court Judges, Chief Judge Deborah Welsh, Judge Lorie Sinclair Taylor, Judge William Fitzpatrick

FROM: Buta Biberaj, Commonwealth's Attorney

DATE: December 30, 2022

RE: Prosecution of Misdemeanor Offenses
Greetings Judges:

I would like to have the opportunity to present to you changes that are occurring in the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney that may impact your courts. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these changes and to have your comments and perspective as it relates to my intention to have our attorneys focus on the prosecution of jury trials in Circuit Court, and crimes that are violent and pose greater harm to our community.

As you may know, with the increase in the trials in Circuit Court and the introduction of body worn camera and related recordings in each case, the OCA is inundated and left with insufficient time to prosecute every infraction and low-level offense that is charged. To better serve our community and to ensure that we are providing safety and justice, we need to reallocate

NEWS



Times-Mirror/Coy Ferrell

Loudoun County Supervisor Kristen Umstatted, D-Leesburg, addresses Commonwealth's Attorney Buta Biberaj during a March 13 work session.

keeping the public safe," Umstatted said.

Kershner concurred. "I think this boils down to a level of confidence," he said. "I don't think anyone up here ... can say, we really understand what Ms. Biberaj is going to with low level misdemeanors." Umstatted's proposed solution was not ideal, he said, "but I think it's almost out of necessity."

Umstatted's motion failed, with only Supervisor Tony Buffington, R-Blue Ridge, joining Umstatted and Kershner in voting "aye."

Randall, who has been severely critical of Biberaj, nonetheless argued it was illogical to make such a drastic change in an election year, noting that Biberaj may be voted out of office and a new commonwealth's attorney may implement completely different policies.

Supervisor Matt Letourneau, R-Dulles, also urged caution. He pointed to comments from County Attorney Leo Rogers, who told supervisors that he may not need as many resources to prosecute low-level crimes as initially thought. Letourneau also said he was hesitant to take away positions from the commonwealth's attorney, even if those positions were currently vacant.

"I completely empathize with Supervisor Umstatted's intent and completely concur with the emotional aspects of what you're trying to do," added Supervisor Mike Turner, D-Ashburn. But he warned of "unintended downstream consequences" by taking such drastic action without more information.

Supervisor Juli Briskman, D-Algonkian, adamantly defended Biberaj throughout the meeting. She called Umstatted's motion "offensive," "disrespectful" and "anti-democratic."

But outside of Briskman, outward support for Biberaj seems sparse.

The March 13 work session, for instance, was supposed to be about Biberaj's \$444,000 funding request for an executive assistant, two legal services assistants and a paralegal. Biberaj's com-

ments to supervisors suggested this need was due, in part, to the need to review footage from body-worn camera footage before certain criminal hearings.

But Umstatted questioned Biberaj's interpretation of state law regarding the timing of prosecutors' obligation to review the footage — and she questioned whether Biberaj had been truthful about when that footage is reviewed under currently policy. Umstatted said that she wanted to know "if the statement of the degree of burden is entirely correct," a comment met with audible sneering from Biberaj's supporters in the audience.

"The main message from [Biberaj] is that the body-worn camera footage has become burdensome," Umstatted said. "... From what I am hearing from the criminal defense bar, it is not nearly as burdensome as we are hearing tonight."

Supervisors voted 5-4 to hold a committee work session to explore the issue further.

Responding to protests from Briskman, who argued it was "inappropriate" to question a constitutional officer's policy decisions in such detail, Letourneau said that it was appropriate to scrutinize the request because it is a matter of local tax funding. "[Biberaj] is asking us for more positions because she says body-worn cameras are using all of her resources ... and I don't know how to evaluate [the request] any other way."

Supervisors did accomplish one budget-related item March 13, voting 7-2 to add a permanent executive assistant position for the commonwealth's attorney to the draft fiscal year 2024 budget at a cost of \$108,000. The position is currently set to expire June 30. (Umstatted and Turner voted against the motion.)

"I think the elected commonwealth's attorney for Loudoun County should have an executive assistant," Buffington said, a sentiment shared by the board's majority.



Times-Mirror/Coy Ferrell

Loudoun County School Board members Erika Ogedegbe, Leesburg, Atoosa Reaser, Algonkian, and Ian Serotkin, Blue Ridge, appear at a Feb. 6 liaison meeting with board supervisors.

New Leesburg middle school named

BY EVAN GOODENOW
egoodenow@loudountimes.com

A new middle school located in an area possibly home to Loudoun County's largest population of free Black people before the Civil War has been named.

Loudoun County Public Schools board members on Feb. 28 voted to name the \$110 million school at 41480 Steeplechase Loop Drive in Leesburg the Watson Mountain Middle School. The school is located by the intersection of Evergreen Mills, Red Hill and Ryan roads in southeast Loudoun.

The area is by Watson Road and may have been home to the largest community of free Blacks in Loudoun, according to History Matters, a Richmond-based historical group hired by LCPS to research school names. The group cites a 1982 Loudoun Times-Mirror article but says there is no secondary evidence.

In 1896, Black members of the Watson community opened the First Baptist Church which also served as a school for Black children until 1945. The church still stands.

A 17-member naming committee, which included parents, staff, students, and members selected by board members, recommended Watson Mountain Middle School. The committee, which sought names from the public, also provided alternate names. They were William Horace Ashe and John Watson, both of whom were born enslaved.

Ash was an educator who lived from 1859 to 1908, according to History Matters. He graduated from what is now Hampton University in 1892 and helped found the Teachers Reading Circle, the first statewide organization for Black educators in Virginia. He lived

and taught in Leesburg from 1891 to 1904.

John Watson, whose birth date is unknown, was one of the first Black members of the House of Delegates elected during Reconstruction in 1869, according to the Virginia Humanities Encyclopedia Virginia. Watson, who had no connection to Loudoun, voted to ratify the 14th and 15th amendments which were passed to guarantee the rights of formerly enslaved people including the right of men to vote. Those rights were violently suppressed during the white supremacist Redemption era in the 1870s as documented by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Watson died in 1869.

Board Chairman Ian Serotkin, Blue Ridge, said the name recommended by the committee was appropriate.

"It accurately reflects the history of the region as well as a nearby road that is one of the major roads in the area," he said. "It reflects the history of Watson as a community in the area, as well as individuals who lived in that area with the name Watson who the community may have been named after."

All board members who were present voted in favor of the name. Denise Corbo, At-Large — who board members voted against allowing to participate remotely through a medical exemption — was absent.

The four-floor, 210,969-square-foot school is scheduled to open in the fall of 2024, according to LCPS documents. It will be the 99th school at LCPS and hold up to 1,445 students. It's designed to accommodate enrollment growth in the 83,000-student district, particularly in the Dulles North and South Planning districts. The school will be on a campus with new elementary and high schools.

NEWS

‘High threat team’ practices ‘active shooter’ response

‘The time for us to learn how to work together ... is not when the ‘big incident’ happens’

BY COY FERRELL

cferrell@loudountimes.com

There wasn't an "active shooter" incident in Loudoun County June 22. Operational commanders with the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and the Loudoun County Combined Fire and Rescue System spent the morning practicing their response to one, anyway.

"Multiple callers advising multiple people are shot inside. Shooter last seen upstairs in the cafe area. Suspect description is going to be a white male wearing a green hoodie and black pants, armed with a pistol," LCSO Lt. Tom Mengel repeated in a clear, matter-of-fact tone that morning. His was in a small basement room in the former public safety dispatch center outside Leesburg that now serves as a public safety training facility.

A TV screen in front of him displayed an image of the Wegmans in Sterling; the simulations always use real locations in Loudoun County, giving commanders practice coordinating combinations of real field units. To Mengel's left was Battalion Chief Daniel Neal, of the fire and rescue system. LCSO Capt. Bryan Wacker was keeping track of units and drawing diagrams as the exercise progressed. (Had the incident been real, the three men would have been gathered across the parking lot from the grocery store.)

Several sheriff's deputies were in the next room, using a script to relay incomplete and sometimes contradictory information to the command room to simulate the influx of 911 calls, check-ins from field units other bits of information that decision makers must process.

The entire simulation was over in 13 minutes. In this scenario, the shooter fled the scene in a vehicle after sheriff's office "contact teams" entered the store, overturning his car on Russell Branch Parkway nearby. The shooter was apprehended by sheriff's deputies, who found the shooter had a long gun, not a pistol as first reported.

Back at the Wegmans, other sheriff's



Times-Mirror/Coy Ferrell

Lt. Tom Mengel, of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, and Battalion Chief Daniel Neal, of the Loudoun County Combined Fire and Rescue System, coordinate the response to a simulated mass shooting scenario during a June 22 training exercise.

deputies had cleared the scene within about 10 minutes, giving Neal the go-ahead to send in his paramedics to evacuate the shooting victims. As more law enforcement units called in to report their arrival on the scene, Mengel directed them to specific assignments to secure the scene.

The regular "unified command" exercises, like the one open to media on June 22, are intended as a tool to refine the decision-making process and coordination among responding agencies. The county has conducted more than 125 of these exercises since the creation two years ago of a "high threat team," comprised of operational command staffers from both local law enforcement and fire and rescue agencies.

Most importantly, the "unified com-

mand" structure clearly outlines who's in charge in a real-world scenario, Wacker explained June 22, especially in the vital first few minutes after calls start coming in. The Wegmans scenario was relatively straightforward, Wacker said, since the building has a relatively open layout and the suspect fled the scene. An active shooter situation in a school or a mall would require a more complex response, making coordination all the more important.

That "high threat team" is part of a range of initiatives launched in 2021 meant to streamline the response to a mass shooting, an increasingly common aspect of American life that Loudoun has thus far avoided, despite several false alarms. While focusing by necessity on coordination between the two large county first responder agencies, the Leesburg Police Department and the Northern Virginia Community College Campus Police Department are also involved.

Other initiatives have focused on a range of scenarios for the tactical law enforcement teams and paramedics tasked with making contact with the shooter and the victims. All sheriff's deputies and fire and rescue personnel get basic cross training with the other agency, helping them anticipate the needs of their counterparts on the scene. Loudoun fire and rescue personnel now carry body armor, a measure that was once unusual even for law enforcement officers.

"As these active violence incidents started happening more frequently ... we had to come together and focus on what the real mission is," Neal said of the incep-

tion of the Loudoun County initiatives. "Obviously, that's to handle these things as quickly as possible and then to try to save as many lives as we can."

Generally, the shift leaders for the local sheriff's office and fire and rescue stations would take on the roles performed by Mengel and Neal June 22, though there are specific protocols based on the exact nature of the incident and the agencies involved. Repeating those exercises dozens of times with different combinations of commanders and scenarios builds trust and understanding among commanders in one agency and their counterparts in another.

"We've done [these exercises] over and over and over again — 125 of what you saw today, at least," Neal said. "And again, when I came in, there were two or three questions I had in my head for Tom [Mengel]. Again, where did we learn those? By doing this over and over and over again. ... It's not always going to be exact, but that's where the trust and the relationship comes in." Neal and others emphasized that the "unified command" system has greatly improved the response to all types of incidents, from traffic crashes to house fires, not just to so-far-hypothetical emergencies like a mass shooting.

"The time for us to learn how to work together ... is not when the 'big incident' happens," Neal added.

"We put the mic in their hand, we get them thinking real fast, we get some stuff being thrown at them — it just changes the game," Wacker said of the command exercises. "When we get guys and gals who



Times-Mirror/Coy Ferrell

Loudoun County sheriff's deputies participate in a June 22 training exercise based on a simulated mass shooting scenario.

NEWS

come in here for the very first time, and they go through the first one and they say: 'OK, that was a bit humbling.' But then they come back for the second one and it's night and day — I mean night and day. Just how quickly, they say: 'I can do this. This is easy.'

LCSO Major David Hill emphasized that the command protocols go hand-in-hand with what the agency has done at every level to refine its response to an active shooter.

"With everything you heard, there's probably about 100 other tasks that went along with that piece of radio traffic," he explained.

"We've also done active violence training for all the deputies out there. So they know, automatically, what the expectations are. We're not communicating that stuff anymore. It used to be like, 'Go in the building and clear that part of it.' The commanders now, you'll never hear that radio traffic. They are probably not even going to be on scene before the deputies are already in there and they're just going. They've been preprogrammed, and they're also empowered, that trust is there for them to make the right decision."

Like the tactics and unit structure used in the field, the command protocols developed in Loudoun County can draw on a plethora of real-world data from the spate of mass shooting across the country.

Using a definition "active shooter" that includes only "one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area" — the definition excludes gang or drug related violence and "contained residential or domestic disputes" — the FBI counted 50 incidents last year. The Gun Violence Archive, which tallies "mass shootings" with at least four people killed or wounded, counted 646 incidents in 2022, a number that has more than doubled since 2014.

For instance, Wacker explained, "We always, always, always get information that there are multiple shooters. Almost every single one that has ever occurred in the United States, there are multiple shooters being reported as being there." In reality, the data shows that a vast majority of mass shootings are carried out by a person acting alone, he said.

While no amount of data can predict every incident, data can tell first responders what to expect and prevent wasting precious seconds on false leads. When shaping the chain of responses to an incident, "We go on probability, not possibility," Neal added. That has helped shape the "package" of fire and rescue units automatically dispatched at the first report of an active shooter, along with the questions he and everyone in both agencies know to ask on the scene and the protocols they know to follow without any further guidance.

"I think that's the whole point," Hill summarized. "We empower people to make their own decisions, relay back the critical information. By ... building that relationship ahead of time, that is what increases the speed. And ultimately, speed comes down to saving lives."

Visit
LOUDOUN
DC's Wine Country®

PRESENTS

52 *fun* things to do in
Loudoun
PHOTO CONTEST

SUMMER EDITION



A wonderful place to live and visit, Loudoun County has something for everyone. Whether you want to shop, dine or just relax, discover all that is has to offer.

Summer is here and we want to know what 'fun' things you are doing in Loudoun. Enter your photos for a chance to win some great local prizes from:

- Bourbon Bayou Kitchen ■ Celebration by Rupa Vira
- Endhardt Vineyards ■ The George Marshall International Center

Enter now through July 13

LOUDOUNTIMES.COM/GOTO/52FUN

PLUS, BE SURE TO SHARE YOUR FUN THINGS WITH **#LOVELOUDOUN**

Loudoun Times-Mirror

NEWS

Schuyler Lake to face grand jury in alleged murder of his father, Dean Lake

Strangulation was the cause of death, prosecutor says

BY COY FERRELL

cferrell@loudountimes.com

Over the course of a two-hour preliminary hearing March 27, prosecutors did little to answer why Dean Lake, a trailblazer in the local craft brewing industry, was strangled to death in his Leesburg home last year. But a judge ruled that there was “probable cause” to suspect that Lake’s son, 22-year-old Schuyler Lake, murdered his father. A grand jury will decide April 10 whether to indict the younger Lake and send the second-degree murder charge to circuit court for adjudication.

Dean Lake, the 57-year-old director of operations for Black Hoof Brewing Company, was found dead in his South King Street home early on April 30, 2022. Schuyler Lake, who according to the Leesburg Police Department lived at his father’s residence at the time, was arrested the same day and has been held without bond ever since. Besides vague allusions to “mental and/or physical health concerns” in a press release at the time, it is still not clear what led police to the younger Lake so quickly or what investigators believe could have motivated the homicide.

It is not the first time Schuyler Lake has been charged criminally for alleged violence directed at his father. In 2020, he pleaded “no contest” to misdemeanor assault and battery. While prosecutors initially agreed to a “deferred disposition” in the case — the charge would be dropped after 18 months if Lake was able to comply with the terms of his supervised probation — Lake within just one month failed to comply with those terms and a judge convicted him on the assault charge and the probation violation. Still, court records indicate Lake was never sentenced to jail or fined for the 2020 assault conviction, which carried a maximum sentence of one year in jail and a \$2,500 fine.

While the dozen witnesses called by prosecutors March 27 focused mainly on highly technical chain-of-custody issues, two previously unreported details about the evidence in the 2022 homicide did emerge from the hearing: Schuyler Lake’s DNA was found under his father’s fingernails, according to a forensic report cited by Deputy Commonwealth’s Attorney Anna Hammond. In a follow-up email to the Times-Mirror, Hammond wrote that Dean Lake was strangled to death, according to the medical examiner’s report.

Other circumstantial evidence in the case had been previously made public through affidavits filed by investigators.



Dean Lake

Video from a neighbor’s security camera allegedly depicts Schuyler Lake “yelling obscenities” on the evening of April 29, 2022. Another security camera, this one at a local store, allegedly captured Schuyler Lake wearing the same shoes that were found at the crime scene stained with what appeared to be blood. In the hours after Dean Lake was found dead, Schuyler Lake allegedly bought new shoes at a Leesburg store using his father’s credit card, though prosecutors dropped two charges related to the alleged credit card theft.

Public defenders Tamara Lazarus and Jessica Lau are representing Schuyler Lake. They argued March 27 that, while prosecutors have presented circumstantial evidence in the case, “What we’re missing here is, kind of, how that evidence ties together,” as Lazarus put it. There is a “clear absence of any ... direct connection” between Schuyler Lake and his father’s death, she added.

‘Erratic behavior’

In the two years leading up to the homicide, court documents portray Schuyler Lake as a young man exhibiting behavior that deeply concerned his parents and probation officers. It’s a pattern that his parents attributed to some unknown substance abuse problem or mental health disorder, though there is no evidence in the public record that he ever received any diagnosis.

The first record of Schuyler Lake’s interaction with the criminal justice system dates to Feb. 12, 2020, when he was 19 years old. A Leesburg police officer arrived

that morning at Dean Lake’s South King Street home, where the elder Lake said that “his son Schuyler Lake punched him in the face multiple times,” according to a criminal complaint filed by the officer. “Dean had a swollen eye and a scratch on his neck,” the officer wrote. “Schuyler was found down the street with marks on his knuckles.”

Officer J.E. Roberts arrested Schuyler Lake, who was living with his father at the time, and charged him with assaulting a family member, a class 1 misdemeanor. Roberts also obtained an emergency protective order effective for 72 hours against Schuyler Lake.

The same day, Magistrate Robert Franchok ordered Schuyler Lake to be released from custody on a \$1,000 unsecured bond. “Per [the Leesburg Police Department], the defendant’s father stated that there may be some substance abuse issues by the defendant,” according to a bail determination formed signed by Franchok.

Three months later, the case reached what could have been its effective resolution. Schuyler Lake signed a plea agreement dated May 18, 2020, pleading “no contest” to the assault charge. The agreement stipulated that, if he complied with the terms of the agreement and didn’t commit any probation violations for 18 months, the assault charge would be dismissed. It’s an arrangement called a “deferred disposition” in Virginia law.

But just a month later, Lake’s probation officer wrote a letter to the court asking for a warrant for Lake’s arrest and suggesting

that Lake “may be suffering from mental health issues.” Lake had called the officer after his initial court date, the letter said, but had since failed to check in as required by the terms of his supervised probation.

“This Officer has been contacted by both the parents of Mr. Lake who have both described that the defendant is staying mostly in Washington, D.C., at an unknown location. Several times this Officer has called the home and the Mother has made attempts to have the defendant come to the phone. The defendant can be heard in the background advising his Mother that he, ‘is not on probation and does not have to speak to any Officer.’ Mr. Lake’s voicemail is full and messages cannot be left,” the June 19 letter said. (Schuyler Lake’s mother, Susan Lake, was divorced from Dean Lake and lived at a separate residence in Leesburg at the time.)

“Both parents have expressed concern over the defendant’s current mental health state and have described behavior that is not consistent with how their son ‘normally operates,’” the letter continued. At this time the defendant has left the home and has not been in touch with his parents for several days. This Officer is concerned about the defendant’s erratic behavior.”

A judge issued an arrest warrant several days later, and Schuyler Lake was taken into custody on Aug. 4, 2020, according to court records. After spending two weeks in jail, Lake’s attorney and prosecutor Brittany Dunn-Pirio signed an agreement stipulating that Lake should be released again from jail, this time to live with his mother. Except for a provision directing that Lake should not leave the state, the conditions of this second bond order were similar to the first.

On Aug. 17, Judge Pamela L. Brooks signed the agreement and released Lake from custody, again on a \$1,000 unsecured bond.

Adjudication of the case was delayed several times. Eventually, on July 26, 2021, a judge ruled that Lake had failed to comply with the terms of the deferred disposition and found him guilty of the 2020 assault. There is no indication in court records that Lake was sentenced to jail or ordered to pay a fine; court records only note that Lake paid \$120 in court costs on Aug. 27, 2021.

After August 2021, there is no suggestion that Schuyler Lake had any further interactions with the criminal justice system in the intervening eight months before his father was found dead. He was still on probation when his father was killed, according to an April 30, 2022, determination-of-bail form completed by a magistrate following the homicide.

Hammond declined to comment when the Times-Mirror asked her whether Dean Lake had filed any protective orders

NEWS



Courtesy Photo

Schuyler Lake

against his son — beyond the emergency order obtained by a police officer in February 2020. But there is some evidence that Susan Lake, at least, felt that her son was capable of violence.

She was supposed to meet her ex-husband at a nearby grocery store early on April 30, 2022. When he didn't show up, she walked to his home and entered through an unlocked back door, finding Dean Lake dead on the floor of the family room. According to a police affidavit and her statements in court March 27, Susan Lake remained in the home only long enough to confirm that her ex-husband could not be helped.

Although she had seen no evidence that her son was at the house, Susan Lake left quickly after discovering the body because "she became scared that Schuyler may still be in the residence," according to a police affidavit.

Schuyler Lake's attorneys declined to comment for this story.



A Times Mirror Staff Photo/Amena H. Saijid
Commuters boarding Loudoun commuter bus service for downtown D.C.

Loudoun County Transit resumes full bus service after strike

Loudoun County Transit has restored all local, Silver Line and commuter bus service, according to a March 24 press release from the county. A labor dispute between the private operator contracted to provide bus service and the company's employees led to a two-month strike that ended March 20.

Bus operator Keolis North America had initially estimated that it could take "weeks" to restore commuter bus service, which was most negatively impacted by the labor dispute, after the strike ended.

More information about bus service in Loudoun County is available at loudoun.gov/bus.

Visit LOUDOUN DC's Wine Country®

PRESENTS

52 fun things to do in Loudoun PHOTO CONTEST

SPRING EDITION



A wonderful place to live and visit, Loudoun County has something for everyone. Whether you want to shop, dine or just relax, discover all that is has to offer.

Spring has sprung and we want to know what 'fun' things you are doing in Loudoun. Enter your photos for a chance to win some great local prizes from:

- A Delightfully Different Gallery ■ Bourbon Bayou Kitchen
- Celebration by Rupa Vira ■ Endhardt Vineyards
- The George Marshall International Center

Enter now through April 8

LOUDOUNTIMES.COM/GOTO/52FUN

PLUS, BE SURE TO SHARE YOUR FUN THINGS WITH #LOVELOUDOUN

Loudoun Times-Mirror