



State Attorney Employee Who Testified in Zimmerman Case Fired

As media pundits continue to discuss the “not guilty” verdict rendered by the jury on July 13 in the nationally watched George Zimmerman trial, a particular aspect of the case warrants further attention. Ben Kruidbos (shown), the former information technology director in the Florida state attorney’s office, was fired on July 12 for what he believes was retaliation for having testified that prosecutors withheld evidence from Zimmerman’s defense team.



The [Florida Times Union](#) reported that State Attorney Angela Corey’s office sent a state attorney investigator to Ben Kruidbos’ home on Friday evening to hand deliver a six-page letter to the IT director notifying him that his employment had been terminated. The letter was signed by the state attorney office’s managing director, Cheryl R. Peek.

[NBC News](#) provided several excerpts from the letter, including:

It has come to our attention that you violated numerous State Attorney’s Office (SAO) policies and procedures and have engaged in deliberate misconduct that is especially egregious in light of your position as Director of Information Technology (IT).

Your egregious lack of regard for the sensitive nature of the information handled by this office is completely abhorrent. You have proven to be completely untrustworthy. Because of your deliberate, willful and unscrupulous actions, you can never again be trusted to step foot in this office.

The letter alleged that Kruidbos’ intent “was not pursuant to any pure motive or genuine concern,” and continued:

Your feigned and spurious claim of possible liability was nothing more than shameful manipulation in a shallow, but obvious, attempt to cloak yourself in the protection of the whistleblower law.

Florida’s “whistleblower law” bars retaliation against state employees who reveal protected information.

The *Times-Union* quoted Kruidbos’ attorney, Wesley White, who resigned from the state attorney’s office in December. White said that the purpose of Kruidbos’ dismissal was to send a message to state office employees “that if they feel like there is wrongdoing,” they should not disclose it or seek legal advice from a private attorney.

“If they do speak to an attorney, then they are dead,” White said. “The State Attorney’s Office will do whatever is necessary to not only terminate them, but destroy their reputations in the process.”

Kruidbos apparently became the object of his superiors’ disfavor when he testified last month that he was concerned that prosecutors in the Zimmerman trial failed to turn over information about deleted images and text messages that Kruidbos recovered from Trayvon Martin’s cellphone. (Zimmerman was charged with killing Martin.) Included among the photos were pictures of a hand holding a gun and a



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plant that looked like marijuana. He also recovered deleted text messages that described a transaction for a firearm, where Trayvon Martin appeared to be trying to buy or sell a gun. None of this information had been given to George Zimmerman's defense team.

Worried that the information he provided had not been used, Kruidbos hired a lawyer to contact the Zimmerman defense team, explaining, "All the information is important in the process to ensure it's a fair trial." Zimmerman's attorney Mark O'Mara noted that it took months to get information out of the SAO, [saying](#):

The only way that we really found out about it ... and the only way that we really found out about the intensity of the failure to give us information was when a person from their own office, a whistle-blower, came forward and said, "I gave them that information in the middle to end of January" and we didn't get it until June 4th. It could have derailed the trial.

O'Mara filed a request to delay the Zimmerman trial so the defense team could go through the records pertaining to Martin's cellphone, which was denied.

[A CNN report carried by WPTV](#) in West Palm Beach, Florida, cited Kruidbos' recollection that, when he printed out a 900-page Florida Department of Law Enforcement report from Martin's cellphone in late 2012 or early 2013, he noticed that a significant amount of information was missing. He said he had generated a report that was more than three times the size of the one that had been handed over to attorneys. As an example, Kruidbos said that his report contained 4,275 photos, but that only 2,958 of those were in the report given to the defense team.

Because of his concern that attorneys did not have all the information they needed to prepare the case, he said, he reported his concerns to a state attorney's office investigator and later to prosecutor Bernie de la Rionda.

Wesley White, Kruidbos' attorney, then informed Zimmerman's defense team that the missing information existed.

When CNN's Martin Savidge interviewed O'Mara about the state attorney office (SAO) withholding information from the defense, the lawyer all but accused the SAO of deliberately violating the law:

When it takes me six months to get a color picture of my client, when the first one I get is a black and white, when I look at it and go, "This is off a cell phone; cell phones don't take black-and-white pictures," and I ask for a color copy, that takes two months.

And then I get a pastel-colored color copy of it, and it takes me to file a motion and have a hearing set before I get the actual jpeg, no, that's frustrating. That should not happen. I've done this too long to make believe in my own mind that that's happenstance.

CNN reported that Circuit Judge Debra Nelson said before the trial that the possibility of sanctions against the SAO, which had been requested by the defense, would be addressed after the verdict.

When Zimmerman was found "not guilty" of the charges, Judge Nelson told him: "Your GPS monitor will be cut off, when you exit the courtroom over here. You have no further business with the court."

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