



Former state attorney candidate Greg Wilson arrested

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PANAMA CITY — A former chief deputy of the State Attorney’s Office and candidate to be the area’s top prosecutor in the most recent election has been arrested for allegedly helping pass what appeared to be love letters between inmates, officials reported.

Greg Wilson, 46, was arrested Tuesday afternoon on charges of perjury and introduction of contraband into a detention facility. His arrest comes after a months-long investigation by the Bay County Sheriff’s Office into a possible breach of security at the Bay County Jail. Wilson had a special first appearance on the charge Tuesday and was released on his own recognizance, officials reported.

Wilson, of Panama City, did not respond to a request for comment. Because of his previous role with the SAO, Gov. Rick Scott has appointed 2nd Judicial Circuit State Attorney Jack Campbell to handle the case, officials reported.

BCSO reported that a phone call on a public jail line between Wilson and an unidentified inmate he represented initiated the investigation. Eventually, BCSO video recorded an interaction between Wilson and the inmate, in which he allegedly appears to accept a paper package and deliver it to another inmate client, BCSO reported.

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“It was kind of a love letter from one inmate to an inmate in another dorm,” BCSO Maj. Jimmy Stanford said. “What concerns us is the attorney did not know the content; he just accepted it without looking at it. It could’ve contained drugs, it could’ve contained weapons, an escape plan, plans to hurt a guard. He didn’t know, but he still passed it.”

Stanford said the transaction was not the first of its kind allegedly facilitated by Wilson. He cited Florida law that defines “any written or recorded communication” as contraband. Stanford said the breach of security was particularly concerning because attorneys are the only people to have face-to-face access with inmates.

“Attorneys have access to inmates their mothers and fathers don’t have,” Stanford said. “... For that unfettered access to be violated, it is certainly a security breach that is very concerning.”

BCSO reported that the first phone call was stumbled upon by a detention officer. Wilson spoke with the inmate on a public line instead of using a private, secured line available for private attorneys to have unrecorded conversations with their clients. Concerns about narcotics activity arose out of the phone call, and BCSO set up a video recording of a meeting between Wilson and a client.

“During the meeting, the inmate took a small package out of her pocket and placed in Wilson’s notebook, which was open on the table. Wilson was aware of her action,” BCSO reported. “This inmate then left the room and a second inmate entered the room to meet with Wilson. Wilson took the package and positioned it so the second inmate could pick it up, which she did, placing the item in her shirt pocket.”

Part of the package later was recovered from the second inmate’s room when she provided it to jail personnel and told them she had received it from Wilson, BCSO reported.

Officers collected a sworn statement at the end of September from Wilson, in which he allegedly denied any involvement in the passing of, and any knowledge of the passing of any contraband, to inmates.

Wilson allegedly told officers he “never seen ’em pass anything, I’ve never facilitated them passing anything, I’ve never helped them, I’ve never allowed them to,” BCSO quoted him as saying.

BCSO reported each of the inmates admitted to Wilson’s role in the passing of correspondence. Officials also reporting learning Wilson had passed cologne-soaked business cards six times to distribute to other female inmates so they could have the smell of a man in their cell.

“We don’t know what we may have missed,” Stanford said. “We do know what we collected was written correspondence, which is against Florida statute.”

BCSO reported that due diligence was given to the method and direction of the investigation because of issues of attorney/client privilege. The department researched and sought opinions from prosecutors in other jurisdictions before proceeding, officers reported.

Wilson campaigned in 2016 to lead the 14th Judicial Circuit State Attorney’s Office. He had been the second-in-command before abruptly resigning from the office, claiming incumbent State Attorney Glenn Hess did not fulfill an agreement to bow out at the end of his second term. Wilson had been chief deputy state attorney for about seven of Hess’s eight years and attributed the achievements of the office — including an historic conviction rate — to his own initiatives.

Wilson began his career in law enforcement with the Panama City Police Department in 1993, working for seven years as patrol officer, a narcotics investigator and a SWAT team member. He

left police work in his 30s to pursue a law degree and ascended the ranks to eventually challenge the long-time top prosecutor for the job.

Hess won his third-term re-election bid in August 2016, though, with 58 percent of the vote versus Wilson, who garnered 42 percent.

Wilson said at the time he planned to run for the office again in 2020 but would be returning to private practice in the meantime. If convicted, he could face prison time, be disbarred and rendered ineligible.

When arrested, BCSO Deputy Chief Joel Heape presented Wilson with a letter revoking his attorney privileges to the Bay County Jail until further notice.