Outlook

11th Judicial District Court Vacancy - Travis Ahner

From Coffman, Danielle <Danielle.Coffman@mt.gov>
Date Wed 9/30/2026 2:31 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

I am writing in support of Flathead County Attorney Travis Ahner's application to fill the impending vacancy in the Montana Eleventh Judicial District. Travis appears frequently in my courtroom and serves as a member of my adult treatment court team. In both capacities I have found Travis to be reasonable, ethical, fair, intelligent, and thoughtful. He already possesses and demonstrates the appropriate temperament for a judge and will be a great addition to the Eleventh Judicial District.

I also had the opportunity, when I was still in private practice, to appear before Travis while he was serving as Judge *pro tem* in Kalispell Municipal Court. My client was seeking an Order of Protection on behalf of her minor child. Travis was respectful, kind, and handled the matter appropriately. I left the hearing thinking he should in fact take the bench.

Finally, Retired Judge Bob Allison has asked that I pass along his endorsement of Travis for the position. Ret. Judge Allison had the opportunity to observe Travis in court often over the course of his judicial career and supports his application.

Thank you in advance,
Judge Danni Coffman

Hon. Danni Coffman
Eleventh Judicial District Court, Dept. 5
Flathead County Justice Center
920 S. Main St.
Kalispell, MT 59901

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Nominating Committee of Flathead County

From Clint Blackwood <clint@virtualmontana.com>
Date Thu 10/1/2026 3:57 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

It is without reservation that I offer this short, but very sincere note of support for Travis Ahner's application for a Judgeship in Flathead County. I have known the Ahners since my son played football with Travis at Carroll College in the early 2000's. He struck me then that Travis was destined for success in whatever he chose to pursue.... you are very fortunate that his professional path has focused on Flathead County. I think, no I am convinced, that you will not ever do better than elect Travis in his pursuit in the legal world of a Judgeship in Flathead County!

Thanks for allowing me to express my support for Mr.Travis Ahner.

Clint Blackwood [redacted] 406-442-6370(H) 406-431-5020(C)

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Ahner

From rockitmt <rockitmt@mail.com>
Date Fri 10/2/2026 3:51 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Governor Gianforte:

I am submitting this public comment regarding Travis Ahner's application for appointment as a District Court Judge for Montana's Eleventh Judicial District.

My concerns are based on my own direct experience with Mr. Ahner and the Flathead County Attorney's Office during an extraordinarily difficult family-law matter, In re the Marriage of Williams, Cause No. DR-15-2024-379.

I believe my experience raises legitimate questions that should be examined before Mr. Ahner is entrusted with the considerably greater authority and discretion of a District Court Judge.

Beginning in May 2026, I repeatedly reported what I believed to be violations and interference involving my court-ordered parenting time. My last parenting time with my children occurred on May 3, 2026. As the situation continued, law-enforcement reports were generated, including Flathead County Sheriff reports 2026-[redacted] 2026-[redacted], and 2026-[redacted].

I ultimately brought extensive documentation directly to Mr. Ahner.

In an August 10, 2026 letter to me, Mr. Ahner stated that he had reviewed "most of the reports and all of your documentation." He also expressly acknowledged that his office had authority to institute criminal proceedings concerning parenting issues. Nevertheless, he concluded that such disputes were typically better addressed through the ongoing divorce proceeding and directed me back to that process.

That response is particularly troubling to me because the very reason I sought assistance from law enforcement and the County Attorney was that the domestic relations process had not resolved the problem. My parenting time had already stopped, motions concerning the interruption remained before the District Court, and I continued to have no contact with my children.

I am not asking the Governor to accept my characterization of anyone's conduct as criminal. Nor am I suggesting that a prosecutor is required to bring charges merely because a citizen requests them. Prosecutors necessarily exercise discretion.

My concern is how that discretion was exercised when presented with repeated reports, court orders, law enforcement involvement, and extensive documentation.

Mr. Ahner personally acknowledged reviewing that material and acknowledged his office possessed authority to pursue parenting-related criminal matters, yet referred the matter back to the same civil proceeding that had failed to provide a timely remedy.

That experience matters to me when evaluating someone seeking a judgeship.

A District Court Judge will decide questions affecting parents' relationships with their children, protection orders, criminal defendants, constitutional rights, property, and personal liberty. Those decisions require not only legal experience, but a demonstrated willingness to examine evidence objectively and apply the law consistently even when doing so is difficult or inconvenient.

My experience has caused me serious concern about whether Mr. Ahner has demonstrated the judgment, neutrality, and evenhanded treatment that I believe should accompany that authority.

This is also not an abstract concern for me. My family has lived with the consequences of a legal system in which procedural delays, conflicting orders, and failures to address documented problems can have enormous real world consequences. I have gone months without seeing my children while attempting to obtain relief through the processes available to me.

I therefore respectfully ask that, before making this appointment, you personally review Mr. Ahner's August 10, 2026 response to me, the underlying law-enforcement referrals and documentation provided to his office, and the manner in which his office evaluated those matters.

I am willing to provide the Governor's Office with Mr. Ahner's letter, the relevant police reports, court orders, filings, and supporting documentation so that my concerns can be evaluated from the actual record rather than simply taking my word for them.

Given the extraordinary authority exercised by a District Court Judge, I believe these circumstances deserve careful scrutiny before Mr. Ahner is appointed to the Eleventh Judicial District Court.

Respectfully,

Corey J. Williams Kalispell, Montana

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Support for Travis Ahner

From Gail Shay <gailannshay@gmail.com>
Date Fri 10/2/2026 10:15 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

To whom it may concern,

Attorney Travis Ahner has served Flathead County well in his position as County Attorney.

His desire to seek office as a district court judge stems both out of his lifelong passion for public service and his "sense of duty and the desire to preserve our community and the Montana values that make the Flathead a wonderful place in which to live," which he stated in an interview with the Daily Interlake.

Mr. Abner became the Flathead Valley's top prosecutor in 2018, and had also served as a deputy county attorney in that office and a special assistant U. S. attorney.

Other skills include serving as an adjunct professor at Carroll College and working as a law clerk for the Montana Supreme Court.

His academic background includes a degree in sociology and English, a one year stent in the US military Academy at West Point, New York and receiving his law degree at the University of Oregon School of Law in 2007.

He also has five years of experience as a substitute judge in Kalispell Municipal Court.

Mr. Ahner wrote in his application that a judge's decision should be "governed by the facts of the case and applicable law, not by agenda or desired outcomes."

Travis Ahner is highly qualified to fulfill the responsibilities of District Court judge and I fully support his nomination to be appointed to that position.

Gail Shay Linne
[redacted]
Kalispell

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Eleventh Judicial District Vacancy: Letter of Support for Travis Ahner

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From Joe Unterreiner <joe.unterreiner@gmail.com>
Date Fri 10/2/2026 10:43 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Governor Gianforte:

I'd like to share my strong support for County Attorney Travis Ahner to fill the upcoming vacancy for a seat on the bench in the Eleventh District. Travis has done an outstanding job as our county attorney since his election to the position in 2018. He will be missed in his current role, but we are fortunate to be able to keep him in a public service position he desires by appointment to this position.

On a personal note, I can assure you that Travis and his family are highly regarded and much appreciated in this community.

Kind regards,

Joseph H Unterreiner
[redacted]
406 249 2046
joe.unterreiner@gmail.com

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Travis Ahner

From Tim Wiley <popig1957@gmail.com>
Date Fri 10/2/2026 1:24 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

I am writing to voice my objection to Travis Ahner's candidacy for the Eleventh Judicial District judge vacancy that will be open after the upcoming election.
Mr. Ahner, whole technically qualified, has an extensive history of being soft on crime in Flathead County while serving as the County Attorney. Cases of serious crime have seldom been prosecuted under his "leadership", but far too often are settled by the granting of plea bargaining, usually resulting in dangerous criminals being released to continue their life of crime. This has resulted in an inordinate number of violent or dangerous offenders repeatedly committing crimes and hurting law abiding citizens.
I'm hoping that his bid for re-election as County Attorney will be unsuccessful and that Flathead County will soon have a County Attorney who will prosecute more cases rather than go the easy route of plea bargaining, but I would hate to see him in a position of adjudicating these cases, too. I hope the Governor will give credence to my comments.

Respectfully,
Tim Wiley
Kalispell, MT

DAWSON COUNTY ATTORNEY

Mr. Brett Irigoin, Dawson County Attorney
Mr. Cody Lensing, Deputy County Attorney
Ms. Lindsay Whalen, Deputy County Attorney
121 South Douglas Avenue
Glendive, Montana 59330

Phone: 406-377-2532
Fax: 406-377-2531

October 2, 2026

Boards and Appointments Advisor
Governor's Office
PO Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620
Office: (406) 444-5665
nominatejudges@mt.gov

RE: Judicial Appointment, Eleventh Judicial District
Travis Ahner

Dear Commission Members:

I am pleased to write in strong support of Travis Ahner's nomination and appointment to fill the 11h Judicial District Court Judge vacancy.

I have known Travis for approximately a decade, both through our work as County Attorneys and through our service together on the Montana County Attorneys Association Board. Over that time, I have had the privilege to see firsthand his dedication to the law, his community, and the responsibilities entrusted to him as a public servant.

Travis is honest, hardworking, thoughtful, and possesses an exceptional legal mind. He approaches difficult legal issues with careful consideration and a genuine commitment to reaching the right result under the law. He is someone I have come to respect not only for his legal ability, but also for his character and integrity.

As County Attorney, Travis has worked tirelessly on behalf of his community. He understands the significant responsibility that comes with public office and has consistently demonstrated a willingness to put in the time and effort necessary to serve his community well. I have no doubt that same work ethic and commitment to public service would carry over to the District Court bench.

The role of a District Court Judge requires sound judgment, integrity, preparation, and a thorough understanding of the law. Based on my experience knowing and working with Travis over the past decade, I believe he possesses these qualities and would approach the responsibilities of the position with the seriousness they deserve.

I am proud to offer my support for Travis Ahner's appointment to the Eleventh Judicial District Court. I believe he would serve the people of the Eleventh Judicial District with integrity, diligence, and fairness.

Best Regards,

Brett J. Irigoin
Dawson County Attorney

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Recommendation for Travis Ahner for the District Judge Position in Flathead County

From Michael Rubich <mjrubich@gmail.com>
Date Mon 10/5/2026 4:36 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

I recommend Travis Ahner be selected to fill the upcoming district court judge vacancy in Flathead County. I am confident that Mr. Ahner will fairly and impartially adjudicate cases brought forth in his court in accordance with the applicable law and the Constitution of the State of Montana. His success as Flathead County Attorney demonstrates his breadth of experience and qualifications for the judgeship.

Michael Rubich, COL, US Army ret.

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Support for Travis Ahner District Judge

From Chris Sund <chris@sund.me>
Date Tue 10/6/2026 7:33 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Hey, I wanted to email in support of nominating Travis to this position. I've known Travis to always be a fair and unbiased person both professionally and personally. He would be an asset to the bench.

Chris Sund
[redacted] Kalispell, MT 59901
406-461-9635

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] 11th Judicial District Court Vacancy

From Alison Howard <ahoward@kalispell.com>
Date Tue 10/6/2026 12:38 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Governor Gianforte,

It is without hesitation that I write this letter of support for the appointment of Travis Ahner to the 11th Judicial District Court. I have had the privilege of working with Travis since 2008, when he joined the Flathead County Attorney's Office. During our years as colleagues, Travis and I tried countless cases together, including several high-profile, multi-week felony trials. Through these experiences, I observed firsthand his thorough preparation, strong work ethic, and ability to analyze complicated legal issues and develop persuasive legal arguments. He has always been a thoughtful and capable advocate who consistently approaches his cases with professionalism and integrity.

In 2018, Travis became the Flathead County Attorney, and I continued to work for him as a Deputy County Attorney until January of 2023. During the nearly 15 years we worked together, Travis was not only my colleague, but also a mentor, a friend, and an exceptional leader. He has consistently earned the respect of those around him through his professionalism, fairness, and steady temperament. Travis is remarkably even-keeled in what can often be an adversarial environment, and I believe that calm and measured temperament will serve him particularly well on the bench.

In January of 2023, I left the Flathead County Attorney's Office to become the Kalispell Municipal Court Judge. Since that time, I have continued to observe Travis lead the Flathead County Attorney's Office. There have been periods when his office has been understaffed and he has faced difficult personnel issues, through no fault of his own. Through those challenges, Travis has consistently maintained a positive outlook, advocated for his employees, fostered strong relationships with the agencies and professionals with whom his office works, and remained steadfast in his commitment to the administration of justice.

I have no doubt that Travis will be a valuable addition to the 11th Judicial District Court and will serve our community with distinction. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Respectfully,
Judge Alison Howard
Kalispell Municipal Court

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Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Travis Ahner/District Court Seat

From rossrene@charter.net <rossrene@charter.net>
Date Tue 10/6/2026 5:35 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

I would like to submit my professional recommendation of Mr. Ahner to be appointed to the upcoming District Court Seat in Flathead County being vacated after the November 2026 elections.
I met Mr. Ahner in 2018 when he had sold his house and needed a rental to live in while his new home was being built and I had a rental that was coming available.
I was working to remodel this rental when Mr. Ahner asked about needing a place to live with his family. I mentioned about the work that I was wanting to do to upgrade the house, and he stated a roof over their head was all he was needing and that he would help with the other repairs as time allowed.
This became the start of my understanding of what type of man Mr. Ahner is.
Besides being a dedicated County Attorney (and definitely underpaid in terms of lawyers) who's professionalism has greatly helped Flathead County with its never-ending criminal case load, Mr. Ahner has become a dedicated father and figure in the Flathead Valley whom many have come to admire.
Thru this relationship I have watched his case load with the county and admired how having this much stress from the endless criminal cases placed before him and his team, that he still maintains a certain humbleness about him and I feel that he would make a very fair and honest District Court Judge,
so, I and my family and friends would like to request that Travis Ahner be appointed to District Court Judge for the Flathead County position.
Thank you,
Ross Bishop
[redacted]
Kalispell, MT

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Support of Travis Ahner for District Judge in Flathead

From Anna Gajda <a.r.gajda@gmail.com>
Date Wed 10/7/2026 12:36 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Dear Governor,

I am writing to support Travis Ahner for District Judge.

I know Travis as a friend, and I have also had several professional conversations with him about drunk driving law, a subject I care about deeply. Those conversations as well as seeing him in court first hand, showed me the qualities that make him so well suited for the bench.

Travis is exceptionally knowledgeable. He understands the law thoroughly and applies it with care. He is thoughtful, well prepared, and always willing to listen before drawing a conclusion.

He also has a calm, steady demeanor. A courtroom is a place where emotions often run high, and a judge must remain composed and even-handed no matter who stands before him. Travis does exactly that.

Most importantly, Travis will be an impartial judge. He treats everyone with the same respect and fairness, and he understands that protecting the community and ensuring due process are not competing goals but two halves of justice done right.

Beyond his professional skills, Travis is a person of integrity and good character, someone I trust.

I am confident Travis Ahner will serve our community with fairness, wisdom, and dedication.

Sincerely,

Anna Gajda
Kalispell, Montana

Jefferson County Attorney's Office

Steven C. Haddon, County Attorney
shaddon@jeffersoncounty-mt.gov

Andrew W. Paul, Chief Deputy
apaul@jeffersoncounty-mt.gov

Danielle R. Perry, Deputy
dperry@jeffersoncounty-mt.gov

Kellie J. Doherty, Paralegal-Investigator
kdoherty@jeffersoncounty-mt.gov

Heather Rykal, Legal Secretary
hrykal@jeffersoncounty-mt.gov

PO Box H, Boulder, MT 59632 Phone: (406) 225-4010 Fax: (406) 225-4049

October 9, 2026

Honorable Greg Gianforte
Governor, State of Montana
Attn: Boards and Appointments Advisor **Via electronic & U.S. Mail**
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Judicial Appointment, Eleventh 11th Judicial District Court
Travis Ahner

Dear Governor Gianforte:

It is my pleasure to write in support of Flathead County Attorney Travis Ahner's application to fill the District Court Judge vacancy in the Montana Eleventh Judicial District Court. I am pleased to provide input.

I first met County Attorney Ahner prior to his joining the board of the Montana County Attorney's Association on which I serve. Before his appointment to the board, County Attorney Ahner made it a point to attend our board meetings and provide constructive and meaningful input on matters of association importance. Indeed, it was this enthusiasm which led me to recommend to the board that we appointment County Attorney Ahner to fill a vacancy.

In the approximately 10 years I have known County Attorney Ahner, I have found him to carry himself with the utmost professionalism and display clear dedication to his role as county attorney and to the rule of law. He has a keen intellect and an innate ability to dissect legal authority and legal issues. Further, County Attorney Ahner has a strong work ethic and does not shy away from hard work or difficult issues.

I have practiced law in Montana for over 30 years. In this time, I have appeared before jurists of varying degrees of competency in many state and federal courtrooms across our great state. In addition, my time in the United State Marine Corps exposed me firsthand to the characteristics which make a good leader. I can say without hesitation County Attorney Ahner

possesses the characteristics needed in a judge. He is also among those whose leadership skills are above reproach.

In my judgment, County Attorney Ahner possesses the intellect, skill and competency to undertake the duties of a Montana District Court Judge. Further, County Attorney Ahner has the demeanor and temperament for the role. Accordingly, it is with enthusiasm I write in support of his nomination and ask for your strongest consideration.

Thank you and please advise if I can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Steven C. Haddon

Steven C. Haddon
Jefferson County Attorney

SCH/
c. Travis Ahner

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Letter of Support for Travis Ahner

From Bill Erwin <wherwin@gmail.com>
Date Sun 10/11/2026 6:02 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Dear Governor Gianforte,
I would like to write a letter of support for current Flathead County Attorney Travis Ahner in his application for District Court Judge. I have known travis thru my son while they were in highschool. They were leaders at Capital High School and went on to college and their own careers.

William and Donna Erwin
Helena, Montana

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Letter of Support for Travis Ahner

From Jaden Erwin <jadenerwin@gmail.com>
Date Tue 10/13/2026 11:41 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Hello, I would like to submit this letter of support for Travis Ahner in his application for Flathead County District Court Judge. Travis and I grew together here in Helena, MT and have friends since middle school. In all those years I have come to know him at the deepest of levels. Due to our years of deep friendship I can honestly say I know of very few other humans that have such a high degree of integrity, honor, and sense of duty. I cannot think of a better person to be entrusted with the responsibility that is needed to be a fair, honest, and impartial judge. I write this support from the perspective of a friend but more importantly from the perspective a citizen of Montana to who desires that we continue to have the best candidates possible seated at the benches of our judicial system.
Sincerely,

Jaden Erwin DDS, MSD



Montana Implants and Periodontics
3275 Colonial Dr.
Helena, MT 59601
Phone: (406) 449-2900
Fax: (406) 495-0600
Email: mtimplantsandperio.com [mtimplantsandperio.com]

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Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Letter of Support – Travis Ahner, District Court Vacancy

From Austin King <austin@glacierlawfirm.com>
Date Mon 10/12/2026 1:59 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Dear Governor Gianforte:

I am writing in strong support of Travis Ahner's application for appointment to the 11th Judicial District Court. I am an attorney practicing in Flathead County, and I had the privilege of working under Travis as a deputy county attorney. I have also continued to work alongside his office and the county since then. I write in my personal capacity, based on what I have seen firsthand.

Travis is an exceptional attorney. He is thoroughly prepared, careful in his analysis, and fair in how he exercises the considerable discretion entrusted to a prosecutor. He understands that the role of a prosecutor is not simply to win cases but to seek justice, and he holds himself and those he supervises to that standard. In the time I worked for him, I learned a great deal from his example. His judgment is one I continue to trust today.

More important than his legal ability is his character. Travis is a man of integrity and strong moral conviction. He does the right thing when it is difficult and when no one is watching. He treats victims, defendants, colleagues, and opposing counsel with respect. Those convictions are matched by a sense of humility. He approaches his work as a duty rather than a platform, and I believe that is exactly the temperament we should want in a judge. He is someone committed to applying the law as written to the facts presented, without regard to popularity or personal preference.

Travis is also deeply rooted in this community. He is a father of seven, and he and his family are regularly present at Glacier High School sporting events, cheering on local kids. He loves the Flathead Valley and invests in it, not only through his public service but through his everyday involvement in the lives of his neighbors. Those who appear before him will find a judge who understands the people and the community he serves.

Having served as Flathead County Attorney since 2018, and as a prosecutor in this county long before that, Travis brings experience in our courts and a firm grasp of how the justice system affects real people. I am confident he will bring the same diligence, fairness, and commitment to the rule of law to the bench.

I respectfully urge you to appoint Travis Ahner to the 11th Judicial District Court. Thank you for your consideration and for your service to Montana.

Respectfully,

Austin King,

Attorney, Kalispell, MT
www.glacierlawfirm.com [glacierlawfirm.com]

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Travis Ahner

From Allen Leppink <arleppink@gmail.com>
Date Sun 10/11/2026 10:25 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Travis Ahner is highly qualified to be a Judge due to the experience he has as the Flathead County Attorney for seven years. He has a great deal of experience in how to run a legal office and deal with office employees, budgeting and office management. He has successfully managed office staff plus attorneys and dealt with getting cases to go to trial.

As a retired Brigadier General who has spent most of his 33 years of service evaluating soldiers for advancement into leadership positions, Travis Ahner is in that category of candidates that I would highly recommend to be advanced to District Judge in Montana.

Allen R. Leppink
Brigadier General, rtd.

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Recommendation of Travis Ahner for District Court Judge

From Philip Porrini <philporrini@aol.com>
Date Mon 10/12/2026 8:45 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Dear

nominatejudges@mt.gov

Caitlin Wagoner
Governors Office
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620

Caitlin Wagoner
Governors Office
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Recommendation of Travis Ahner for District Court Judge

Dear Members of the Local Advisory Committee:

I am pleased to recommend Travis Ahner for appointment as a District Court Judge. As the current Flathead County Attorney, he has served in a role that demands sound judgment, integrity, careful analysis, and a strong commitment to the fair administration of justice.

I have known Travis since he was a student at Capital High School in Helena. After a period at West Point Military Academy, Travis became a Fighting Saint and help propel Carroll College into a nationally recognized football powerhouse. He and his teammates on the football field in 2000 and 2001 went to the NAIA semifinals each year and overall accomplished a 20-6 record. But his academic accomplishments (3.97 in sociology) were even greater, earning a National Scholar-Athlete award by the National Football Foundation given to only a handful of graduating seniors in 2001. This scholastic scholarship enabled Travis to pursue his legal studies and became the starting point for his legal career.

He has always treated people with respect, both in competition and in court. He considers the facts carefully and communicates clearly. These qualities are essential for a judge to apply the law impartially and ensure that all parties are heard.

I believe Travis would bring a strong commitment of Montana law to the bench. I recommend him for this position and ask that you give his application your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

Philip Porrini
[redacted]
Helena, MT 59601

Phil Porrini
406 465-4143

Outlook

[EXTERNAL]

From Kathleen Theis <theisk86@gmail.com>
Date Wed 10/14/2026 9:23 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I am writing as a Flathead County resident and mother to express serious concerns regarding Travis Ahner's application for appointment to the Eleventh Judicial District Court.

In July 2025, my family experienced a terrifying incident involving a neighbor who discharged a 20-gauge shotgun toward our home while members of our family were outside, including our 10-year-old son.

My husband, three of our other children, and I witnessed the incident. The witnesses observed our neighbor aiming toward our son.

During a subsequent protective-order hearing, our neighbor admitted on the court record that he fired the shotgun toward our house while knowing my husband and I were standing outside. Although he claimed not to have seen our son, we witnessed circumstances that directly contradicted his account. We ultimately obtained a protective order.

Despite these circumstances, criminal charges were not pursued.

During a telephone conversation with Travis Ahner, he told me that he did not believe the 20-gauge shotgun would have killed our son. He also stated that he did not make enough money to do all of this.

I found these statements deeply troubling. A 20-gauge shotgun is a potentially lethal firearm, particularly at the close distance involved in this incident. As a parent, I expected the danger to my child to be treated with the utmost seriousness.

I recognize that prosecutors must evaluate evidence and exercise discretion when determining whether criminal charges are appropriate. However, the handling of this incident and the explanation I personally received have seriously undermined my confidence in Mr. Ahner's judgment.

District court judges are entrusted with decisions affecting public safety, the rights of victims, and the administration of justice. I believe my family's experience raises important questions that deserve consideration during the appointment process.

I respectfully request that your office review the circumstances surrounding this incident, including the protective-order hearing recording, the available witness testimony, and the decision not to prosecute.

Thank you for considering my family's experience as part of the public evaluation of Mr. Ahner's judicial qualifications.

Sincerely,

Katie Theis
Flathead County, Montana

Outlook

[EXTERNAL]

From Jane Maahs <montana.jm554@gmail.com>
Date Thu 10/15/2026 11:36 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

I respectfully OPPOSE the appointment of Travis Ahners to be a state judge. Thank you.

--
Peace and understanding.

Outlook

Message Regarding Judge Nominee

From Sipes, Lisa <Lisa.Sipes@mt.gov>
Date Mon 10/19/2026 11:11 AM
To Wagoner, Caitlin <caitlin.wagoner@mt.gov>

Marion Wacker
406-858-2433
jwack1@yahoo.com

I heard that you are thinking to giving AG Travis Ahners a judgeship. I would like to object to this as he is a terrible AG and I am afraid he would legislate from the bench like he does cases here.

Thomas Stanger
[redacted]
Helena, Mt. 59601
(406) 438-3878 | uniontax1040@gmail.com

10/18/2026

The Honorable Greg Gianforte
Governor of Montana
Attn: Caitlin Wagoner, Governor's Office
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, Montana 59620

Re: Letter of Support for Travis Ahner, Eleventh Judicial District Court Vacancy

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I am writing to strongly support Flathead County Attorney Travis Ahner for appointment as District Court Judge for the Eleventh Judicial District. I have known Travis, whom most of us have always called "Trapper," since we were in third grade together. I have watched him grow from a hardworking kid into one of the most capable and principled people I know.

Trapper and I played football together from small fry all the way through Carroll College. Over all those seasons, I saw who he was when things were hard: at practice in bad weather, after tough losses, and when nobody was watching. He was disciplined, he prepared harder than anyone, and he treated teammates, coaches, and opponents with respect. He led by example, and people trusted him.

That same drive showed in the classroom. Trapper was our high school valedictorian. He did it while giving his full effort on the field, and he never made anyone feel he was above them. He was smart, but more important, he was humble and fair.

Above all, Trapper is honest. In all the years I have known him, I have never seen him cut a corner or bend the truth to make things easier for himself. That kind of integrity is exactly what people need to see in a judge. Everyone who comes before the court, whether they win or lose, deserves to know the person on the bench is fair, careful, and not swayed by anything but the law and the facts. Trapper is that person.

His record in public service backs this up. He has served as Flathead County's chief prosecutor since 2018, after working as a deputy county attorney and a special assistant U.S. attorney. He knows the courtroom, he knows the community, and he cares deeply about both.

As a tax professional and business owner, I work with people during some of the most stressful times in their lives, and I know how much it matters when the person in authority is fair and trustworthy. I can say without hesitation that the people of Flathead County would be lucky to have Travis Ahner on the bench. I respectfully urge you to appoint him.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide anything further.

Respectfully,

Thomas Stanger EA, MBA

Oct. 12, 2026
33 Burlington Av.
Billings, MT. 59101

Caitlin Wagoner
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT. 59602-0801

Greetings:

I am writing to offer my support for the appointment of Travis Ahner as District Court Judge for Flathead County.

I have been a friend of the Ahner family for more than forty years. I am confident that Montana's judicial system would be well served by Travis. His years of experience as Flathead County Attorney, allegiance to job responsibilities, and dedication to family make him an excellent choice.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Donald R. Kendall

Donald R. Kendall

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Travis Ahner for judge

From Emma <observantcitizen.legal@gmail.com>
Date Fri 10/23/2026 6:18 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I am writing to express my strong support for Travis Ahner to serve as a District Court Judge in Flathead County.

I have had the opportunity to see the dedication, work ethic, and character that Travis brings to his role as a County Attorney. As someone who has seen the work other elected County Attorneys do, or more accurately don't do, Travis is an exception to what most people think. He is constantly working. I believe he would apply that same level of dedication, showing up and actually doing the work unlike so many others.

It is difficult to think of many jobs more thankless than being a County Attorney or judge. On any given day, you are asked to make decisions that will inevitably leave someone unhappy. Victims may want a harsher outcome. Defendants may believe the consequences are unfair. Law enforcement may want a different approach. Members of the public may disagree with decisions they do not fully understand. No matter what decision is made, someone is likely to be dissatisfied or disappointed.

Despite that reality, Travis has consistently approached his job with fairness, professionalism, and a genuine commitment to doing what he believes is right for the people of the Flathead Valley.

He has also done this work under difficult circumstances, including periods of being short-staffed and carrying an enormous workload. It's hard to imagine being put in a position of having to decide which cases to charge, not because of their legal or factual complexities, but because you simply do not have the staff to handle such intense caseloads. He worked hard, handled difficult cases, and took seriously the responsibility entrusted to him. He understood that behind every case was a person, a family, a victim, a defendant, or a community that would be affected by the decisions being made.

What stands out to me most is that Travis has never seemed motivated by simply doing what is easiest or what will make him the most popular. He understands that public service sometimes means making difficult decisions and accepting that not everyone will agree with you, including

the public. He has nevertheless continued to strive for decisions that are fair, thoughtful, and in the best interests of the people he serves.

I believe those qualities are particularly important in a judge. A good judge needs more than legal knowledge. A judge needs patience, sound judgment, humility, integrity, and the ability to listen to people who may be experiencing some of the most difficult circumstances of their lives. A judge must be able to consider competing perspectives, apply the law fairly, and make difficult decisions without allowing personal feelings or outside pressure to dictate the outcome.Travis has demonstrated those qualities throughout his career as a County Attorney.

His experience has also given him a practical understanding of the justice system and the people who come before it. He has seen the consequences of legal decisions from many different perspectives. He knows that the people involved in a case are not simply names on a file. He understands the impact that decisions made in a courtroom can have on individuals, families, victims, defendants, law enforcement, and the community as a whole.

Most importantly, I believe Travis genuinely cares about the Flathead Valley and the people who call it home because it is also his home. His commitment to this community is evident in the way he has approached his work, particularly when doing so has required long hours, difficult decisions, and personal sacrifice without much recognition in return. It is these actions that the public does not see. They don’t see the late hours, the brainstorm sessions, the countless hours it takes him away from his family. Yet still, despite all that, he continues to do the best he can for the Flathead Valley.

For those reasons, I believe Travis Ahner would be an exceptional judge. He has the legal experience, work ethic, integrity, temperament, and commitment to fairness that I believe the people of the Flathead Valley deserve from someone entrusted with such an important responsibility.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

An observant citizen

Personal Statement Regarding Prosecutorial Conduct
and Judicial Fitness

Re: Jeffrey Scott Serio case, Flathead County, Montana

Purpose. This statement expresses our personal concerns for preservation in the case record and possible submission to an appropriate reviewing authority. We ask that the concerns below be assessed against the complete, authenticated record. We further ask that this documented case be considered as an example of our experience with Travis Ahner during his service as a prosecutor. Based on our experience and the conduct documented in this case, we have serious concerns about his fairness, impartiality, and judgment. As Travis Ahner is now being considered for a position as a district judge, we respectfully submit this complaint for consideration as part of the public review of his judicial candidacy. We believe our documented experience raises legitimate concerns that should be carefully examined before any decision is made regarding his appointment or selection as a judge.

During the prosecution of Jeffrey Serio, Travis Ahner was aware of circumstances that, warranted careful consideration when evaluating the facts of the incident and the appropriate sentence. These circumstances included the reported statement that the shooter told Jeffrey to “get up” while Jeffrey was being detained by a deputy, as well as concerns that Jeffrey was experiencing a medical emergency and that the response by law enforcement and the 911 system may have involved significant errors by the Flathead County Sheriff’s Department. Travis Ahner knew there were no eyewitnesses to the final incident. Additionally, testimony from the shooter’s father reportedly described a prior incident in which the shooter bloodied his father’s face and took a gun against him. Despite these circumstances, Ahner sought a 100-year sentence for Jeffrey, who had no prior convictions and, according to the information that was available, had no alcohol or illegal drugs involved in the incident. We are concerned that the prosecution’s sentencing position did not adequately account for these circumstances, including the reported prior violent conduct attributed to the shooter, Jeffrey’s medical emergency, the lack of eyewitnesses, and the absence of prior convictions. We respectfully request that the reviewing authority examine the trial transcript, sentencing record, and other authenticated evidence to determine whether Ahner’s handling of the case demonstrated the fairness, impartiality, sound judgment, and proportionality expected of a person being considered for judicial office.

Specific concerns for review

1. **Witness interviews and possible influence on accounts.** We know for a fact that Sara Born, Cherise Dahlin, and Wyatt Dahlin, all relatives of the shooter, were questioned together and allowed to discuss events in one another’s presence. In his interview, Wyatt Dahlin told the prosecution that he did not see the final event but wanted to help them win their case. We have recordings and transcripts confirming these facts. We ask the reviewing authority to determine whether their accounts were independent or were influenced by those discussions.
2. **Firsthand knowledge of the final shooting.** We understand that these witnesses did not personally observe the shooting at the cell tower. We ask whether the limits of their firsthand knowledge were clearly identified when the evidence concerning Jeff's intent was evaluated. Watch our Video on Face Book Irene Serio or Tony Serio. Proof that it was never considered.
3. **Conclusions about intent.** We are concerned that opinions or inferences about Jeff's state of mind may have received more weight than direct observations. We ask whether investigators and prosecutors distinguished what each witness actually saw or heard from what the witness inferred. If you think

someone is shooting at you you then know when someone is shooting at you. Jeffreys high sence of awareness protected him.

4. **Self-defense and other contrary evidence.** We ask whether evidence supporting Jeffrey Serio's account of self-defense, including reported gunfire and damage to his vehicle, was fully considered during the original charging analysis. The deployment of Jeffrey's airbag also raises questions about the circumstances of the incident and whether his potential injuries were properly assessed. Despite these circumstances, Jeffrey was detained and, in our view, treated as though his guilt had already been determined, without receiving the fairness or medical attention his condition should have required from the Flathead County Sheriff's Department. We respectfully request a review of the incident reports, 911 records, vehicle evidence, and medical documentation to determine whether the evidence supporting Jeffrey's account and his need for medical care were adequately considered.
5. **Prosecutorial judgment and judicial service.** We believe a person seeking judicial office should be evaluated for fairness, sound judgment, and the ability to assess disputed evidence with an open mind. We ask whether verified aspects of the prosecutor's handling of this case bear on those qualities.

Why this matters to judicial fitness

In our view, a judge should approach each matter fairly, consider contrary evidence, and distinguish allegations from facts established in the record. If the records show that material limits in witness accounts or important contrary evidence were not fairly considered, we believe that information should be weighed when assessing the prosecutor's fitness for judicial service. We are not claiming that filing a charge, by itself, was improper.

Records to examine before reaching a conclusion

We ask that the reviewing authority examine the original charging documents and probable-cause affidavit; dated witness interviews, audio and video recordings, and transcripts; communications about the charging decision that may lawfully be reviewed; evidence bearing on self-defense; and applicable court rulings and the trial record. The timing of the witness interviews in relation to the original charge is especially important.

Requested consideration

We respectfully ask the appropriate reviewing authority to determine whether the charging process reflected sound judgment and fairness, and whether any verified conduct is relevant to the prosecutor's qualifications for judicial service. We ask that these concerns be assessed on the complete record, without assuming either guilt or misconduct.

Important qualification

This statement reflects our personal opinions and concerns based on our experience and our review of the available information. We respectfully invite the reviewing authority to visit the Facebook pages of Irene Serio or Tony Serio to review materials relevant to these concerns, including sheriff's body-camera footage, deposition testimony, and other documented evidence. We ask that these materials be independently reviewed and assessed alongside the complete, authenticated case record before a decision is made regarding Travis Ahner's consideration for judicial office. We further note that his involvement in this matter may be relevant to anticipated or ongoing civil litigation. Given the seriousness of these concerns and the potential relevance of his actions to future legal proceedings, we respectfully request a thorough and impartial review of the documented evidence before his judicial candidacy is considered further.

Prepared by: Anthony Serio
Signed by Oct 28, 2026

Date: 10/28/26

Additional Information

__I would also like to express my support for Alisha Rapkoch for judicial office. In my experience, she demonstrated fairness by considering both sides and standing up for what she believed was right. I witnessed her work hard and advocate diligently, even when she appeared to be facing significant professional challenges and negative attitudes from others, including Ben Colter and other colleagues. I believe her willingness to examine both sides, stand firm in her efforts, and advocate for fairness are qualities worth recognizing in a judicial candidate. I respectfully ask that her conduct and commitment to fairness be considered when evaluating the qualities needed in a judge.

Formal Public Comment Regarding Travis Ahner's Consideration for District Judge: Seeking a 100-Year Prison Sentence for Jeffrey Serio Despite Serious Doubts, Disputed Evidence, No Eyewitnesses to the Shooting, and Unanswered Questions About Law Enforcement Conduct

Submitted to the appropriate judicial-appointment reviewing authority

We respectfully ask

the reviewing authority to examine the evidence, trial records, and concerns outlined in this complaint before making any decision about his appointment.

We believe this review is necessary to protect the rights of Flathead County citizens, promote accountability, and ensure that those appointed to judicial office uphold the fairness, honesty, and impartiality that the public deserves.

Concerns About Jeffrey Serio's Testimony, Wride's Diagram, and the Prosecution's Account of the Shooting

During Jeffreys trial, Jeffrey Serio testified that he drove over a bump that caused him to bounce out of his seat. He then came to a stop near the corner of a cell tower.

According to Jeffrey's testimony, and others testimony there was a crash sound where Jeff came to a stop - Mory Grigg began shooting after Jeffrey had stopped. Jeffrey testified that he subsequently drove toward the direction of the gunfire in self-defense.

The jury also heard a video recording containing five apparent gunshots.

Despite Jeffrey's testimony, prosecutors under the direction of Travis Ahner argued that Jeffrey was attempting to run Mory Grigg, the shooter, over.

Katherine (Kate) Wride, a certified crime scene investigator, evidence technician, and crime scene team leader with the Flathead County Sheriff's Office, also presented a diagram to the jury illustrating the shooting reconstruction, as enclosed. Wride has extensive experience in crime scene investigations, including firearms evidence collection and bullet trajectory analysis.

However, Wride admitted in her own written rebuttal that she did not perform a bullet trajectory analysis. She explained that she chose not to conduct the analysis because Mory's exact position was unknown, the ground was uneven, and an accurate reconstruction could not be completed without knowing those details.

We question why Wride presented a diagram illustrating the shooting to the jury when she had not performed her own trajectory analysis and had acknowledged that the information necessary for an accurate reconstruction was unavailable.

We further question whether the prosecution clearly explained to the jury that the diagram was an illustration rather than a scientifically verified reconstruction of exactly what happened.

We respectfully request an independent review of Wride's diagram, her written rebuttal, the trial transcripts, the video recording, and Jeffrey's testimony to determine whether the evidence was fairly and accurately presented.

We believe these concerns are relevant when evaluating Travis Ahner's fairness, judgment, and suitability for appointment as a district judge.

Concerns about technical language and jury understanding

We are concerned that complicated forensic terminology, hypothetical reconstructions, and assumptions may have made it difficult for jurors to distinguish established facts from expert interpretations. We do not claim to know what individual jurors believed; we ask that the transcript be reviewed to determine how uncertainty was explained and whether the jury was clearly told which conclusions depended on unverified assumptions.

Jurors rely on prosecutors and experts to explain technical evidence accurately. The reviewing authority should examine Steven Howard's testimony, the defense's challenges, and Travis Ahner's and prosecutors questioning and arguments to assess whether the evidence was fairly characterized.

We request an independent review of photographs, vehicle examination records, 911 recordings, trial testimony, and the complete incident record to determine whether all relevant evidence was fairly considered before such an extreme sentence was requested.

Our concerns also include the reported absence of alcohol or illegal drugs and Jeffrey's lack of prior convictions. We believe these circumstances warranted careful consideration **before the prosecution requested a 100-year prison sentence.**

We ask the reviewing authority to verify these matters against the authenticated record rather than assume them from this statement alone.

We believe the decision to seek such a severe sentence, given the disputed evidence and unanswered questions, deserves careful examination when evaluating Travis Ahner's fairness, judgment, and suitability for appointment as a district judge.

Concerns About Deputy Conduct, Possible Vigilante Actions, and a Potential Cover-Up

We have serious concerns about the actions of Flathead County Sheriff's deputies before Mory Grigg fired shots at Jeffrey Serio.

Jeffrey was experiencing a medical emergency, had requested medical assistance, and had acknowledged that he needed help. Despite this, a deputy instructed Jeffrey to get into his vehicle and drive.

We are also concerned by reports that deputies were positioned on vehicles near where Jeffrey had parked and communicated information about where Jeffrey would emerge.

We question whether the deputies' actions or communications may have encouraged, enabled, or contributed to a confrontation between Mory Grigg and Jeffrey Serio.

We further question whether Mory's reported actions should have been independently investigated as possible attempted murder or unlawful vigilante conduct, rather than assuming that his use of deadly force was justified.

We also request examination of the reported statement that Mory told Jeffrey to "get up" while Jeffrey was detained by a deputy, along with testimony concerning Mory's reported prior violent conduct.

Could these events indicate that deputies improperly assisted or encouraged a private individual to confront Jeffrey? Were these possibilities fully investigated, or were important questions left unanswered?

We do not claim that a conspiracy, attempted murder, or cover-up has been established. We request an independent investigation to determine what actually occurred.

8. Concerns About Travis Ahner's Request for a 100-Year Prison Sentence

We are deeply concerned that prosecutors under the direction of Travis Ahner sought a 100-year prison sentence for Jeffrey Serio despite serious questions about the shooting, Jeffrey's reported medical emergency, and the conduct of responding deputies.

We question whether the prosecution adequately examined the possibility that law enforcement mistakes contributed to the events leading to the shooting.

We also ask whether the prosecution's decisions, including the request for a 100-year sentence, were influenced in any way by a desire to protect deputies or the Sheriff's Department from scrutiny.

If evidence existed suggesting that deputies contributed to the confrontation, we believe that evidence should have been thoroughly investigated and fairly presented.

We request an independent review of what Travis Ahner and the prosecution knew about these concerns, what investigative steps were taken, and whether relevant information was disclosed to the defense.

We are not alleging that an improper motive has been proven. We are asking whether the prosecution acted fairly and independently when serious questions about law enforcement conduct remained unresolved.

These concerns are directly relevant to our opposition to Travis Ahner's appointment as district judge.

9. Missing Ring Camera Evidence and Questions About Evidence Preservation

We are particularly concerned about the apparent failure to obtain or preserve potentially important footage from Chris Fritz's Ring camera.

We understand that this camera may have been positioned to record activity relevant to the deputies' actions and communications before the shooting.

Why was Chris Fritz's Ring camera footage not obtained, if it was available and potentially relevant to the investigation?

We ask whether investigators knew about the camera, whether anyone contacted Chris Fritz, whether footage existed for the relevant period, and whether any attempt was made to preserve or recover it.

We further ask whether the camera might have recorded communications between deputies and citizens including Mory Grigg and Sara Born who was told by the Deputy "when were you going to get your gun, as Jeff sat on the ground detained by Deputy Van Gundy.

Could the failure to obtain this footage have prevented evidence of improper deputy conduct from being discovered? Was the footage overlooked through investigative error, or was there any deliberate effort to avoid evidence that might have raised questions about law enforcement's actions?

These are questions requiring investigation.

We also request an examination of whether investigators obtained and preserved relevant footage from Sara Born's camera system, cameras on Mory Grigg's property, and other nearby surveillance systems other then the only one retained a half mile away at the party store that showed sounds and Was the party store video purposely edited or altered before being presented to the jury, and was it compared with the original, unedited recording?"

We ask the reviewing authority to determine whether Travis Ahner knew about these potential sources of evidence, whether he took appropriate steps to address any investigative gaps, and whether the defense was informed.

Before Travis Ahner is considered for district judge, we believe an independent authority should examine whether his prosecution of Jeffrey Serio demonstrated the fairness, integrity, and impartial judgment required of someone seeking judicial office.

We also invite reviewers to consider publicly available materials identified on the Facebook pages of Irene Serio and Tony Serio, including reported body-camera footage and deposition testimony, but ask that such materials be authenticated and assessed against official records before any conclusions are reached.

The events and prosecutorial decisions described here may also be relevant to potential or ongoing civil litigation concerning Jeffrey Serio and the circumstances of his case. We do not assert that Ahner is a party to any lawsuit or prejudge liability. Our purpose is to request

a fair, independent examination of the record before a judicial appointment decision is made.

Additional public support for Alisha Rapkoch

We also wish to express support for Alisha Rapkoch for judicial office. In our experience, she demonstrated fairness by considering both sides and advocating diligently even when facing what appeared to be professional challenges. We believe her willingness to examine competing perspectives and stand firm in her work reflects qualities worth considering in a judicial candidate. This statement of support reflects our personal observations.

Supporting materials included

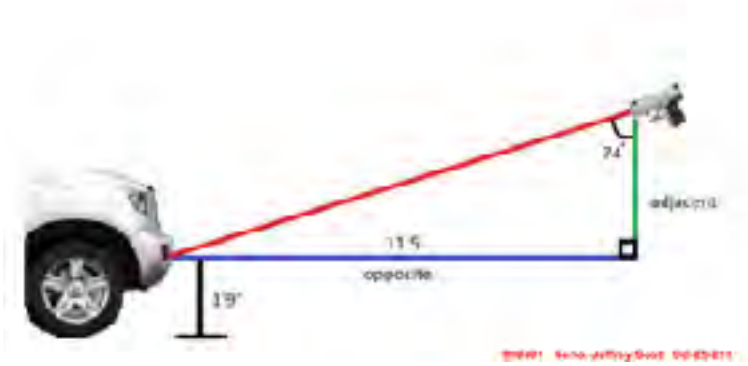
- Appendix A: Wride trajectory diagram (April 28, 2026; discovery page 000301).
- Appendix B: scene photographs supplied by the commenter

- Additional records referenced but not reproduced: Wride CV (discovery pages 000263–000267) and rebuttal report (discovery pages 000299–000300).

Prepared as a public-comment draft. Please confirm the precise sentencing request, chronology, witness testimony, and availability of evidence before submission.

Signed Irene Serio Signed by... • Oct 29, 2026. Date. 10/29/26

Appendix A — Trajectory diagram



Source: Discovery - Wride Diagram 4.28.26.pdf, page 1 (discovery 000301).

Appendix B — Scene photographs



Photograph 388.JPG — supplied by commenter; scene location and date not independently verified.

Photograph 389.JPG — supplied by commenter; scene location and date not independently verified.



Photograph 390.JPG — supplied by commenter; scene location and date not independently verified.

Public Comment on Travis Ahner’s Judicial Application

To: nominatejudges@mt.gov

Subject: Public Comment on Travis Ahner’s Judicial Application

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I ask you to carefully consider my family’s concerns as you review Travis Ahner’s application for the Flathead County judgeship.

In my brother Jeffrey Serio’s case, Deputies Weatherby and Van Gundy were involved in events that raise serious concerns for our family about deputy conduct and communications. We believe their actions and communications exposed Jeff to danger. We are concerned that officers failed to do their jobs and that their conduct may have contributed to what we view as state-created danger. This incident occurred in August 2025.

On May 29, 2026, Kenneth Ardagna died in a deputy-involved shooting at Emery Bay Campground. I have not seen public information identifying the deputies involved. I ask whether either Deputy Weatherby or Deputy Van Gundy was involved and, if so, whether Mr. Ahner knew of that involvement. I believe the answer would be relevant to assessing his fairness and judgment as a judicial applicant.

At Jeffrey’s sentencing, Deputy County Attorneys Amy Kenison and Ashley Frechette requested a 100-year sentence, which the judge imposed. Our family learned the day before sentencing that the prosecution would request 100 years. Because Mr. Ahner was the elected County Attorney, I ask whether he reviewed, approved, or was consulted about that request.

I also ask whether Mr. Ahner would remain open to disputed evidence, the absence of eyewitnesses to the shooting, and unanswered questions about law-enforcement conduct when deciding a case as a judge.

I am not claiming that the Emery Bay incident is connected to Jeffrey’s case, or that Mr. Ahner or any deputy committed misconduct in that

incident. I ask your office to verify any relevant facts and consider whether Mr. Ahner’s knowledge, actions, and judgment in response to any substantiated concerns bear on his qualifications to serve as a fair and impartial judge.

I also respectfully ask your office to seek clarification about when information identifying the deputy or deputies involved in Kenneth Ardagna’s death may be released. I believe the public deserves timely information and a fair, impartial judge.

Please include this comment in your review of Mr. Ahner’s application.

Sincerely,

Torina Coutavas

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Tavis Ahner's Judicial Application

From Andrew <tssdust@gmail.com>
Date Fri 10/30/2026 7:30 AM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

Public Comment on Travis Ahner's Judicial Application

To: Governor Greg Gianforte and the judicial review authority
Subject: Request for review of Jeffrey Serio's case

Dear Governor Gianforte and Members of the Review Authority:

I am Andrew Coutavas, Jeffrey Serio's brother-in-law. I respectfully ask you to review the authenticated record of Jeffrey's case before deciding whether Travis Ahner is qualified to serve as a judge. I am concerned that important questions about the medical assistance provided to Jeffrey, the completeness of the investigation, and the prosecution's request for a 100-year sentence may not have received full consideration. I ask you to consider whether Mr. Ahner's conduct as County Attorney demonstrated the judgment, fairness, and impartiality expected of a judge.

- **Medical assistance.** Body-camera footage appears to show Jeffrey saying he needed medical help. I ask you to review the footage and dispatch records to determine what assistance he requested and how deputies responded. Please review 911 and dispatch records to establish what deputies knew hours before Jeff sought help and how the county responded. Did the 911 system or county response fail Jeff? Determine whether any failure was later concealed and whether Mr. Ahner participated in or led a cover-up; I ask this as a question for investigation.
- **Evidence and investigation.** My understanding is that no eyewitness saw the shooting itself, toxicology testing found no alcohol or illegal drugs, and Jeffrey had no prior convictions. Please check these points against the record. I also ask who prepared the prosecution's charts, what evidence they used, and whether the lack of a full scene reconstruction was considered and explained.
- **The 100-year sentence.** The prosecution requested a 100-year prison term. Please verify whether Mr. Ahner reviewed, approved, or participated in that request, and whether the disputed evidence and mitigating circumstances were considered.
- Other reported conduct and public funds. Please determine whether Mory Grigg's reported command for Jeffrey to "get up," made while a deputy was present, and testimony about prior violent conduct were independently investigated. I am concerned by reports that $6,000 in taxpayer funds was paid to the Grigg family soon after the incident, while, to my knowledge, the crime scene was never fully reconstructed. If the payment was made when reported, its timing raises questions about whether public decisions were made before the evidence was fully reviewed and whether Jeffrey's claim that he was being shot at and acted in self-defense received fair consideration. Please verify whether the payment was made, when it

was authorized and paid, its source and purpose, who approved it, and whether Mr. Ahner had any role in the decision. Please also determine whether a full reconstruction was requested or considered and, if it was not conducted, why.

Uncollected evidence and questions about deputy conduct

I understand that sworn statements from the two men were not taken until more than a year after the incident, approximately two weeks before trial. By then, the Ring camera footage had expired. I ask why those statements were delayed and why the footage was not obtained and preserved earlier, particularly given reports that Ring camera footage was being used during the incident to relay messages to Mory Grigg. Please verify who had access to the footage, whether it was requested or preserved, and whether it captured messages relevant to the shooting.

Please determine whether deputies obtained and preserved any Ring camera footage. Please also verify what interviews or testimony were obtained from the two men at the scene, what evidence was collected, and whether missing footage or witness testimony affected the investigation or trial.

I am concerned by reports and trial testimony about a deputy's prior use of deadly force and comments captured on camera encouraging citizens to get guns. Please verify the complete context and official findings concerning those matters, including whether the same deputy was involved in a shooting of a man in a park. If so, please determine whether Mr. Ahner knew of that incident when the prosecution sought a 100-year sentence for Jeffrey. I ask these questions for review and do not claim that they establish misconduct or a cover-up.

I believe Jeffrey was being shot at and had to defend himself. I ask that the full video, physical evidence, witness accounts, and timeline be reviewed together when evaluating the charging and sentencing decisions. I also ask whether the prosecution initially sought the death penalty or another maximum punishment, and what information Mr. Ahner considered in making or supporting that request.

I am not asking you to treat disputed claims as proven or to decide the criminal case in this review. I ask you to verify these matters against the complete record and consider whether Mr. Ahner's actions and judgment show the fairness and independence expected of a judge.

Respectfully,
Andrew Coutavas
Brother-in-law of Jeffrey Serio

Tom Esch
[redacted]
Kalispell, MT 59903
406 250-5311

October 29, 2026

Honorable Greg Gianforte Governor,
State of Montana
Attn: Boards and Appointments Advisor
Sent to: NominateJudges@mt.gov

Re: **Travis Ahner**: Judicial Appointment, Eleventh 11th Judicial District Court

Dear Governor Gianforte:

This is an unsolicited letter of support of the application of Travis Ahner to become our District Court Judge in the Eleventh Judicial District. I write as a former three-time elected (Republican) Flathead County Attorney and as someone who has known and worked with Mr. Ahner since he was a Deputy County Attorney beginning in 2008. These are his qualities for which he has garnered my support:

Integrity. Mr. Ahner is above reproach. He has a good sense of right and wrong and uses that sense in making decisions. He has a solid moral compass. I suspect his integrity is grounded in his private and very personal faith, and his belief that ultimately justice will prevail.

Rule Follower. Mr. Ahner knows the rules, follows the rules and inspires others to follow the rules. He has a strong command of the Rules of Evidence, the Rules of Civil Procedure, the Rules of Criminal Procedure, the Montana Code and the Montana and United States Constitution. He believes in the rules. As our District Court judge those rules will be enforced in his courtroom and he will expect attorneys to subscribe to the rules in their advocacy.

Team Player. Mr. Ahner has shown he works well with and inspires others. Rather than delegate to a subordinate, Mr. Ahner has chosen to serve on the interdisciplinary team of our drug court, working with the Court, Public Defenders, Probation Office and treatment providers. He has instructed law enforcement on arrest and search and seizure laws. And as a Special United States Attorney he has

worked with federal law enforcement in the prosecution of crimes in Glacier National Park and on the Flathead National Forrest.

Resilience. Mr. Ahner has shown he has staying power. He's been doing the job, day in and day out, for eighteen years. I know a County Attorney makes a hundred decisions a day, some of them are important, and some are not perfect. Sometimes the hardest decision is not to prosecute a case and that may not be popular with those who feel they are victims or have a stake in the outcome. He is willing to stand by his tough decisions and defend them from his critics. His resilience will serve him well as our judge.

Humility. Mr. Ahner never asks anything for himself. He doesn't toot his own horn. He shows up, does the job and does it again. In doing so he has tremendous empathy for crime victims. He has shown great understanding and respect for the work of law enforcement. And he treats those accused with fairness and justice.

Flathead County has had a long line of exceptional District Court Judges. In fact, our next Montana Supreme Court Judge will have served as a Flathead County Judge. As our next District Court Judge, Mr. Ahner will continue the tradition of exceptional service.

Thank you,

Tom Esch

Tom Esch

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Public Comment — Eleventh Judicial District Applicant Travis Ahner To the Office of the Governor:

From Duane Egan <duane.egan@outlook.com>
Date Fri 10/30/2026 4:05 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

4 attachments (7 MB)
11thJudicialDistrictPublicCommentTravisAhner.pdf; FCD 21 26 FCA letter.pdf; 2025 03 20 CAO Cooper Letter To Seaman.docx.doc; 11thJudicialDistrictPublicCommentTravisAhner.pdf;

Please accept the attached letter as my public comment in opposition to the appointment of Travis Russell Ahner to the Eleventh Judicial District Court vacancy.

Dear Governor Gianforte:

I submit this comment in opposition to the appointment of Flathead County Attorney Travis Russell Ahner to the impending vacancy in the Eleventh Judicial District. I am a Columbia Falls resident and the publisher of MontanaWatchdog.com [montanawatchdog.com], which documents matters of local government accountability in Flathead County. This comment does not address Mr. Ahner's legal knowledge or personal character. It addresses a documented, two-year record of how his office has handled a single code enforcement matter and the citizen who brought it.

Background. I am the complainant of record in Community Decay Complaint FCD-21-26, filed July 7, 2021, under Flathead County Ordinance No. 6, and renewed in 2024 with co-signers from neighboring businesses. It concerns junk vehicles, dilapidated buildings, and debris at 5609 and 5611 US Highway 2 West, Columbia Falls. On October 16, 2024, after the property owner failed to comply with two rounds of violation notices, the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office forwarded the case to the County Attorney's Office with a full chronology, an exhibit list, and a witness list.

The office's written commitment. On January 6, 2025, Deputy County Attorney Elspeth Cooper wrote to the property owner that the case had been referred to her office "for legal action." The letter gave him until January 21, 2025 to comply and stated that, failing compliance, "our office will commence formal legal proceedings without further notice to you." I have found no record that any proceedings were ever commenced. The condition remains in public view today, more than 21 months after that deadline.

Unanswered inquiries. Over the same period, I asked Mr. Ahner's office for the status of this matter repeatedly and in writing:

> **January 15 and May 14, 2025:** Public records requests for the office's file on FCD-21-26, the second addressed to Mr. Ahner. No timely response was received to either request.
>
> **November 20, 2025:** Email to Mr. Ahner asking for the status of the complaint and an expected date for corrective action. No response was received.

June 17, 2026: Letter to Mr. Ahner asking three factual questions, including whether his office considered the matter open and whether it intended to take any action, with a requested response date of July 1, 2026. No response was received.

July 13, 2026: Email to Deputy County Attorney Cooper asking whether her office regarded the matter as open or closed. No response was received.

Complaint of Official Misconduct. On July 27, 2026, I filed a formal complaint with Mr. Ahner alleging Official Misconduct under 45-7-401, MCA, by county officers responsible for enforcing Ordinance No. 6. It was delivered by USPS Certified Mail on July 29, 2026. By letter dated October 16, 2026, exactly two years after his office received the case, Mr. Ahner stated that he would not commence an action "based upon the information provided" and that he had referred the complaint to the Attorney General's Office under 7-4-2718, MCA. I acknowledge that the referral was timely and appropriate, since the Board of County Commissioners, which controls his office's budget, is among the officials named. It is also the only written communication I have received from his office in two years, and it came only because a statute set a 90-day deadline.

Related complaints concerning the handling of this matter were filed with the Office of the Attorney General on April 27, 2026, and with the Department of Justice Prosecution Services Bureau on July 24, 2026. With Mr. Ahner's referral, the matter is now before the Attorney General's Office.

A county-wide pattern. Mr. Ahner's office is not alone. The Planning Director has stated in writing that the case "remains with the County Attorney's Office." Yet the Planning and Zoning transmittal for FCD-21-26 contains no request for action of any kind; it is purely a status report. The County Attorney was entitled to treat it as such. But when asked directly, in writing, whether his office agreed with Planning and Zoning's position, prudence called for an answer, and none came. That is not the conduct of a diligent judge. The Board of County Commissioners and the County Administrator, copied on nearly every letter described above and sent a direct supervision inquiry on June 16, 2026, did not respond. Each office points to another, and none accepts responsibility. In my view, this reflects dysfunction across the County Attorney's Office, the Planning and Zoning Office, the County Administrator's Office, and the Board of County Commissioners. As the county's chief legal officer, Mr. Ahner was positioned to end that circle with a single written answer. He did not.

Why this bears on the appointment. I do not dispute that a county attorney has discretion over whether to bring an enforcement action. My concern is different. Mr. Ahner's office told a property owner in writing that it would commence proceedings by a specific date, did not do so, and for nearly two years declined to tell the complainant whether the matter was open, closed, or abandoned. That is stonewalling, and it continued through every written inquiry I sent. In his application, Mr. Ahner wrote that "a judge's decisions should be governed by the facts of the case and the applicable law, not by agenda or a desired outcome." I agree. A district judge must also follow through on what the court has ordered, address the matters properly brought before it, and explain the basis for the decisions made. The record I have described does not reflect those qualities.

Because Mr. Ahner is the sole applicant for this vacancy, the public comment period is the only opportunity for the community to place matters such as this before you. I respectfully ask that you decline to appoint Mr. Ahner. At a minimum, because the complaint his office referred is now under review by the Attorney General, I ask that you consider whether an appointment should await the outcome of that review.

I maintain a five-year record of emails and letters showing that Community Decay Complaint FCD-21-26, along with other matters, has not been properly addressed or resolved by the Flathead County

administration, including the Office of the County Attorney. That record is available on request. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Duane Egan

Attached:
- Comment letter, dated October 30, 2026
- Planning and Zoning transmittal to the County Attorney's Office, October 16, 2024
- Letter from Deputy County Attorney Elspeth Cooper to the property owner, January 6, 2025
- Status Inquiry to Travis Ahner, June 17, 2026
- Letter from Travis R. Ahner, County Attorney, October 16, 2026

Please confirm receipt.

Duane Egan
[redacted]
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
Duane.egan@outlook.com

Outlook
Community Decay Complaint FCD 21-26
From Duane Egan <duane.egan@outlook.com>
Date Wed 6/17/2026 9:56 AM
To Travis Ahner <County.Attorney@flathead.mt.gov>
Cc Elspeth Cooper <ecooper@flathead.mt.gov>; Pete Melnick <Pete.Melnick@flatheadcounty.gov>; Pamela
Holmquist <Pam.Holmquist@flathead.mt.gov>; Brad Abell <Brad.Abell@flathead.mt.gov>; Randy Brodehl
<Randy.Brodlehl@flathead.mt.gov>; Erik Mack <emack@flatheadcounty.gov>
2 attachments (2 MB)
2026-06-17 Egan Letter to Ahner FCD-21-26.pdf; Enclosure - Mack Email Response FCD-21-26.pdf;
Please see the Attached files regarding my inquires of processing and enforcement of Community Decay Complaint FCD 21-26.
Duane Egan
Duane.egan@outlook.com

40 11th Street West, Ste. 220
Kalispell, MT, 59901
OFFICE: (406) 751-8200
EMAIL: planning.zoning@flathead.mt.gov
WEB: flathead.mt.gov/planning_zoning

October 16, 2024

Flathead County Attorney's Office
Attn: Elspeth Cooper

Ms. Cooper:

The following on-going violation is being forwarded to your office:

Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office File #FCD-21-26

Property Owner: Michael Seaman

Property Address: [redacted]
Columbia Falls, MT 59912.

Description of Violation:

July 7, 2021: Written complaint received about the properties regarding the decay and junk vehicles.

July 19, 2021: Site visit conducted and photos taken.

March 15, 2023: Site visit conducted and photos taken.

March 22, 2023: First 30 day letter sent to property owner. USPS Tracking 70222410000243687721 shows delivered, front desk/reception/mail room on May 24, 2023.

April 28, 2023: Final 10 day violation notice. No proof if the letter was sent and/or delivered.

July 6, 2023: Site visit conducted and photos taken.

July 17, 2023: File closed out as compliant.

March 6, 2024: Site visit conducted and photos taken after phone call from complainant.

March 8, 2024: New complaint received for the property.

March 21, 2024: 30 day violation letter sent to property owner. USPS Tracking 70222410000243664654 shows delivered, front desk/reception/mail room on March 22, 2024.

May 7, 2024: Final 10 day notice sent to property owner. USPS tracking 70222410000243670990 shows delivered, left with individual on May 8, 2024.

May 14, 2024: Email sent to Kayla Seaman (daughter of Michael Seaman) with the photos I took in March and the Flathead County Community Decay Ordinance No 6.

May 16, 2024: Emailed with Kayla Seaman about possible solutions for the violation.

August 7, 2024: Email sent to Kayla Seaman requesting update.

August 16, 2024: Email received from Kayla Seaman stating they had put in a request for an auto dealer for the properties.

August 19, 2024: Email sent to Kayla Seaman to clarify which property the emails are referring to.

September 10, 2024: Email received from Kayla Seaman stating a fence around the property would not work for them.

September 11, 2024: Email sent to Kayla Seaman explaining how a fence would remedy the violation. Reply from Kayla Seaman stating once fall is here they may have more help after a busy summer.

September 12, 2024: Email sent to Kayla Seaman asking for a rough time frame for compliance. Reply from Kayla requesting a list of violations. Replied with the violations.

September 20, 2024: Email sent to Kayla Seaman about status of applying for wrecking yard license.

September 24, 2024: Reply from Kayla Seaman asking probing questions about the fence to remedy the violation.

	September 25, 2024: Replied to Kayla Seaman stating the fence would remedy the violation.
Violation from Regulation:	Flathead County Community Decay Ordinance No 6.
Past Correspondence:	March 22, 2023: First 30 day violation letter sent. March 28, 2023: Final 10 day violation letter sent. No proof that it was sent and/or delivered. March 21, 2024: Second 30 day violation letter sent. May 7, 2024: Final 10 day violation letter sent. May 14, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. May 16, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. August 7, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. August 16, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. August 19, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. September 10, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. September 11, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. September 12, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. September 20, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. September 24, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman. September 25, 2024: Email correspondence with Kayla Seaman.
Exhibit List:	30 day Certified Letter and receipt Site Visit Photos Final Notice Letter with receipt Email Correspondence
Witness List:	**Jared Schroeder** Code Compliance Technician II Flathead County Planning and Zoning **Phone**: 406-751-8210 **Email**: jschroeder@flathead.mt.gov 40 11th Street W Ste. 220 Kalispell **Cody Gove** Code Compliance Technician I Flathead County Planning and Zoning **Phone**: 406-751-8201 **Email**: cgove@flathead.mt.gov 40 11th St W Ste. 220 Kalispell.

Erik Mack
Director
Flathead County Planning and Zoning
Phone 406-751-8206
Email emack@flathead.mt.gov.
40 11th street W Ste. 220. Kalispell

Jared Schroeder and Cody Gove can testify to observations made regarding the property as well as the attempts made to contact the property owner. Erik Mack can testify on the legal description of the property.

Sincerely,

Jared Schroeder
Code Compliance Technician II

Filename: 2025_03_20-CAO-Cooper Letter-To_Seaman.docx

Office of the Flathead County Attorney

TRAVIS R. AHNER, County Attorney
TARA R, FUGINA, Deputy
JOHN DONOVAN, Deputy
DAVID W. RANDALL, Deputy
ASHLEY S. FRECHETTE, Deputy
AMY L. KENISON, Deputy
KATIE MATIC HANDLEY, Deputy
LARISSA MALLOY, Deputy
JOSH LAMSON, Deputy
ELSPETH COOPER, Deputy

820 South Main Street
Kalispell, Montana 59901
(406) 758-5630
FAX (406) 758-5642

Sheri Houser, Office Administrator

January 6, 2025

Michael Seaman
4000 Highway 2 E
Kalispell, MT 59901

RE: **Violation of Community Decay Ordinance at [redacted] Columbia Falls, MT 59912**

Dear: Mr. Seaman,

The Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office (FCPZO) has referred a violation of the Community Decay Ordinance to our office for legal action. FCPZO advised our office that there are multiple junk vehicles as well as dilapidated buildings and debris visible on your properties located at 5609 and 5611 Highway 2 W Columbia Falls, MT 59912. Flathead County Ordinance No. 6 (Control of Community Decay) prohibits the accumulation of rubble, debris, junk or refuse on property when visible from a public roadway.

You have previously been notified by FCPZO of this violation in letters dated March 21, 2024, and May 7, 2024, detailing the nature of the violation and the actions you need to take to comply with the Ordinance. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with an additional ten (10) business days from the date of this letter to contact FCPZO and comply or take appropriate actions to comply with the applicable ordinance. If FCPZO has not advised me by January 21, 2025, that you have brought, or made satisfactory arrangements to bring, your property into compliance, our office will commence formal legal proceedings without further notice to you which may include civil or criminal penalties in addition to relief by injunction.

The FCPZO can be reached at (406)751-8200 regarding the violation. I hope this matter can be resolved between you and FCPZO without additional action by my office.

Sincerely,

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ATTORNEY
Flathead County, Montana

By: _____
Elspeth Cooper, Deputy

CC: Erik Mack, Planning Director, Flathead County Planning & Zoning
Jared Schroeder, Code Compliance Technician, Flathead County Planning & Zoning

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Travis Ahner - 11th Judicial District Application

From Ben Alke <balke@cristlaw.com>
Date Fri 10/30/2026 5:36 PM
To NominateJudges <NominateJudges@mt.gov>

It is my privilege to write in support of Travis Ahner's application for appointment to the Eleventh Judicial District Court, Flathead County.

I am an attorney and have known Trapper (as he is known by friends) on a personal level for almost four decades. We met as kids in Helena and attended Capital High School together, where Trapper was a valedictorian of our high school class and a standout athlete. Since then, I had the opportunity to watch him develop and grow through college and law school and into a seasoned prosecutor and the leader of the Flathead County Attorney's Office.

There are a few points I would like to share here about Trapper. He is hard-working and leads by example. As the Flathead County Attorney, he has prosecuted numerous, complex felony cases while balancing a heavy case load with his administrative responsibilities. Not every county attorney can say the same. Trapper is also extremely intelligent and thoughtful. His intellect will be an asset to the bench and I am confident that civil litigators will want him to preside over complex civil matters, even though his practice has been focused primarily on criminal law up to this point.

Most importantly, Trapper has as much integrity and character as any person I have ever met. He is honest and fair and ethical. I have no doubt that he would interpret the law impartially, ensuring that every litigant receives equal and unbiased treatment under the law.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ben Alke