

Samantha Merideth's Statement

My name is Samantha Merideth. I worked as an employee of the Vanderburgh County Prosecutor's Office from February of 2011 to January 2, 2019. I was a secretary, criminal investigator, and adult protective services investigator. During my employment, I was subjected to sexual harassment and retaliation by the Prosecutor, Nicholas Hermann. In August of 2013, while in Chicago, IL at a business conference, Nick Hermann sexually harassed and assaulted me. That incident has haunted me and profoundly affected my life on a daily basis causing emotional distress and humiliation.

The day we got to Chicago, Hermann, myself, and two Evansville police officers went to Gibson's for dinner. While there, Hermann made inappropriate comments. For example, Hermann said something like "That girl over there in the in the black dress . . . Watch. When she bends over, I bet she's not wearing any underwear." The police officers and I discussed the inappropriate comments. At one point, one officer stated that this made him sick to his stomach and couldn't believe Hermann was acting this way.

After dinner, we all walked back to the hotel and went to our separate hotel rooms. Then around 10:30 p.m., Hermann asked me to meet him for a drink. I told him I was already in bed and I was tired. He stated he wouldn't take no for an answer, and he would come to my room if he had to. I did not want to disappoint my boss, so I planned to have just a drink. At the bar, Hermann started to ask about my personal life including my divorce. We talked about work too. He told me I could pretty much do whatever I wanted in the Prosecutor's office. He commented on my appearance numerous times and asked how much weight I had lost. At the end, Hermann paid for the drinks after I offered to pay for my own. We left the Tower and walked back to the hotel.

When we got to the elevator in the hotel, I pressed my floor number. Hermann said something like "So you're not coming back to my room?" I told him no and that I was tired. He told me "no" and insisted that I come to his room for one more drink. I agreed only because I did not want to disappoint my boss, and because I trusted him. In his room, things really escalated.

Hermann put his arm on my shoulder and walked me to his room. Inside, I walked to the furthest side of the room, sat on the window ledge, and admired the downtown Chicago view. He pulled up a chair and wanted me to sit. He sat on a bed within a few feet of me. Hermann again wanted to talk about my ex-husband and the divorce. Hermann told me I was "hot" and said that if he "had a shot", he would "take it." Then, Hermann pulled out his handcuffs, stood up, and walked up to me and said to hold out my hands. I thought he was joking around, so I did and he handcuffed me. Then he unlocked the handcuffs and suddenly wrapped my arms around my back, and he cuffed me again. It hurt, and I asked him to please remove the handcuffs. He did with a laugh. Then he pulled out a gun and sat it on the desk. At that point, I got up, said I am leaving. He put his leg up, blocking my way out. I stepped over his leg and walked to the door. He came after me, picked me up, threw me over his shoulder, and carried me back to the chair. Hermann said "No! You're not going anywhere! We're not done yet!". I was terrified. After a few minutes, I stood up and walked towards the door again. For a second time, he put his leg up to block my way, and I walked over it. I went to my room for the night.

The next day, I wanted to leave Chicago and go home, but I decided to stay for work. I confronted Hermann about the previous night. I told him that what he did was uncalled for, inappropriate, and made me very uncomfortable. He responded dismissively by saying "I'm sorry you took it that way." The whole experience in Chicago with Hermann was terrifying and humiliating, and I was shocked that my boss behaved so inappropriately.

Back in Evansville, there were false rumors spread in the Prosecutor's office that I was sleeping with Nick Hermann. He never took responsibility for his actions and the rumors persisted. My character was defamed, and I was subjected to a hostile work environment, harassment, and bullying by Nick Hermann and others in the Prosecutor's office. For example, rumors and gossip about sexual relations and unwelcomed sexual advances were discussed out in the open even by supervisors and Nick Hermann, but no one policed the office. I was fearful that if I reported this crime, I would lose my job. I liked my job at the Prosecutor's office. I was able to work with the prosecutors as well as the public. I felt that my work was important and that it mattered. I was proud to be an investigator. I considered going to school to get a degree so that I could advance within the office to a director position. The benefits and opportunities of working at the Prosecutor's office are not available in the private sector. I felt trapped, but I was willing to live with the emotional distress and humiliation in order to keep my job and continue to serve the public.

Last year, my worst fears came to pass. I believe that Nick Hermann was so afraid that I would come forward with my story and allegations during his 2018 election campaign that he allowed his staff to defame my character and job performance. After keeping his secret and my head down for over 5 years, after his election and on the first day of his new term, Nick Hermann wrongfully terminated my employment without notice on the morning of January 2, 2019, the first day of his new term in office. My supervisor and the finance director confined me in an office, refused to allow me to use the restroom facility, and made me sign resignation paperwork, and a letter of resignation that was already drafted when presented to me. I was not told what I had done wrong and I was declined even a moment to think or to make a phone call. I was treated like a criminal, and escorted out of the building, forced to leave my personal belongings behind.

For over 13 years, I worked diligently with the public and local law enforcement agencies. I assisted in filing more criminal charges and got more convictions than any other employee in my position in Vanderburgh County. The job gave me confidence and allowed me to work directly with prosecutors and victims. When I was terminated without any cause or explanation, I knew it was retaliation by Mr. Hermann for my refusal to submit to his sexual advances in 2013. Although, I have been able to obtain full-time employment, I am paid less, there are no benefits, and there is no opportunity for advancement.

I am now coming forward after having filed formal charges, because I know I am not the only victim. I believe there are at least five victims of similar experience. I want them all to know that they are not alone, and we can stand together to seek justice. I will not disclose the others' names as it is not my story to tell. Holding something so vulnerable and private can eat you alive and I ask the others to come forward and tell your story. If you remain silent, I understand.

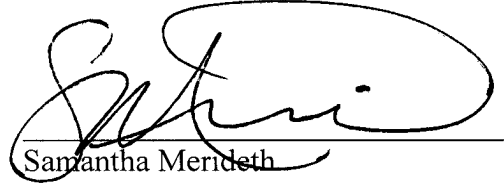
The position of an elected prosecutor is a very powerful one. Nick Hermann has taken advantage of his power by being inappropriate with female staff and intimidating them into silence. The Prosecutor took an oath to ensure a safer community, to uphold the integrity of his staff, and to improve the criminal justice system, all the while, the predator is walking the community with his own secrets and lies. This is criminal.

I demand the resignation of Nick Hermann, Vanderburgh County Prosecutor, and I ask for other victims to come forward and share their experiences.

I ask for privacy and respect during this time.

05-29-19

Date


Samantha Merideth