



June 17, 2025

The Honorable Mounir Bouyounes  
County Administrator  
Marion County Administration  
601 SE 25<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Ocala, FL 34471

Dear Mr. Bouyounes,

Thank you for your letter dated June 9, 2025, regarding the proposed reassignment of Lake County from District 5 to District 24 for medical examiner services. I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on a matter that will directly affect public safety and the criminal justice system within our region.

As the Sheriff of Marion County, my responsibilities are deeply intertwined with the operations of the Medical Examiner's Office. A timely, professional, and consistent forensic response is critical to the integrity of death investigations, criminal prosecutions, and, ultimately, justice for victims and their families. Under the leadership of Dr. Wolf, the District 5 Medical Examiner's Office has proven to be reliable, efficient, and of the highest professional standard. Any action that could potentially compromise that level of service must be approached with caution.

While I understand from Dr. Wolf that her office would be capable of serving both districts, I have not received sufficient detail about the proposed transition or its operational implications. From what I do understand, cost concerns related to the construction of the new facility are a primary motivator behind the proposal. While I fully support fiscal responsibility, decisions that appear financially sound in the short term can often result in higher long-term costs, especially when critical infrastructure and service continuity are at stake.

Moreover, the ability to attract and retain top-tier forensic professionals is vital to maintaining the quality of service my citizens expect. A state-of-the-art, purpose-built facility is not just a symbol of commitment to public service, it is a necessity for competing nationally for qualified personnel.

**Billy Woods, Sheriff**



I also share the State Attorney's concern regarding the process. To my knowledge, every county in the district, with the exception of Seminole at one point, supported the original plan to move forward. I was briefed on this project and was under the impression there was broad consensus. The selected site is strategically located and highly accessible, and in my opinion, represents the best possible choice for serving the needs of all counties within the Fifth Circuit.

I wish to make something abundantly clear, all of this was brought to my attention only within the last few months and what appears to be the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. This alone brings enormous "Red Flags" to my attention considering alongside with Dr. Wolf, the MAJOR stakeholders within the Fifth Judicial Circuit to include all of the Law Enforcement CEO's (Sheriffs and Chiefs), the State Attorney's Office, and the Public Defender's Office should have been brought together before this point to have a discussion and to look into whether or not this would be a good move and not just any one county official or any single county major stakeholder. Such a move does and will have a direct impact upon us.

In closing, I respect Lake County's right to determine how to best manage its resources. However, based on the information available to me at this time, I am not in support of the proposal to separate Lake County from District 5. I believe such a move risks undermining the strength and continuity of a system that has served us well.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Sheriff Billy Woods

**Billy Woods, Sheriff**