

Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy | Chief Deputy District Attorney Jonathan H. Kurland is leaving the Berks DA's office to work as an advocate for victims of sexual and domestic assault, in Washington DC. 7/28/17 photo by Tim Leedy

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 4, 2017 07:51 PM

Berks loses assistant DA to help prosecutors nationwide

Jonathan H. Kurland came here 16 years ago, says this is where "I grew up as a lawyer."

WRITTEN BY [STEPHANIE WEAVER \(/WEB/20191004112439/HTTP://WWW.READINGEAGLE.COM/APPS/PBCS.DLL/PERSONALIA?ID=62\)](https://www.readingeagle.com/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?id=62)

READING, PA —

Jonathan H. Kurland didn't have any connection to Berks when he picked up a legal circular in 2001 and saw the county was looking for an assistant district attorney.

He knew the area had a high crime rate and, as a young attorney only four years out of law school, he was interested in challenging cases.

In the past 16 years, Kurland has built his career as a prosecutor here in Berks, trying some of the most high-profile murder cases and heading up the office's domestic violence and child abuse units.

"I came for the crime, but I stayed for the people," he said jokingly before later adding, "This is where I grew up as a lawyer."

Kurland left his position as chief deputy district attorney in August to start work as an attorney adviser with the Washington-based advocacy group AEquitas.

The nonprofit serves as a resource for prosecutors nationwide, providing technical assistance, training and research on best practices for cases involving intimate partner violence, sexual assault and human trafficking.

Kurland, 45, is joining a team of six attorneys who travel the world to conduct trainings. And when he's not traveling, Kurland said he'll be busy researching issues and designing courses from home.

The organization is proactive when it comes to technology, so Kurland said he and his family will be able to stay in Berks, where they've built their home and life.

Kurland made strong connections with AEquitas while working on the case against Jose Olivo, who was convicted of sexually assaulting a young girl.

The case was stalled for several years over appeals regarding the use of expert testimony about the ways victims respond to sexual abuse. It was one of the first cases in the state to make that request and Kurland said was ultimately the one that helped get the statute blessed by the Superior Court.

He's now looking forward to helping other prosecutors in similar circumstances.

"What I always liked from AEquitas is that it sort of kept me going," he said. "It can be a tough job and burnout can be high, but when I would go to trainings conducted by AEquitas, it would inspire me to look for better practices here in Berks County.

"And if I can help do that for people in prosecutors' offices across the nation, then that's pretty rewarding."

Working his way up

Kurland graduated from Duquesne University School of Law in 1997 and began his career as a law clerk for a Bradford County judge. He spent a few years working in the Monroe County DA's office before coming to Berks in August 2001.

He was part of a general trial team until 2006, but said he tried to specialize in cases involving domestic violence and child abuse.

He joined the appeals team for a few years before focusing on domestic and sexual violence full time in 2011, shortly after being promoted to a supervisory role. He was named chief deputy, a position created by District Attorney John T. Adams, in January 2014. Kurland also ran for county judge in 2015.

"It's such a great office and the people of Berks County are so lucky to have so many people - attorneys, support staff and detectives - who are dedicated to serving their community," Kurland said. "It's an honor to work with this dedicated staff and something I'm really going to miss."

Adams said they're certainly going to miss Kurland, a talented trial attorney who was the intellectual of the office. Adams said he's submitted a proposal regarding a replacement plan, but it has yet to be approved by county officials.

"It's a very big loss to our office and frankly, a big loss to victims of crimes in our county," Adams said. "He was a dedicated assistant district attorney and a real leader in the prosecution of cases in our office."

'A wonderful, wonderful trip'

Kurland was the lead prosecutor in many of the county's most infamous cases, perhaps most notably the long-awaited murder trial for Miguel A. Torres in January 2016.

Torres had been on the run for almost seven years after fatally shooting his estranged wife, Barbara J. West-Torres in a center city parking lot in September 2005. He was featured twice on "America's Most Wanted" and the subject of an international manhunt that ended in March 2013 when he was captured in Italy.

Kurland successfully prosecuted the emotional case before a jury of York County residents, convicting Torres on all charges.

Kurland said the Torres trial was definitely a highlight, along with the murder trials of Glenn Lyons, Michael P. Marrone, William R. Landis and, his first major case, Allentown brothers Terry and Kenneth Kline.

While those cases all ended in convictions, Kurland said he's also grateful for the cases he's lost because each one taught him something that made him a better attorney.

He said the cases that stick out to him usually consist of two things: The connections he made with the victim or victim's family and an interesting or challenging dynamic that arose at trial.

"Working on cases like that and to be given that kind of trust to try and get justice for someone is humbling," he said.

He said helping victims of domestic and sexual abuse, who often are some of the most vulnerable, is one of the most rewarding parts of the job. However, he said those cases can also be the most challenging because of the various stigmas and the public's misunderstandings about them.

"While I'm going to miss working with victims on an individual level, the idea that I might be able to help victims in a more broad-based way is pretty exciting and inspiring," he said.

Kurland said his years as a prosecutor helped him realize there's a lot more to life than his dreams of fortune and fame as a young man. While it may sound corny, he said the job taught him that helping others who are in need is its own best reward.

"There have been ups, downs and challenges," he said, "but at the end, it's been such a wonderful, wonderful trip."

Contact Stephanie Weaver: 610-371-5042 or sweaver@readingeagle.com.

Share this article

Trending Stories

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/wilson-high-school-11th-grader-has-had-several-prestigious-runway-gigs-in-her-career\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/wilson-high-school-11th-grader-has-had-several-prestigious-runway-gigs-in-her-career)

[Wilson High School 11th-grader has had several prestigious runway gigs in her career](http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/wilson-high-school-11th-grader-has-had-several-prestigious-runway-gigs-in-her-career)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/wilson-high-school-11th-grader-has-had-several-prestigious-runway-gigs-in-her-career\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/wilson-high-school-11th-grader-has-had-several-prestigious-runway-gigs-in-her-career)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/sports/article/berks-high-school-football-capsules-for-october-4-2019\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/sports/article/berks-high-school-football-capsules-for-october-4-2019)

[Berks high school football capsules for October 4, 2019](http://www.readingeagle.com/sports/article/berks-high-school-football-capsules-for-october-4-2019)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/sports/article/berks-high-school-football-capsules-for-october-4-2019\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/sports/article/berks-high-school-football-capsules-for-october-4-2019)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/ruscombmanor-cites-horse-owner-for-zoning-violations\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/ruscombmanor-cites-horse-owner-for-zoning-violations)

[Ruscombmanor cites horse owner for zoning violations](http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/ruscombmanor-cites-horse-owner-for-zoning-violations)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/ruscombmanor-cites-horse-owner-for-zoning-violations\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/ruscombmanor-cites-horse-owner-for-zoning-violations)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/exeter-wastewater-plants-935-million-sale-approved\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/exeter-wastewater-plants-935-million-sale-approved)

[Exeter wastewater plant's \\$93.5 million sale approved](http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/exeter-wastewater-plants-935-million-sale-approved)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/exeter-wastewater-plants-935-million-sale-approved\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/exeter-wastewater-plants-935-million-sale-approved)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/get-out-earl-poole-sanctuary-in--alsace-township\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/get-out-earl-poole-sanctuary-in--alsace-township)

[Get Out: Earl Poole Sanctuary in Alsace Township](http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/get-out-earl-poole-sanctuary-in--alsace-township)

[\(/web/20191004112439/http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/get-out-earl-poole-sanctuary-in--alsace-township\)](http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/get-out-earl-poole-sanctuary-in--alsace-township)