

Office of the State Attorney
Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida
www.sao4th.com



MELISSA W. NELSON
STATE ATTORNEY

311 West Monroe Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202-4242
TEL: (904) 255-2500

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: David Chapman

Phone: (904) 255-3004

Cell: (904) 524-6626

ChapmanD@coj.net

April 24, 2026

SAO4 PROSECUTOR, CRIME VICTIM AWARDED FOR THEIR IMPACT

The City of Jacksonville's Victim Assistance Advisory Council honored Assistant State Attorney Caitlin Messinger and Pearline Watkins, the surviving victim in a murder case prosecuted by the office in 2025, during annual Crime Victims' Rights Week awards. During the week, the Council hosts events in Jacksonville to highlight resources for victims and positive work in the community to support victims. The awards ceremony is the culmination of the week of events.

The Council awarded Messinger with the Criminal Justice Advocate award for her excellence in fighting for justice on behalf of victims of sexual battery, domestic violence, and crimes against children. Messinger joined the State Attorney's Office in 2018 and was promoted to the Special Victims Unit in 2022 where she continues to serve today. She diligently and persistently advocates for the victims in her cases and is passionate about keeping them informed and heard throughout the process.

Watkins was honored with the Courageous Victim award for her bravery in her pursuit of justice for her sons. On October 17, 2023, Iris Williams shot and killed Watkins' two adult sons and then took Watkins (then 78 years old) hostage overnight. Williams forced Watkins at gunpoint to drive to a hotel where she was held there for hours without her phone before she could return home to call 911. Watkins appeared at every single court date and ultimately took the stand to face Williams in the 2025 trial; Watkins reiterated every detail of the night into morning before Williams was arrested. The case was prosecuted by First Assistant Jay Plotkin and Assistant State Attorney Crystal Ganpath-Freed.