

Battling Brad's ban: Local veterans rally for Lavite

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EDWARDSVILLE - The steps of the **Madison County Courthouse** were lined with sign-carrying veterans showing support for **Madison County Veterans' Affairs Commission Superintendent Brad Lavite** Friday morning.

Lavite has been barred from the **Madison County Administrative Building** following a Spring 2015 incident in which Lavite had an episode related to post-traumatic stress disorder (**PTSD**). During that incident, Lavite kicked the back window from a **Wood River Police** cruiser and acted threateningly toward officers. Lavite was in police

custody after a call for a domestic dispute was placed to police by Lavite's girlfriend. Following that incident, Lavite was charged with disorderly conduct and ordered to serve 90 days supervision. He was also banned from the premises of the administration building where he worked.

A rally was held at the Madison County Courthouse demanding Lavite's return to the office. Lavite currently still fills the role of the **Madison County Veterans' Affairs Commission** (VAC) superintendent, but he works from his home. Lavite's mother, **Sandy Doerr**, was at the rally to speak for her son's character.

"He's one of those people who actually goes out and walks the walk," she said. "What people posting about this and saying things about it don't know is who he actually is."

Doerr described her son as incredibly active in his community of veterans. She said the entire incident has not phased him, nor has it stopped his work with veterans. Doerr said Lavite is out at local **V.F.W.s** and **American Legions** across the county working with veterans. She said he even allows some veterans to stay in apartments he manages.

"People will see veterans using hoses for showers and eating out of the trash, and they call Brad ," she said. "He goes, helps them fill out their paperwork and even does some of their paperwork for them. Some of it takes a few months, and during that time, he lets them stay in his places for free. How many people would let that happen? He really gets out there. He really walks the walk."

In a release from "**Madison County Veterans**," **Madison County Board Chairman Alan Dunstan**, **County Administrator Joseph Parente** and **Madison County State's Attorney Tom Gibbons** were accused of "violating" Lavite's "civil rights" with the ban, which they said "sends the wrong message to veterans throughout the Metro-East." They also said "discrimination of a decorated combat veteran should not be tolerated.

During two tours of duty, one in **Iraq**, and another in **Afghanistan**, Lavite was awarded a **Purple Heart** and a **Bronze Star**. He has also been cleared to return to work through a VA psychiatrist who specializes in PTSD, according to the release from Madison County Veterans.

Lawsuits have also been filed in state and federal courts to lift the ban on Lavite. According to the release, those lawsuits present a "potential financial liability for **Madison County** taxpayers." The group says the action is clear evidence of Madison County discriminating against a disabled person.

Army veteran **Ron Williams**, who is running against Gibbons in this year's election, said the incident is a "civil rights issue."

"It's an aggressive civil rights issue," Williams said. "There is a huge stigma with PTSD."

Williams also countered the action taken against Lavite by Madison County was not due to the violent nature of Lavite's charges. He said the action was taken for political gain.

"It's not about public safety," Williams said. "It's about politics. People want control and money."

To illustrate his stance on the matter, Williams said Lavite's charge would not have been dropped to disorderly conduct from assault if Gibbons was truly concerned about violence.

"Disorderly conduct is the lowest charge you can have in the State of Illinois," Williams said. "If this was really about being worried about public safety, his charges would not have been dropped to that."

Last Friday, Gibbons released a statement on the matter, which accused Williams of trying to capitalize on the matter for political purposes.

"It is truly unfortunate that a political candidate would try to use this case to gain notoriety and further his campaign for office," Gibbons said. "The only person whose interests will be served by trying this case in the media is Mr. Williams."

Gibbons also commented on the incident involving Lavite in that statement, saying:

"We all respect Brad Lavite for his service to our country and his commitment to local veterans. From the very beginning, everyone has been focused on working with Brad to create a restorative path. Throughout the process, Brad has continued to run the VAC and be paid for his work. What is being asked of him now is not significantly different from the process that worked successfully on a prior serious incident that occurred with him less than a year before this one. Brad has been asked to provide a letter from a doctor that has examined him and the video of the incident, and certifies that he is not a safety risk and is fit to return to duty in the county building."

"Madison County has been a national leader in providing support and restorative justice measures for veterans through our **Veterans Court**, and we are committed to working with veterans through challenges that bring them in contact with the justice system. However, that does not justify abdicating our duty and responsibility to protect the public and individuals working in the Administration Building, including Brad Lavite."

"In my judgment, no responsible State's Attorney would suggest that the county should

ignore direct knowledge – in this case a police car video showing a threat to murder a police officer - of a very serious and violent incident involving an individual that works in the county building."



Madison County Treasurer Kurt Prenzler introduced speakers at the rally. Prenzler is also running against Dunstan in upcoming elections. Neither Prenzler nor Williams spoke about the upcoming elections during the rally. Each spoke on behalf of veterans and Lavite's cause.

After the rally, Williams said if he were to be elected Madison County State's Attorney, he would try to make this matter get resolved. He said he would work closely with Prenzler, who he said would be the next Madison County Board chairperson, to allow Lavite back into the office.

Other speakers at the rally said banning Lavite from entering the administration building due to either violence or mental illness was hypocritical, citing one in five Americans suffer from some mental illness. Speakers, including Williams, openly questioned how a building which allows violent criminals to enter it for probation and other purposes on a daily basis would ban Lavite, who was not charged with directly harming another person during the entire ordeal.

"As State's Attorney I will work closely with the Veterans groups to make sure we have the best interest of veterans who enter the Madison County legal system," Williams said in a statement. "I believe the way the county is handling Lavite's PTSD episode is

sending the wrong message to all military personnel and veterans. Given the county's proximity to Scott Air Force Base and its the positive impact on our economy, we have duty to treat veterans in a respectful manner."