



# BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



**MICHAEL L. RAMSEY**  
District Attorney

**MARK MURPHY**  
Chief Deputy District Attorney

**JASON WINES**  
Chief Investigator

## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
September 6, 2023

### **Butte County Foster Mother Sentenced on Child Abuse**

A 51-year-old former foster mother was recently sentenced in Butte County Superior Court on multiple convictions of physical and emotional abuse of six children she had fostered since infancy and adopted.

**Candace Lee Johnson**, 51, previously of Oroville, was sentenced to a four-year term of probation with a six-month jail term as a condition on August 16, 2023.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said his office objected to the probation sentence and instead had asked the judge to sentence Johnson to the maximum sentence of seven years in state prison for the abuse she committed against the six children in her custody ranging in ages from four to fifteen years old.

Investigation into the abuse began in August 2021 when a video secretly taken by one of the children surfaced showing Johnson physically abusing one of the children in her home.

Further investigation by the Butte County Sheriff's Office included interviews with the children then in Johnson's house plus thirteen previously fostered children who were now adults. All reported being victims or witnesses of serious physical and emotional abuse committed by Johnson.

Numerous witnesses, including Johnson's biological adult children, various family members, and school staff all reported incidents of Johnson's volatile and sometimes abusive nature. Several of the children's statements suggested that Johnson was most violent and demeaning toward her adopted children of color and her children with disabilities in her home, using derogatory and racist slurs while abusing them.

Based on the above investigation, Johnson was arrested and the district attorney filed a criminal complaint against Johnson in September 2021, alleging counts of child abuse, criminal threats, and assault.

After several delays in the case, due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, Johnson finally pleaded guilty to the six child abuse charges on March 8, 2023.

After more delays due to Johnson obtaining a new attorney, Johnson was finally

sentenced with the judge granting her “one shot” at probation. The judge stated he was giving Johnson an opportunity on probation because she had no prior criminal history; she had begun taking in children decades ago with good intentions to try and care for children who needed homes; and it appeared that after Johnson had gone through multiple battles with cancer, she no longer had the ability or temperament to care for the children in her home. The judge said he also considered nearly 30 letters in support of Johnson from various people in the community who described Johnson as “loving and giving; a person who volunteers tirelessly to fight homelessness; supporting Veteran’s affairs; and helping children and mothers who are in need.” The Butte County Probation Department also recommended that Johnson be given a chance at probation based on all of these factors.

Ramsey said his office however urged for Johnson to be sent to prison, arguing that the abuse was not isolated; she took virtually no accountability for the crimes she committed; she denied nearly every act she was accused of doing, even those captured on video; and instead tried to place blame on the children themselves. Prosecutors also argued the children in Johnson’s home were especially vulnerable children and in need of a loving parent, but instead were inflicted with mental, emotional, and physical injuries.

Despite the prosecutor’s objections, the judge granted Johnson four years of formal child abuse probation, stating he was also imposing the upper term of seven years in state prison, which would be immediately imposed should Johnson violate her probation. The judge then immediately remanded Johnson into custody to serve 180 days in Butte County Jail. However, she was granted credit for the time she spent in jail in 2021 before she bailed out. She is scheduled to be released from the jail on September 14, 2023.

Ramsey said Johnson’s probation terms prohibit her from being around any person under the age of 18 unless she is in the immediate presence of a responsible adult, approved in advance by the probation department. She is to have no contact whatsoever with any of the children she abused, and she will not be able to foster or adopt children in the future because of the convictions in this case.



**Candace Lee Johnson**