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In August of 2024, a 12-year-old told her parents that a friend of hers was getting inappropriate text messages from her stepdad, including a request for nude photos. Those parents contacted the police and an investigation was initiated. The 12-year-old victim was interviewed at the Bridge Children's Advocacy Center and disclosed that her stepdad had been sexually abusing her for the past four years. The victim also had a sexual assault examination, and there was physical evidence of sexual abuse. Swabs from the exam were sent to the DPS laboratory, and male DNA was found in the sexual assault exam. The defendant was arrested and charged with Continuous Sexual Abuse of a Child, a charge that recognizes that many sexual abuse cases take place over long periods of time.

The State of Texas vs. Thomas Gwynn went to trial in July of 2026 in the 108th District Court of Potter County, Texas. At trial, the victim took the stand and bravely testified about what the defendant had done to her over the years. The jury heard from the Bridge interviewer, the sexual assault nurse, members of the Amarillo Police Department, and the family who had helped the victim report the case originally. The jury found him guilty and then proceeded to the issue of punishment. The range of punishment for Continuous Sexual Abuse of a Child is 25 years to life in prison. In recognition of how serious this charge is, the legislature has also mandated that there is no parole. The jury swiftly returned a verdict of life in prison, which he will have to serve day-for-day. District Attorney Jason Herring said, "We are grateful to the victim in this case for being willing to speak out about what happened to her, not only stopping the abuse that she endured, but protecting every other child the defendant might have come into contact with in the future." The 47th District Attorney's Office wants to also thank the jury for sending the message that people who sexually abuse children have no place in our community.

Jason Herring
47th District Attorney