



ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

2024 Annual Report

Theodore N. Stephens II
Essex County Prosecutor



Essex County Prosecutor's Office

**Veterans Courthouse
50 West Market Street
Newark, NJ 07102**

www.njecpo.org

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Chief Executives



From Left to Right: First Assistant Prosecutor Romesh C. Sukhdeo, Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II, Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams, and Chief of County Detectives Mitchell G. McGuire III.



Theodore N. Stephens II was sworn in by Judge Mark Ali on February 16, 2024, to serve a five-year term as Essex County Prosecutor. Stephens had previously served as Acting Prosecutor following his appointment by Governor Murphy on September 4, 2018.



2024 was a significant year for ECPO's investigative unit. Six investigators were hired and ten were promoted, including Deputy Chief Paulo DeSousa.



Five members of the ECPO investigative staff were promoted to higher ranking positions and assigned managerial responsibilities in 2024. ECPO Chief of Investigators Mitchell G. McGuire III (far right) joins his staff as they are sworn in to their new positions.



ECPO held its 13th Annual Black History Month Celebration in 2024. Extraordinary individuals from our office were recognized for their commitment to community service. ECPO Supervising Assistant Prosecutor Donna Cameron was among those honored. She is pictured here with Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II, Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor Anthony Higgins, First Assistant Prosecutor Romesh C. Sukhdeo, and Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams.



Morgan Williams was one of eleven assistant prosecutors sworn in during a courtroom ceremony presided over by Judge Mark Ali and Prosecutor Stephens.

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During 2024, the total number of new adult defendant cases received and filed with the Essex County Prosecutor's Office (ECPO) increased from 12,204 in 2023 to 13,606 in 2024. This partly reflects a rebound from the slowdown in charge filings caused by the COVID pandemic in 2020-21 but is largely driven by a long-term trend of increasing annual case loads. Total ECPO adult case dispositions also increased from 12,398 in 2023 to 14,531 for 2024. In addition, the total defendants indicted increased from 3,025 in 2023 to 3,216 in 2024. In 2023, 61.9 percent of the ECPO's adult defendant resolutions following an indictment or accusation involved first or second-degree criminal charges. Finally, the total number of juveniles involved in new delinquency case filings in Essex County decreased from 861 juveniles from 1,646 cases in 2023 to 754 juveniles in 1,457 cases in 2024.

(Statistics from the Promis Gavel Database of the Administrative Office of the Courts, N.J. Superior Court).

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Message from Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office is the largest and busiest prosecutor's office in New Jersey. We handle more than one-third of the state's homicide cases and more than one-quarter of the other in-state felonies. Every unit manages demanding and challenging caseloads. Nonetheless our units met those challenges in 2024 with unwavering dedication to our mission: "To seek justice, serve justice and to do justice."

Every year removed from the aberrant circumstances that accompanied the COVID pandemic, we take a significant step closer to normality of life; this includes the activities associated with the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

ECPO is structured to provide services to the community through several traditional prosecution units:

- **Adult Trial Section**
- **Appellate**
- **Central Judicial Processing | Grand Jury**
- **Domestic Violence**
- **Financial Crimes | Corruption**
- **Homicide | Crash & Arson**
- **Special Prosecutions**
- **Juvenile**

We also commit significant resources to numerous non-traditional units which are increasingly important to our community. Most notably, these are:

- **Community Justice**
- **Mental Health**
- **Pre-Trial Intervention | Expungements**
- **Recovery and Veterans Courts**

The success of these units may offer the strongest opportunity to demonstrate the Essex County Prosecutor's Office's commitment to becoming a trusted and integral part of the community.

Similarly, we also continue **Operation Help Hand (OHH)**, a diversion program in which ECPO staff connects individuals suffering from opioid addiction with substance abuse services. The goal of the program, sponsored by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, is to interrupt the cycle of addiction that often leads addicts to spiral down the path of incarceration. Throughout 2024, OHH sponsored many outreach

events throughout the county, partnering with social service agencies, and community groups to offer addicts information on recovery services. This “non-arrest” model of helping addicts find services was expanded in 2024, which you’ll read about in this report.

ECPO investigators, support staff, and assistant prosecutors all performed in an exemplary manner during the pandemic. Some of the lessons learned and tools utilized during that time have helped bolster the professionalism and effectiveness of those groups.

Overall, the staff of ECPO has never been busier. The number of case-defendants filings increased from 12,204 in 2023 to 13,606 in 2024. The number of dispositions similarly increased from 12,398 in 2023 to 14,531 in 2024. It is significant that total defendant trial verdicts increased from 65 in 2023 to 70 trial verdicts in 2024. The number of guilty verdicts went from 67.7% in 2023 to 71.4% in 2024.

ECPO has the dubious distinction of often being judged based on our homicide statistics. While it is regrettable to have to focus on those statistics, it is gratifying to report that this office once again is effectively meeting that challenge. In 2024 the total number of homicides reported was 59, compared to 68 in 2023. ECPO investigators followed up on the excellent work from last year by posting a homicide clearance rate of 83% in 2024, which is slightly below the clearance rate of 85% in 2023.

In short, the staff of ECPO worked not only harder and smarter, but also more effectively. Also important is the collaboration we have worked diligently to maintain with our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners. Those partnerships are essential to the overall success of ECPO.

This annual report, published in conjunction with the statistical summary required by the Attorney General, cannot possibly detail the entirety of this office’s efforts in 2024. It does, however, provide an overview of the essential work done by the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office.

In the end, we thank the citizens of Essex County for their cooperation and confidence. It is a privilege to serve them.

A Brief History of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office

In 1776, the State of New Jersey ratified its first Constitution (superseded by later Constitutions in 1844 and 1947). Under this Constitution, the elected Governor appointed an Attorney General to enforce the laws of the State. The Attorney General in turn appointed deputies for the various counties, including Essex, to enforce the criminal laws on behalf of the local populace. In 1822, the New Jersey General Assembly passed an act authorizing a more independent Prosecutor of Pleas for each county, to be appointed by the Court of Quarter Session once every five years. A few years later, the Governor was given the authority to appoint each county's Prosecutor of Pleas.

On Feb. 20, 1829, Amzi Dodd became the first governor-appointed Prosecutor of Pleas for Essex County. The earliest record of a prosecution by Prosecutor Dodd involves "a nuisance in suffering the water to stagnate and become offensive in the old burying ground" in Newark. The first Prosecutor of Pleas worked alone, but by 1877 the Prosecutor required the help of a First Assistant.

As Essex County grew and matters became more complex, the Office expanded. By 1922, Prosecutor John O. Bigelow employed 28 men, including three assistant prosecutors, two detective captains, two lieutenants, and various detectives and clerks.

In the 1920s and 30s, cases involving gambling, organized crime and official corruption increased. In October of 1935, the nationally known organized crime figure Dutch Schultz was shot at the Palace Chop House in Newark. Although the prime suspect was found hanged soon after the incident, the Office continued its investigation and identified Schultz's real shooter who pled guilty to the murder in 1940.

By 1945, the Office still had only three assistant prosecutors, despite a growing number of murder and gambling cases. In 1951, Prosecutor Edward Gaulkin gained attention by successfully prosecuting four men charged with conspiracy, extortion, and bribery in the Newark milk scandal case.

In 1959, Governor Robert Meyner nominated Brendan T. Byrne of West Orange as the 25th Prosecutor of Essex County. Prosecutor (and later Governor) Byrne served in the Office until 1967. By 1962, there were 16 assistant prosecutors, most of whom were part-time employees. Shortly thereafter, the first female assistant prosecutor, June Strelecki, was appointed. Also, during Byrne's tenure, the "Charlie Squad" was formed, a name coined after members of the public were urged to report illegal gambling by calling a dedicated phone number and asking for "Charlie."

In 1967, the City of Newark experienced a week-long civil disturbance, which heralded long-term social and economic change in Essex County. These transformations

challenged future prosecutors to respond to changing patterns and volumes of crime with increased professionalism and dedication.

By 1973, the legal staff numbered 63 lawyers, all full-time. County Investigators replaced the former detectives and were increasingly selected from the ranks of experienced local police officers. Under Prosecutor George Schneider (Prosecutor from 1981 to 1986), the number of assistant prosecutors exceeded 100. Increasing resources were dedicated to special squads. The Homicide Squad was expanded and a Narcotics Section, which at first was a joint task force with the Sheriff's Office, was created. Eventually specialized units were established in Child Abuse, Sex Assault, Arson, Domestic Violence, Megan's Law, and Gangs.

In 1986, Governor Thomas Kean appointed the first African American Prosecutor in Essex County (and only the second in the State), Herbert H. Tate, Jr. The computerization of the Office started at that time and continued in stages throughout the terms of Prosecutor Tate and his successor, Prosecutor Clifford J. Minor.

In 1998, the first female prosecutor, Patricia Hurt, was appointed by Governor Christie Whitman. Prosecutor Hurt was followed by Acting Prosecutor Donald Campolo and Acting Prosecutor Paula T. Dow. In the opening years of the 21st Century, the Office responded aggressively to increased auto theft and expanded youth gang activity. By 2003, it completed a second generation of computerization complete with e-mail and internet access and increased its outreach to the public through its web site -www.njecpo.org, the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office, and the Community Justice Program.

In 2005, Governor Richard Codey appointed Acting Prosecutor Dow to the office of Essex County Prosecutor. During Prosecutor Dow's years of leadership, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office instituted vertical prosecution-- ensuring that each assistant prosecutor handles a case from inception to resolution, increased its resources and outreach to victims and witnesses, opened a state-of-the-art crime scene facility, and participated in a wide variety of cross-agency/cross-jurisdiction collaborations. These included a state-federal anti-gang and narcotics task force, gun buyback programs, and a successful fugitive safe surrender program in Newark in November 2009. Prosecutor Dow also emphasized technology development, with the Office updating its computer server infrastructure in 2009 and planning for the implementation of an office-wide, fully integrated electronic case and record management system.

In January 2010, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie appointed Prosecutor Dow as Acting Attorney General of the State of New Jersey. Chief Assistant Prosecutor Robert D. Laurino, then a 29-year ECPO veteran, who gained public recognition in the trial and conviction of the high school athletes in Glen Ridge, was appointed Acting Essex County Prosecutor.

In February 2011, Governor Christie appointed Carolyn A. Murray as Acting Essex County Prosecutor. As Acting Prosecutor, she made victims' rights a high priority. In addition, the Mental Health Unit was created during her tenure, providing new options to

prosecutors and defense attorneys when dealing with offenders who have a history of mental illness. During Acting Prosecutor Murray's term, the Office prepared for the challenge of implementing the legislative bail reform mandate which went into effect on January 1, 2017. The New Jersey Criminal Justice Reform Act effectively eliminated cash bail. In preparation, Murray oversaw the implementation of an integrated, office-wide case database system for case management and investigation management.

In July 2017, Governor Christie appointed Acting Prosecutor Murray to a judgeship on the Superior Court bench. Once again, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Robert D. Laurino stepped in as Acting Prosecutor, guiding the Office through a time of continuing transition and adaptation to changing criminal justice policies and technology.

On September 4, 2018, former Essex County Surrogate, the Honorable Theodore N. Stephens II was sworn in as the Acting Prosecutor for Essex County. In this capacity he is the highest-ranking law enforcement official for Essex County.

In 2023, Acting Prosecutor Stephens guided the office through ongoing post-COVID adjustments affecting the broader law enforcement system in both Essex County and the State of New Jersey. While the impact of COVID-19 remained a notable factor, most employees returned to in-person work as strict safety protocols gradually eased.

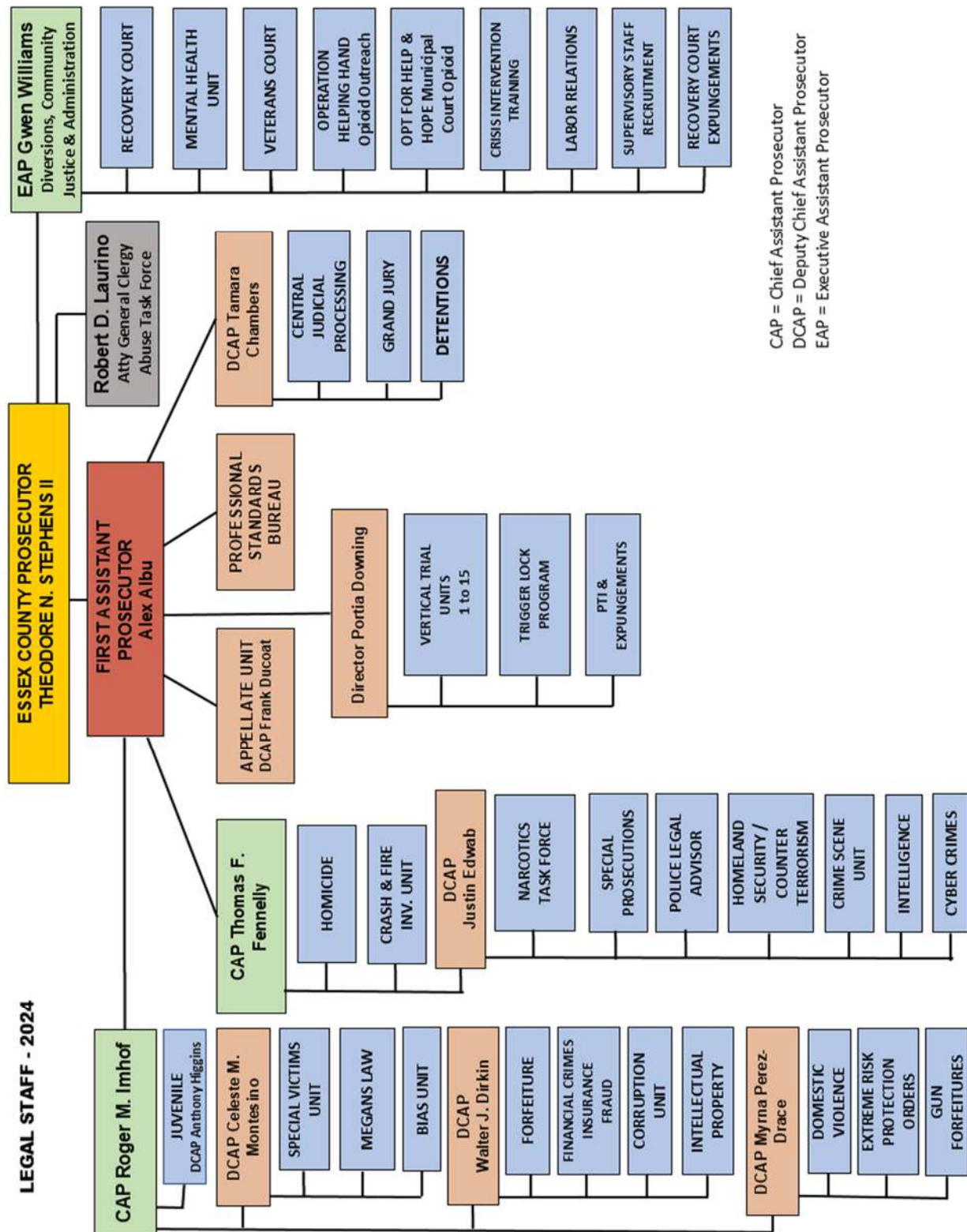
On February 16, 2024, Theodore N. Stephens II was officially sworn in as the Prosecutor of Essex County, following confirmation by the New Jersey Senate. Prosecutor Stephens remains firmly committed to securing justice for crime victims and enhancing public safety throughout the county. In addition, the Office is expanding its focus on preventative outreach and exploring alternative sentencing options for eligible defendants—particularly those who may benefit from substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and other rehabilitative interventions.

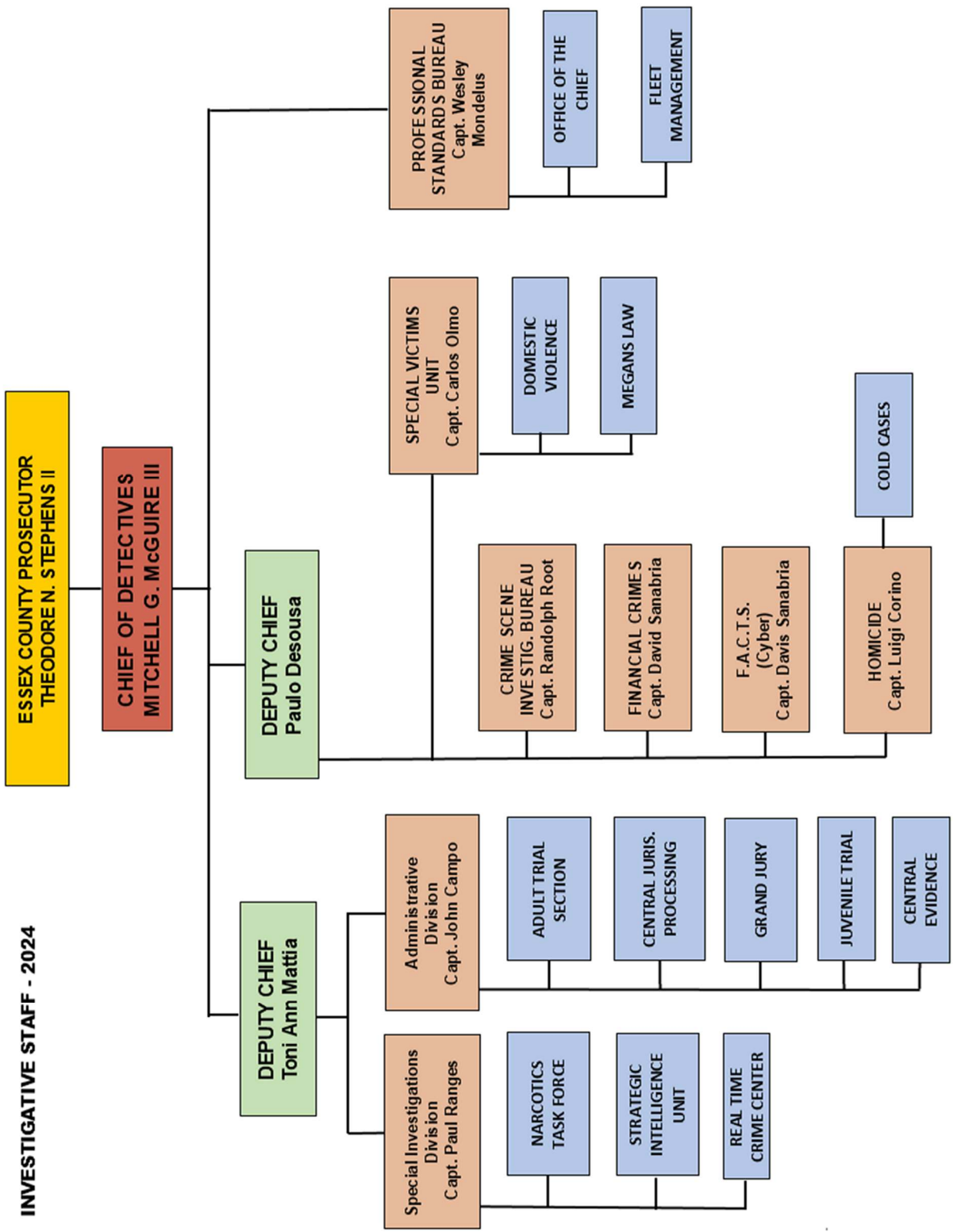
The attorneys, detectives, and support staff under Prosecutor Stephens' leadership are proud to carry forward the legacy of Amzi Dodd into the 21st century. Prosecutor Dodd laid the foundation for a justice system rooted in integrity and public service, and today's team is honored to continue that mission as part of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

With thanks to Francis D. Falivena, Jr., Assistant Prosecutor, Retired



Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II







2024

Annual Report

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

LEGAL UNITS

Adult Trial Section

The Adult Trial Section (ATS) is the largest unit in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office and thus responsible for handling the largest caseload in the office. Essex County continues to lead the state in the number of criminal filings and handles a higher-than-average proportion of first and second-degree offenses, the majority of which are prosecuted by the ATS. The ATS is comprised of 32 assistant prosecutors who represent the state in criminal proceedings upon the arrest of a defendant until final disposition of the case. The ATS is headed by a Chief Assistant Prosecutor as well as a director and five supervisors. The remaining assistant prosecutors are assigned to a Superior Court Criminal judge and are responsible for all litigation functions that are critical to the operation of an effective criminal justice system. Central to this role of the ATS assistant prosecutor is the preparation and prosecution of jury and non-jury trials. ATS assistant prosecutors also represent the state in a variety of other court proceedings including detention hearings, motions to revoke release, arraignment/status conferences, all pre-trial and post-trial motions, sentence hearings, hearings on violations of probation, appeals from the decisions of municipal courts, pleas of guilty to indictments and accusations and petitions for post-conviction relief. The assistant prosecutors are also responsible for presenting their cases to a Grand Jury. Additionally, ATS assistant prosecutors handle Krol hearings, the periodic review of the status of persons committed to state psychiatric institutions incident to criminal proceedings, as well as determining the geographic scope of extradition efforts to be undertaken in the event a defendant absconds.

With the implementation of Criminal Justice Reform in January 2017, the burden of speedy trials has made the job of an ATS assistant prosecutor even more challenging due to the high volume of cases. Since many crimes require mandatory periods of parole ineligibility, rapid, and effective disposition of these offenses has become more difficult. Hesitancy on the part of victims and witnesses to cooperate stemming from intimidation and threats of violence for testifying coupled with an increase in the distrust of law enforcement are additional hurdles that must be overcome. With the advancements in technology and social media, juries are demanding forensic evidence, video evidence, other forms of corroboration as well as eye-witness testimony to convict a defendant. The ATS continues to place a strong emphasis on mentorship and training for the ATS assistant prosecutors and to instill a sense of justice to see that fairness and equity is achieved in Essex County.

To assist ATS assistant prosecutors with their voluminous duties and responsibilities are 23 detectives who are overseen by a captain and three sergeants. Together, all parties work closely to prepare cases for final disposition. Detectives perform a wide array of investigative tasks to support and supplement the prosecution of criminal cases. ATS detectives locate and interview witnesses, prepare reports, take statements, schedule witness interviews, visit crime scenes, take photographs, locate evidence and reports from municipal police departments, serve subpoenas, and take any other additional investigative steps necessary to ensure a successful prosecution. Furthermore, the detectives also receive training and mentorship from their superiors.

In sum, the ATS assistant prosecutors and detectives work closely to ensure that all criminal matters are brought to justice, strive to serve victims, witnesses, and the community at large and include victims and witnesses in all aspects of the criminal justice process.



Trial Team Director Portia Downing

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office successfully indicted or charged by accusation 3,549 defendants and resolved 3,999 post-GJ defendant cases. The percentage of the resolved cases that involved first-or second-degree crimes was 61.9%.

The ATS assistant prosecutors obtained 40 defendant dispositions by trial (jury and bench) with an overall conviction rate of 52.5%.

The following cases highlight some of the significant cases handled by the ATS assistant prosecutors:

LEGAL UNITS

Assistant Prosecutor/Supervisor Jacqueline Bilinkas and second chair Assistant Prosecutor Jenna Ventola received a guilty conviction after trial for the defendants in **State v. Jakim Ward, Ryan Mwangi, Ibn Dortch**. Mwangi received a life sentence for first degree murder. Ward pled guilty to conspiracy to commit murder and unlawful possession of a weapon and received a sentence of 12 years New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor/Supervisor Jacqueline Bilinkas received a guilty verdict in the matter of **State v. Deautay Haines**. The jury returned a guilty verdict for first degree murder, unlawful possession of a weapon and possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose. Haines was sentenced to 50 years in New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor/Supervisor Jacqueline Bilinkas also tried **State v. Hassan Todd**. The jury returned a guilty verdict for first degree murder, unlawful possession of a weapon and possession of a weapon for unlawful purpose. Todd was sentenced to 65 years in New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor Christopher Byrnes tried the matter of **State v. John Davis**. A jury returned a verdict of third-degree aggravated assault. Davis was sentenced to three years in New Jersey State Prison.

Assistant Prosecutor John Cancellieri tried the matter of **State v. Rashaan Robinson**. Robinson was found guilty of third-degree possession of cocaine and was sentenced to probation.

Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Deller tried **State v. Khalil Howard**. A jury returned a guilty verdict for second-degree aggravated assault, unlawful possession of a weapon (knife) and possession of a weapon for unlawful purpose. Howard was sentenced to seven years in New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor Andreas Diakos tried the matter of **State v. Cedrick Hickman**. Hickman was found guilty of second-degree unlawful possession of a handgun. Defendant has not been sentenced.

Assistant Prosecutor Andreas Diakos also tried **State v. Talisha Arrington**. A jury returned a verdict of second-degree unlawful possession of a handgun and fourth-degree tampering with evidence. Arrington was sentenced to five years in New Jersey State Prison with 42 months of parole ineligibility. She also received a sentence of 18 months in New Jersey State Prison. The 18-month sentence will run concurrent to the sentence for the handgun.

Assistant Prosecutor Nidhi Goel tried **State v. Keiron Murray**. The jury returned a verdict of guilty for the following offenses: possession of a controlled dangerous substance, unlawful possession of a weapon, resisting arrest and possession of “dum-

dum” bullets (bullets that expand on impact, causing increased damage and trauma) and obstruction. Murray was sentenced to ten years in New Jersey State Prison with a five-year period of parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor Orlando Hurtado tried **State v. Adriano Palamar DaSilva and Adriel Palamar DaSilva**. The jury found both defendants guilty of third-degree conspiracy and second-degree aggravated assault. The defendants have not yet been sentenced.

Assistant Prosecutor Orlando Hurtado also second chaired Assistant Prosecutor Austin Edwards in the matter of **State v. Brel Elam, Jahzir Williams and Quazier Bishop**. Elam was found guilty of reckless manslaughter. The jury returned a verdict of aggravated manslaughter for Bishop. Both defendants have not been sentenced.

Assistant Prosecutor/Supervisor Eric Plant handled the trial of **State v. Shakeem Butler**. Butler was convicted of murder, unlawful possession of a weapon, possession of a weapon for unlawful purpose and possession of a weapon by a convicted felon. Butler was sentenced to 65 years in New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor Eliot Skolnick tried **State v. Daymon Gist**. The jury returned a guilty verdict for fourth-degree obstruction. Gist was sentenced to three years probation.

Assistant Prosecutor Mattison Stewart conducted the trial of **State v. Michael Moody**. Moody was convicted of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child and simple assault. The defendant has not yet been sentenced.

Assistant Prosecutor James Sukharev presented the case of **State v. Dandel Grimsley**. Grimsley was tried and convicted of the following charges: second-degree conspiracy to commit robbery, three counts of first-degree robbery, four counts of second-degree aggravated assault, third-degree receiving stolen property, two counts of second-degree possession of a handgun for unlawful purpose, fourth-degree possession of hollow point bullets and second-degree eluding. Grimsley was given an aggregate sentence of 20 years in New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

State v. Marquis Murray was tried by Assistant Prosecutor Matthew Funk. The Court convicted Murray of domestic violence simple assault. The defendant received a sentence of probation.

Assistant Prosecutor Jenna Ventola was assigned **State v. Antonio Ortiz**. Ortiz pleaded guilty to second-degree witness tampering and was sentenced to ten years in New Jersey State Prison.

LEGAL UNITS

Assistant Prosecutor William Chalmers was assigned to the case of **Robert O'Donnell**. O'Donnell pled guilty to second-degree aggravated assault. O'Donnell was sentenced to 10 years in New Jersey State Prison with an 85 percent parole disqualifier.

Appellate Section

The Appellate Section of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office is the largest appellate practice of any County Prosecutor's office in New Jersey. It is comprised of career appellate lawyers, all of whom enjoy considerable experience in the state and federal appellate courts. In total, the Section's attorneys have argued dozens of cases in the Supreme Court of New Jersey, hundreds more in the Appellate Division, and have extensive oral argument and briefing experience in the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, and the Supreme Court of the United States.

The Section handles all litigation on behalf of the ECPO in the Appellate Division and the Supreme Court of New Jersey, whether it be pre-trial, during trial, or post-sentencing. It also initiates its own appeals from adverse rulings, often resulting in the successful re-instatement of prosecutions that were effectively terminated. The Section also handles all habeas corpus petitions in federal court and oversees all municipal appeals, gun permit appeals, name change applications, reciprocal witness applications, appeals of orders granting or denying pretrial detention, civil discovery requests, and all requests made under the Open Public Records Act and the common law right of access.

The Section also takes great pride in being an always-ready resource for ECPO's trial and specialized-unit prosecutors. Providing legal advice, reviewing trial court briefs, drafting jury instructions, assisting with challenging pre-trial motions, providing legal updates, and teaching CLE courses are just a few of the ways the Section is integral to the ECPO's mission of seeking justice, serving justice, and doing justice, both on appeal and throughout the investigative and trial processes.

Significant 2024 Cases:

Supreme Court of New Jersey

State v. Fuquan and Shaquan Knight - 259 N.J. 407 (2024) – The Section secured the affirmance of armed robbery and other convictions for a pair of brothers who argued that it was reversible error for the jury to see, at its own request, video evidence in slow motion. The Court held that—subject to any offsetting concerns of undue prejudice—surveillance video footage may be presented to jurors in slow motion or at other varying speeds, or with intermittent pauses, if the trial court in its discretion reasonably finds those modes of presentation would assist the jurors' understanding of the pertinent events and help them resolve disputed factual issues. Additionally, it held that—again subject to any offsetting concerns of undue prejudice—trial courts in their discretion may grant a jury's requests during deliberations to replay the videos in such modes one or more times, provided that the playbacks occur in open court under the judge's supervision and in the presence of counsel. After oral argument, the Supreme Court affirmed the judgment of the Appellate Division for the reasons set forth in that court's opinion, 477 N.J. Super. 400 (App. Div. 2023).

LEGAL UNITS

State v. Isaiah Knight - 256 N.J. 404 (2024) – The Section convinced the Supreme Court to unanimously reject an argument by the defense that it could withhold physical evidence of a crime simply because it is in the possession of defense counsel. The Supreme Court held that the evidence was subject to reciprocal discovery and had to be turned over to the ECPO.

State v. Curtis Gartrell - 256 N.J. 241 (2024) – After the trial court suppressed handguns the defendant left in a bag at Penn Station in Newark after running from police, the Section secured a reversal in the Appellate Division. After granting defendant's petition for certification, the Supreme Court affirmed the Appellate Division's reversal and held that defendant abandoned his bags when he dropped them and ran from police, who were seeking to effectuate a warranted arrest. The Court held that "[d]efendant's possessory or ownership interest in the suitcase ceased when he fled police outside Penn Station and deliberately left his suitcase behind in a public place with no evidence of anyone else's interest in the bag. Because the State has demonstrated by a preponderance of the evidence that the suitcase was abandoned, defendant is without standing to challenge its seizure and search."

Appellate Division

State v. Jeremy Arrington - 480 N.J. Super. 428 (App. Div. 2024) – Following a successful jury trial in which ECPO secured convictions against this defendant for three counts of murder and other serious offenses, the Section secured an affirmance of those convictions by convincing the court to reject defendant's argument of first impression that he should have been allowed to advance an insanity defense at trial without any expert opinion on the issue. The Appellate Division rejected that argument, holding that "that such lay testimony by a defendant, untethered to admissible expert opinion substantiating the defendant's 'disease of the mind,' is inadmissible under our Rules of Evidence and insufficient to advance an insanity defense under N.J.S.A. 2C:4-1. This conclusion is supported by the history and text of the statute. It is also consistent with the case law of most of the states that have addressed the issue...." In early 2025, the Supreme Court agreed to review the case, with arguments likely set for the 2025-2026 Term.

State v. Sean Jones, et al. - 478 N.J. Super. 532 (App. Div. 2024) – The Section convinced the Appellate Division to reject the oft-made argument that the seminal Supreme Court case addressing juvenile offenders, State v. Comer, 249 N.J. 359 (2022) (also an Essex County case handled by the Section), should be applied to adult offenders. The Supreme Court later denied review, 259 N.J. 314 (2024), cementing this case as precedent on the issue.

State v. Wongyu Jang - 478 N.J. Super. 252 (App. Div. 2024) – The Section participated in this case addressing the standards for de novo appeals of municipal court convictions in the Superior Court – Law Division.

State v. Thomas Crandell - 2024 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 3108 (App. Div. 2024) – The Section secured an affirmance of the convictions and sentence of T.L.C., whom a jury, following a 22-day trial, convicted of 26 offenses related to sexual assault and endangerment of a child.

State v. Najee Green - 2024 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 2981 (App. Div. 2024) – The Section successfully defended on appeal defendant's convictions and 46-year sentence for murder, carjacking, aggravated assault, and weapons offenses. Issues included the use of a prior conviction of a witness, in- and out-of-court identifications, other trial issues, and excessive sentence.

State v. Zahir Moore - 2024 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 2960 (App. Div. 2024) – The Section successfully defended on appeal defendant's convictions and 35-year sentence for murder and weapons offenses. Issues included use of the victim's "dying declaration," identification, hearsay, and excessive sentence.

State v. James Pilotti - 2024 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 1332 (App. Div. 2024) – After ECPO secured a jury verdict against defendant for domestic violence kidnapping, aggravated assault, and weapons offenses, the Section convinced the Appellate Division to affirm those convictions and defendant's 40-year sentence. Issues included the propriety of the jury instructions and verdict sheet, admissibility of defendant's prior convictions, the prosecutor's summation, and excessive sentence.



Director/AP Frank Ducoat and Members of the Appellate Section

LEGAL UNITS

Central Judicial Processing Unit

Under New Jersey Court Rule 3:4-2, and until the advent of the Criminal Justice Reform on January 1, 2017, all defendants charged with an indictable complaint (as opposed to disorderly-persons offenses) must appear before a judge to be informed of the charges against them and to arrange bail, if appropriate. In 1987, a Central Judicial Processing ("CJP") Court was established in Essex County to handle this responsibility for all municipalities in the County. Other counties with a CJP Court include Union, Hudson, and Camden.

Essex County's CJP Unit handles all First Appearances. CJP also performs an important case screening function for custody and non-custody cases. All criminal complaints in Essex County charging an indictable crime are "screened" to separate indictable cases (those subject to prosecution in Superior Court) from cases that can be more quickly and appropriately resolved at another level. Cases can also be diverted to the Municipal Courts, Family Court and Recovery Court, Mental Health Court and Veterans Court. Indictable cases are referred to any one of Vertical Prosecution Courts or to a specialized prosecution squad. The nature of the offense, surrounding circumstances, quality of evidence, and character and arrest/conviction history of the defendant are all considered when making the screening decision. By performing this type of early case screening, cases can be diverted before they enter the Grand Jury and trial stages, thereby conserving valuable judicial and prosecutorial resources.

2024 Accomplishments

Detained defendants continued to be produced for their First Appearance as dictated by the Criminal Justice Reform Act of 2017. CJP continued to be split into two virtual courts in 2024 with separate staff manning both courts. One court handled custody defendants exclusively wherein the defendants were produced at the Essex County Correctional Facility via Zoom for their First Appearance. The second First Appearance Court was continued for sole use of Non-Custody defendants who appeared in court via Zoom from their homes via the use of electronic devices. During the 2024 calendar year, CJP Custody Court handled detained defendants in their First Appearances and resulted in the filing of 2,310 detention motions on those matters. To maintain the safety of court staff and the public, the Administrative Office of the Courts determined that Non-Custody matters would be continued to be heard virtually in 2024. There were 11,847 defendants (Custody and Non-Custody) scheduled for their First Appearance in 2024. The work of the Central Judicial Processing Court has never faltered despite the pandemic's grip on our state, preserving all defendants' rights to be seen within 48 hours of being placed into custody.

Forfeiture Unit

The Forfeiture Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office prosecutes all asset forfeiture actions brought pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2C:64-1 et. seq., the State's forfeiture statute. The primary mission of the Unit is to fairly and efficiently forfeit all property seized from defendants within Essex County that can be linked to criminal activity, either as proceeds of such activity or as property used to facilitate the commission of crimes. This is done primarily through the filing of civil "in rem" complaints against the seized property with notice to the defendants. The forfeiture complaints must be filed within 90 days of the seizure. The use of forfeiture funds obtained by the Prosecutor's Office is strictly regulated by law. The forfeiture process is designed to afford claimants due process before monies are forfeited. Forfeited monies may only be used for law enforcement purposes as defined by Attorney General Guidelines. The funds cannot be used to defray normal operating expenses such as salaries, leases, and other regularly incurred expenses. Training expenses, special equipment purchases, and forensic witness fees are examples of permitted forfeiture expenditures.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Forfeiture Unit, through appropriate civil and criminal process, forfeited \$1,783,185.32, which was determined to be either proceeds or instrumentalities of crime. Of that amount, \$1,503,878.32 was in cash, \$ 267,613.00 was the value of motor vehicles, and \$11,694.00 was other property, including Apple gift cards, various items of jewelry, and electronic devices.

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Grand Jury Unit

Grand Jurors make an independent determination to indict, or formally charge, persons accused of crimes based on their assessment of the evidence presented to them by an assistant prosecutor. After listening to witness testimony, viewing physical evidence, if any, the Grand Jury can vote to either True Bill a matter, which formally charges the accused; to No Bill a matter, which dismisses the charges against the accused; or Amend and Remand the matter which refers the case back to the Municipal Court on lesser charges.

The Grand Jury is an independent body consisting of 23 members of the community, with 12 affirmative votes needed to return an indictment. The actual proceedings are secret, but a transcript is made available for use by the Court, the Prosecutor's Office and the defendant after the vote is taken. The defendant may or may not elect to testify before the Grand Jury. Grand Jurors in Essex County sit one day per week from 15 to 18 weeks, hearing approximately 20 to 25 cases on a typical day. To facilitate case scheduling, while respecting the wishes of most Grand Jurors to be released at closing time, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office has developed a weighting system. Under this system, Grand Jury Clerks receive advance notification of the complexity of a given presentation, allowing more efficient and realistic scheduling of cases.

Under the present system, The Adult Trial Section Assistant Prosecutors present cases that are assigned to their Courts under the theory of Vertical Prosecution. Those matters are then returned to the Trial Assistant Prosecutor for resolution via plea or trial. Various specialized units have their own assistant prosecutors present their cases in a vertical prosecution system. They remain assigned to their cases from charging decision through indictment, to the final resolution of the matter.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, All Grand Jurors were chosen to appear in person for all Grand Jury proceedings.

In 2024, the Grand Jury panels returned to sitting five days a week with Trial Assistant Prosecutors presenting all cases using the vertical prosecution model. A senior assistant prosecutor oriented the Grand Jurors on general charges.

In 2024, we presented more than 200 matters than the previous year. There were 3,373 matters calendared for the year 2024, 2,646 resulted in indictments; 147 were No Billed; 24 resulted in No Cause of Action and 42 were referred to municipal court. The remaining cases were either held over, withdrawn, pled out or consolidated with other cases.



Grand Jury Unit Support Staff

LEGAL UNITS

Juvenile Trial Unit



The Juvenile Justice Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office reviews and prosecutes cases involving juveniles accused of delinquency, ranging from minor offenses such as petty theft to serious crimes, including homicide. The Unit prioritizes public safety by ensuring the swift and fair adjudication of violent and repeat offenders. Its primary goal is to reduce recidivism through accountability, structured supervision, and the diversion of minor offenders from the justice system, thereby minimizing future court involvement and breaking cycles of delinquency.

The Code of Juvenile Justice (N.J.S.A. 2A:4A-23) defines delinquency as an act committed by an individual under the age of 18 that, if committed by an adult, would constitute a crime, a disorderly persons offense, or a petty disorderly persons offense. This definition excludes motor vehicle traffic offenses, curfew violations, and truancy concerns, which are instead handled in municipal court.

The Juvenile Justice Unit is responsible for resolving and adjudicating all formal complaints of juvenile delinquency involving Essex County residents. Consequently, the Unit handles cases from across the state, with nearly 18% originating outside Essex County. Assistant prosecutors assigned to the juvenile courts manage individual case calendars throughout all stages of adjudication, including initial

detention, weekly status appearances, plea negotiations, waiver applications, evidentiary hearings, trials, and final disposition. The Unit employs a “vertical prosecution” model, ensuring that each assistant prosecutor handles a case from inception to resolution.

The Juvenile Justice Unit reviews, screens, prepares, and litigates all cases heard before the court. The vertical prosecution approach facilitates the efficient progression of juvenile cases through the family court system, which operates on a more accelerated schedule than the adult criminal courts.

Beyond court appearances, the Unit provides daily legal counsel to the 23 Juvenile Bureaus within Essex County and other law enforcement agencies with patrol authority in the area. The Unit also collaborates with local schools requiring legal or investigative support. Additionally, its members volunteer to conduct community training sessions on the consequences of delinquency and criminal behavior.

The Deputy Chief of the Unit plays a pivotal role in state-wide juvenile justice initiatives. Tasked by the Office of the Attorney General, the Deputy Chief provides training to assistant prosecutors and law enforcement officers across the state. As a founding member of the Juvenile Prosecutor’s Leadership Network, the Deputy Chief liaises with key stakeholders, including the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Juvenile Justice Commission, to promote fairness in the juvenile justice system for both juveniles and victims. Furthermore, the Deputy Chief conducts educational seminars for educators, parents, and community organizations at both county and state levels.

In the face of evolving procedural and substantive due process requirements, the Juvenile Justice Unit continues to consistently implement best practices for the administration of Juvenile Justice. The Unit has been recognized statewide for its effective and efficient case management by multiple stakeholders.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Juvenile Justice Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office managed approximately 1,500 docketed cases, spanning from disorderly persons offenses to homicides. The Unit’s state-wide jurisdiction necessitates handling delinquency matters involving Essex juveniles regardless of where the offenses occur within New Jersey. Due to the number of cases, the Essex County Family Court has assigned two full-time judges to oversee juvenile matters.

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Mental Health Unit

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office Mental Health Unit manages a diversion program focusing on defendants living with serious and persistent mental illnesses, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. The purpose of the program is to combine community-based therapeutic treatment plans with traditional punishment-only oriented criminal case dispositions. The program has been greatly enhanced over the past five years as the Unit continued to develop. In 2015 ECPO was successful as one of only two county prosecutor's offices in New Jersey (the other is Ocean County) in obtaining a grant from the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, Division of Law and Public Safety, for \$150,000 to be distributed equally over a two-year period, and aids county prosecutor-led Mental Health and Co-Occurring Substance Abuse diversion programs. Funded by the OAG grant, Essex County Hospital Center has hired a full-time case manager to work exclusively with the ECPO's Program participants. The case manager is responsible for connecting participants with a treatment plan developed by a mental health professional and will also assist participants with applying for social entitlements, housing, education, vocation, and other benefits that contribute toward greater functioning in the community. The Unit works with a clinician hired by the County Hospital Center. The clinician screens and assess applicants for acceptance into the Program. The clinician, a Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Worker, or LCSW, has developed a comprehensive community-based therapeutic treatment plan for acceptable Program candidates.

In 2017, when grant funding expired with the State, the ECPO was able to maintain a relationship with the Essex County Hospital Center (ECHC) to retain this program. The ECHC absorbed the cost of the LCSW and the case worker which increased the lifeline of this program.

2024 Accomplishments

During 2024, the Mental Health Unit reviewed 25 defendant applications for the program. A total of 11 were legally accepted into the program in 2024. Please note that four applicants who applied to the program in 2023 were accepted to the program in 2024. There were 14 rejections. Of that, eight were legally rejected and six were determined not to be clinically acceptable for this program. Eight defendants successfully graduated. Three defendants withdrew their applications to pursue their case through traditional prosecution.



Pre-Trial Intervention & Expungement Unit

PRE-TRIAL INTERVENTION UNIT

The Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI) Unit is responsible for the complete review and processing of all applications for the PTI Program. This program is similar to probation but allows participants to avoid criminal conviction. Pursuant to R. 3:28-1d. Applicants who are charged with first- or second-degree charges are otherwise ineligible for Pretrial Intervention without Prosecutor Consent to Consideration of the Application. In those cases, the State must submit in writing their consent or refusal. A refusal of consent must show reasons behind the refusal, including consideration of the compelling reasons submitted by defendant. These refusals are appealable. If consented to, the application proceeds as usual.

Prosecutor consent is not required for applications on third- or fourth-degree charges. If an applicant is deemed inappropriate for PTI, a letter outlining the grounds for rejection is prepared, reviewed, and disseminated by Unit personnel. Requests for reconsideration and appeals receive appropriate responses.

Appropriate candidates are accepted into the program and required to fulfill certain conditions. At the end of the PTI term, the Supervising Assistant Prosecutor from the Unit reviews and signs a dismissal order.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, approximately 207 defendants applied for PTI. Pursuant to R. 3:28-1d, approximately 129 defendants applied for PTI that required the State's consent to further consideration of their application. Of those 129 requesting consent, 37 were refused and 55 were consented to.

During the year, 131 defendants were accepted into the program and 40 were rejected (this includes defendants who filed prior to 2024). The unit also litigated several appeals of PTI rejections.

EXPUNGEMENT UNIT

The Expungement Unit reviews Traditional Expungement applications aimed at clearing an offender's criminal record and is responsible for physically expunging those records.

In recent years, there have been significant changes to the expungement law. Most recently, on January 12, 2024, Governor Murphy signed A5826 into law as L. 2023, c. 260. The new law amends multiple provisions of statutory law to allow individuals

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seeking expungement to file in the county in which they live or the county in which one or more of the crimes for which they are seeking expungement was adjudicated. In addition, defendants were deemed eligible to receive expungement, regardless of whether fines/fees/restitution were paid.

Of the many changes to the statute in recent years, the primary one is the “clean slate” provision, where a petitioner’s entire record of arrest and eligible convictions can be expunged after 10 years from the most recent conviction. This means there is no limit as to the number of convictions. In addition, the law also provides for municipal court judges to sign orders of expungements immediately upon the dismissal of municipal cases. This removes the requirement for the petitioner to file for the expungement and the need for a Superior Court Judge to sign the order. These types of expungements are called Expedited Expungements. All expungement petitions are now filed via eCourts.

Marijuana decriminalization also resulted in a dramatic increase in both Expedited Expungements and filed petitions for Regular Expungements. In addition, several marijuana cases were automatically expunged (removed from the system without an order) by the State of New Jersey. Those cases required review by each county for accuracy.

All these changes have resulted and will continue to result in significant increase in the number of petitions filed, more preparation, hearings, and appeals. Expungement applications are typically prompted by employment concerns and require the Unit to extensively examine the applicant’s full criminal history to determine eligibility (as provided for by statute). If eligible, Unit personnel prepare, review and submit approval of orders for the court’s signature. If the applicant is deemed ineligible, rejection letters or orders for dismissal are prepared and forwarded to the court or filed via eCourts.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, there were 22 new, manually filed Expungement applications (referred to as Traditional), non-drug court. In 2024, 61 Traditional Expungement petitions were resolved either via final order or dismissal, some of which had been filed in prior years. In 2024, 650 Regular Expungement petitions were filed electronically, 393 petitions were either granted, dismissed, or withdrawn. For Clean Slate petitions, 405 were filed electronically, 234 petitions have been resolved. Marijuana had 20 petitions filed. 23 Marijuana Decriminalization petitions were filed. In 2024, 10,857 Expedited Orders (these are expungements for cases that have been dismissed either in Municipal Courts or Superior) were received. This number of Expedited Orders is larger than that of the previous year. 10,565 Expedited Orders (including those from previous years) were reviewed and processed. Finally, 450 Out of County Expungement Orders were received in 2024, 427 of which were processed and expunged. These are expungement orders signed in other counties where the petitioners had cases in Essex.

Recovery Court Program

The Recovery Court Program began in Essex County in 1999. The Essex County Recovery Court Program was the original pilot program for the State of New Jersey. Judges, prosecutors, public defenders, court professionals, substance abuse evaluators, treatment facilitators, and probation officers work together to assist participants in the program to accomplish their endeavors and to conquer their addiction. Our program connects the criminal justice system with drug treatment and rehabilitative services promoting life skills. Our goal is to break the cycle of addiction and recidivism among non-violent offenders.

Participants receive intensive probation supervision and swift graduated sanctions for non-compliance as they undergo treatment and counseling for their drug and alcohol addictions. Public safety concerns are addressed through the close monitoring of each defendant by probation officers and the Recovery Court Team. Our team approach includes judges, court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators, and treatment facilitators who support and monitor every participant's recovery. The Recovery Court Team meets with participants weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and quarterly, depending on the individual's needs.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the COVID-19 continued to have a residual negative impact on Recovery Court. Recovery Court in Essex County still uses a hybrid model, where most court reporting is virtual; however, many court events are held in person. Services such as substance abuse treatment/counseling, and probation reporting have returned to in-person as they were prior to the COVID-19 shutdown. Judicial hearings such as pleas, sentences, sanctions, and probation violations are mostly conducted in person.

The Court calendar's fiscal reporting year is from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. However, for our purposes, the numbers provided are extracted from the 2024 and 2025 court calendar years and are combined for this 2024 annual report.

During January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024, calendar year there were 45 Essex County Recovery Court admissions. For the 2024/2025 fiscal year July 1, 2024, through April 30, 2025, (the 2025 court calendar year) there were 29 admissions.

At the close of the 2024 calendar year there were 296 participants, 114 of which were on bench warrant/detainer status.

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Crash and Fire Investigation Unit

In 2024, the Crash and Fire Investigation Unit continued investigating all fatal crashes and fires as well as select serious bodily injury motor vehicle crashes with a criminal element. These include hit and runs, driving under the influence, and accidents involving unlicensed drivers where serious injury occurred. The assistant prosecutors prosecuted all vehicular homicides and related offenses, including fatal and non-fatal arson cases. Non-fatal arson cases are investigated by local departments, with assistance from prosecutor's office investigators, and where appropriate, prosecution by the assistant prosecutors of the CFIU.

CFIU, a subset of the Homicide Unit, continues to be staffed by three assistant prosecutors including one Assistant Prosecutor-Supervisor who carries a case load as well. Crime Scene Investigation Bureau detectives investigate fatal crashes and fires throughout the county. CSIB detectives are responsible for traditional crime scene processing of homicide and search warrant scenes as well as expert analysis associated with that work. They also conduct investigations of all fatal and serious bodily injury vehicle crashes and fatal fires.

There is always at least one detective, and one assistant prosecutor on-call along with investigative and prosecutorial supervisors. The on-call assistant prosecutors also assist local police and the New Jersey State Police 24 hours a day, seven days a week with obtaining telephonic warrants for collecting bodily fluids in DUI cases. Fatal crashes on Essex County's interstate highways are investigated by the New Jersey State Police in conjunction with the assistant prosecutors of CFIU.

The assistant prosecutors and investigators of CFIU and CSIB also meet with surviving family members of criminal and non-criminal fatal crashes and fires to explain the investigations and charging decisions of each case. Once the criminal prosecution concludes, or a decision is made to not prosecute an incident, the assistant prosecutors and investigators also play a role in the subsequent and inevitable civil litigation related to these cases.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, CFIU APs and CSIB investigators investigated a total of fifty motor vehicle fatalities, eleven serious injury crashes, and five fires, which included eight fatalities related to the fires. This does not account for the numerous non-fatal crash and fire investigations and prosecutions, which were assisted or conducted by the CFIU assistant prosecutors in collaboration with local agencies and the New Jersey State Police.

Domestic Violence Unit

The Domestic Violence Unit, which was established in 1992, addresses domestic abuse between intimate partners and adults who reside in the same household. The Unit is comprised of six assistant prosecutors, which include four line APs, one supervisor and one deputy chief assistant prosecutor. Additionally, a captain, lieutenant, sergeant, and three detectives are assigned to the unit along with two support staff and a victim/witness advocate. The Unit examines cases with the dual aims of safeguarding the victims' interests and effectively prosecuting incidents of domestic violence.

Domestic abuse is a deeply ingrained and escalating social issue that affects individuals across all demographics—irrespective of race, culture, religion, economic status, or sexual orientation. A crucial aspect of our societal response to this pervasive problem involves criminal sanctions. The Domestic Violence Unit is committed to seeking the incarceration of violent and repeat offenders when warranted. However, in many instances, we also provide batterers opportunities for rehabilitation, aiming to break the cycle of violence.

The psychological impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families is a significant consideration in our case assessments. The Domestic Violence Unit collaborates closely with the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit to offer comprehensive support, helping victims regain a sense of safety and security. When appropriate, we also facilitate referrals to shelters, recognizing that this multifaceted approach is essential. Many victims hesitate to testify against their abusers due to concerns for their safety, financial stability, the welfare of children, and the complexities of their relationships with the abuser.

Assistant prosecutors play a critical role in balancing the need for deterrence with the level of cooperation from victims, all while advocating passionately for justice. The Domestic Violence Unit is vital to our community, working diligently to prosecute offenders and address the needs of abuse victims.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the members of the Essex County Domestic Violence Unit processed 3118 new domestic violence matters comprised of 3147 defendants. The assistant prosecutors assigned to the Unit also presented 613 cases to the Grand Jury during this period. Additionally, members of the Domestic Violence Unit handled and processed 1062 disorderly domestic violence matters. In these matters, the assistant prosecutor conducted a thorough review of each case determining whether it should be returned to municipal court or if the charges warranted elevation to Superior Court for further handling. Moreover, the Domestic Violence Unit also handled the Contempt of Restraining Order Docket. There were 155 cases handled in 2024.

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Members of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office, including personnel from the Domestic Violence Unit, have been integral to the Domestic Violence Working Group. This collaborative effort includes law enforcement, judiciary representatives, victim service providers, probation officers, and Family Part employees. Together, the Working Group tackles systemic issues within the domestic violence sector and strives to harmonize the efforts of its diverse members. Notably, we are making significant progress in implementing New Jersey's Domestic Violence Procedures Manual and enhancing the process for Temporary Restraining Orders.

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office is one of the lead partners in the Essex County Family Justice Center, located in the Leroy F. Smith Jr. Public Safety Building, 60 Nelson Place, Newark, NJ. The Family Justice Center is recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice on Violence Against Women as a "best practice" in domestic violence intervention and prevention. This center unites domestic violence advocates, civil legal service providers, and other community organizations under one roof, offering crisis intervention, safety planning, counseling, self-sufficiency services, and access to the criminal justice system through a liaison with the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

Extradition Unit

The ECPO Extradition Unit facilitates the return of fugitives who have been accused or convicted of a crime. The Unit is responsible for providing the legal paperwork needed to return an offender to New Jersey. The Unit also arranges the return of fugitives to other jurisdictions where an offender is wanted by law enforcement for a crime committed in that location.

Those working in the Unit must have a familiarity and knowledge of the various legal mechanisms found in both state and federal statutes to compel the return of a fugitive wanted for a crime committed in New Jersey as well as an understanding of the proper procedures for returning a fugitive to another jurisdiction.

This may involve securing a Governor's warrant if a fugitive refuses extradition and extraditing both State and Federal inmates via the Inter State Agreement on Detainers. It also involves working closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Extradition Unit received 358 requests for extradition. Essex County coordinated the legal paperwork to extradite and return 341 fugitives to other jurisdictions and returned 177 fugitives, including Governor's Warrants back to Essex County for Prosecution.



Detective Narvin Singh

INVESTIGATION UNITS

Financial Crimes Unit

The Financial Crimes Unit is dedicated to the detection and prosecution of cases involving the unlawful conversion of funds or property. Most of these cases involve fraudulent activities using checks, credit cards, bank accounts and mortgages. Victims of financial crimes are varied and include some of the most vulnerable victims, such as the elderly or infirm and some of the more affluent, such as private and professional corporations. The assistant prosecutors in the Unit are supervised by a Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor. Assigned detectives conduct the investigations, supervised by a Captain of Detectives. Presently, this Unit is staffed by a Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor, three assistant prosecutors, a detective sergeant, three detectives, one legal assistant, and one clerical supervisor.

The Financial Crimes Unit is a vertical prosecution unit, meaning it handles the cases from inception to prosecution. When the Financial Crimes Unit receives an allegation of criminal conduct, it must determine whether a criminal prosecution is warranted. If it is a criminal charge and/or a presentation to a Grand Jury is conducted after a thorough investigation. If an indictment is returned, the Financial Crimes Unit is responsible for the case through a trial or plea agreement. The Financial Crimes Unit fulfills the need to investigate serious financial crime cases at the county rather than municipal level.

Municipal police departments are often not able to thoroughly investigate complicated economic crimes. Indeed, in many cases, governmental, bank, and financial records can only be obtained by grand jury subpoena, court order or search warrant, and therefore, are beyond the reach of a municipal police department. Many “white collar” crimes are multijurisdictional in nature. Beyond this, such cases are far more complex than the “average” case. They usually require review of voluminous records by an experienced detective.

Because of the complexity of the allegations and investigations, close interaction between the assistant prosecutor and detective is necessary throughout the investigation, especially since these investigations often involve assembling and reviewing complex financial and business records, preparing, and obtaining court orders for in- and out-of-state records (such as bank records, handwriting, toll records). In 2012, the Financial Crimes Unit expanded to include an Insurance Fraud Division. The Insurance Fraud Division is partially funded through a grant from the New Jersey Attorney General’s Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, and works closely with that office in identifying, investigating, and prosecuting appropriate cases. In 2015, the Financial Crimes Unit expanded even further to include an Intellectual Property (Counterfeiting) Division. The Division is partially funded through a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance and its goal is to investigate and prosecute this ever-growing crime.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Financial Crimes Unit conducted investigations into 379 cases, including 129 assists to local police departments seeking assistance from subject matter experts. In addition, there were several notable prosecutions.

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Homicide Unit

The Homicide Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office functions as both an investigative and prosecutorial unit. The Unit is staffed full-time by assistant prosecutors and detectives. Unit personnel respond to all homicides, suspicious deaths and certain non-fatal shootings.

Assistant prosecutors assigned to the Homicide Unit assist detectives in determining whether there is probable cause for search warrants and communications data warrants. Homicide assistant prosecutors are on-call 24 hours a day and are available to discuss emergent legal issues and to submit search warrants and communications data warrants. The ability to obtain warrants and other legal documents on an emergent basis is often crucial to ensuring that all relevant evidence is collected in a manner that will withstand legal challenges and will be admissible in subsequent legal proceedings.

As an investigation proceeds, case detectives in the Unit meet with an assistant prosecutor to determine if probable cause exists to bring criminal charges. Moving forward, the assistant prosecutor and case detective then present a complaint containing a statement of probable cause. If the probable cause is accepted by the magistrate, the complaint is signed, and an arrest warrant is issued. The assistant prosecutor and case detective then prepare the case for presentation to a Grand Jury. In most instances, the assigned assistant prosecutor will continue with the case through final disposition. Vertical prosecution of homicide cases provides continuity throughout the process. Having the same team involved with the case throughout the proceedings is also beneficial for the surviving family members.

In matters in which a juvenile is charged with a homicide offense, the Homicide Assistant Prosecutor will prosecute the matter in Family Court or, in appropriate cases, seek to prosecute the juvenile as an adult.

In matters involving motor vehicle fatalities, homicide and crime scene detectives specially trained in crash investigations and accident reconstruction, will investigate the incident and work with an assistant prosecutor to determine if the collision was the result of criminal conduct.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office continued to operate the Homicide/Major Crimes Task Force. Investigators from the Newark, East Orange, Irvington, Bloomfield departments and the New Jersey State Police are assigned to the Homicide Unit pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and conduct investigations in the county. All homicides, deaths and police shootings throughout the county are investigated by the Homicide Major Crimes Task Force. Having municipal detectives co-located in the Homicide Unit allows for continuity of investigations and eliminates duplicative efforts by county and local officers.

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In 2024, The Essex County Prosecutor's Office Homicide Unit investigated 59 homicides. Of these homicides, 49 have been charged. Additionally, there were 38 special investigations that the Task Force oversaw. That's a decrease from 68 homicides in 2023. Assistant prosecutors and detectives assigned to the Homicide Unit prepared, reviewed, and executed over 500 search warrants and over 500 Communication Data Warrants.



Notable Cases

In **State v. Marcus Harris**, the defendant filmed a video of the victim without permission. The victim tried to stop the filming. That's when the defendant and victim engaged in a fist fight. An accomplice handed the defendant a gun, and he then shot the victim numerous times killing him. The jury returned a verdict of guilty and the defendant was sentenced to life.

In **State v. Deautay Haines**, the defendant approached the victim from behind. He shot and killed the victim in front of his three-year-old son. The jury found the defendant guilty of murder. The defendant was sentenced to 50 years under the No Early Release Act.

In **State v. William Whitfield**, the victim had an argument with the defendant. The defendant went to his apartment to obtain a firearm. The defendant shot the victim in

INVESTIGATION UNITS

the back of the neck and killed him. The jury returned a verdict of guilty of first-degree murder, and the defendant was sentenced to 35 years with 30 years to be served before being eligible for parole.

In **State v. Juan Leandry**, the defendant and unidentified co-conspirators used a stolen Jeep to track down the victim. They then fired 42 shots at the victim, killing him. Days after this murder, the defendant set this Jeep on fire and posted images of the burning Jeep on Instagram. Detectives linked the defendant to this homicide and arson. The jury returned a verdict of guilty for murder, arson, and weapons charges. This defendant is due to be sentenced in May of 2025.



Professional Standards Bureau

The Professional Standards Bureau (PSB) consists of two branches. The prosecution branch is led by a Director - Assistant Prosecutor - along with two additional assistant prosecutors. The investigative branch is led by the Captain of Prosecutor's Detectives, who has overall command of the Bureau and reports directly to the Chief of Detectives. The investigative branch is presently staffed by four sergeants and one detective. The PSB is primarily responsible for the investigation and prosecution of all criminal misconduct involving police in Essex County and all Prosecutor's Office employees. It also conducts activities to improve the administration and delivery of police internal affairs services on a countywide basis, including internal affairs training. Two clericals oversee all office operations and manage the records system and paralegal functions of the PSB. One of those employees also manages the clerical needs of the separate Corruption Unit.

When the PSB receives an allegation of criminal conduct committed by a sworn law enforcement officer, a decision is made about whether a criminal prosecution is warranted. When a criminal prosecution is required, the case is charged and resolved pre-indictment or presented to a Grand Jury. If an indictment is returned, the PSB is responsible for the case through the plea agreement or trial.

In addition, PSB personnel investigate all non-fatal police shootings and police vehicle pursuits with serious bodily injury to determine whether the officers comply with the guidelines and directives set forth by the New Jersey Attorney General. If there is a material, factual issue regarding a police shooting, it is presented to a Grand Jury. All fatal police shootings are investigated by the Attorney General's Office. Internal responsibilities for the PSB include, but are not limited to, random drug screening, investigation of violations of rules and regulations and risk analysis management.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the PSB received and investigated 279 new cases. There were several noteworthy criminal cases in 2024. A Newark Police officer pled guilty to Hindering Apprehension and was sentenced to State Prison. A Northern State Prison Correctional Police Officer pled guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery. Multiple officers entered the Pre-Trial Intervention Program and additionally forfeited and were permanently barred from public employment.

The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), consisting of an assistant prosecutor and numerous PSB and ECPO investigative personnel, investigated all non-fatal officer-involved shootings. The CIRT also responded to all police pursuits resulting in serious injury and numerous in-custody deaths at the Essex County Jail and Northern State Prison. In addition, the PSB conducted a two-day county-wide training regarding all Attorney General Policies and Directives applicable to internal affairs investigators.

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Special Prosecutions Unit/Narcotics Task Force

The principal mission of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Special Prosecutions Unit is to investigate and prosecute offenders who engage in organized and violent crimes. The unit is staffed by investigators and assistant prosecutors who work together to identify, apprehend and prosecute those offenders. The unit is comprised of three sections: the Narcotics Task Force, the Intelligence Unit, and the attorneys assigned to Special Prosecutions. The investigators are supervised by a deputy chief, a captain, and a lieutenant. The assistant prosecutors are supervised by a chief assistant prosecutor, a deputy chief assistant prosecutor and two supervisory assistant prosecutors.

The Narcotics Task Force Section is staffed full-time by one captain, one lieutenant, three sergeants, twelve detectives, and four task force officers. Additionally, there is one detective on loan to the Drug Enforcement Agency. The objective of the Narcotics Task Force is to conduct mid to upper-level investigations that lead to the arrest and conviction of individuals and/or organized groups or street gangs, involved in the possession, distribution, manufacturing, and trafficking of controlled dangerous substances. The Narcotics Task Force is also responsible for investigating citizen complaints concerning drug violations along with assisting other agencies with investigations.

The Strategic Intelligence Section is staffed full-time by one sergeant, one detective, one agent and two investigative aids. The function of the Intelligence Unit is to gather data, analyze that data, and disseminate the information derived from the data. The section receives data from various law enforcement agencies (municipal, county, state, and federal), other intelligence units and open sources. The Intelligence Unit provides support to all investigative and legal personnel within the Essex County Prosecutor's Office and outside agencies that seek our help and assistance. The Intelligence Unit also disseminates a bi-monthly newsletter that encompasses a crime overview, gun recoveries, homicides, aggravated assaults, robberies, carjackings, burglaries, thefts, vehicular incidents, arrests, Megan's Law Offenders, sensitive crimes, wanted persons, and police safety & awareness and training. Additionally, one detective, from the **Intelligence Unit**, is currently assigned to the **State Police Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC)**.

The Special Prosecutions Unit is staffed full-time by one chief assistant prosecutor, one deputy chief assistant prosecutor, two supervisory assistant prosecutors, and five assistant prosecutors. The Special Prosecutions Unit handles county-wide carjacking investigations, non-fatal shootings, and cybercrimes, as well as animal cruelty investigations. The attorneys also assist local agencies with cases involving public alarms or public threats which typically involve threats to schools, public facilities, and infrastructure. Additionally, the attorneys assigned to the **Special Prosecutions Unit** provide police with legal advice to agencies county-wide on a 24-7 basis, including guidance on investigative steps, assistance with subpoenas, search warrants, communications data warrants, and other First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendment issues. The Unit also aids local agencies in need of specialized guidance on complex, sensitive, and high-profile cases, as well as county-wide and state-wide violent crime sprees and auto-

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theft investigations. The attorneys assigned to the unit handle all aspects of the case including investigation, search and seizure, arrest, grand jury proceedings, pretrial motions, and trials.

On October 10, 2024, the Prosecutor executed Memorandum 1-2024 which vested the Essex County Prosecutor's Office with charging authority for additional crimes. As such, in addition to providing legal advice and answering procedural questions, on-call assistant prosecutors, in conjunction with their supervisors, are tasked with approving charges for specific crimes in all 22 municipalities. This task includes reviewing video evidence, photographs, witness statements and reports as well as any other items that give probable cause prior to approving charges.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, William Neafsey, the Supervising Assistant Prosecutor assigned to the Narcotics Task Force was recognized as the Assistant Prosecutor of the Year by the New Jersey Narcotic Enforcement Officers Association. The Narcotics Task Force conducted 84 narcotics investigations and 52 special investigations in 2024. Some of the more significant investigations include:

State v. Malik Teel, Allison Adams, Michael Melvin, Edward Boone, Roberto Rodriguez & Elamin Reynolds-Muhammad - NTF# 2024-046 - An investigation resulted in the execution of four search warrants on October 30-31, 2024. Detectives seized (26) grams of cocaine, (17) bricks of heroin, various quantities of pills, (4) digital scales, narcotics proceeds including over \$7,000, and a large quantity of drug paraphernalia used for packaging (scales/empty jugs/heat sealer). Additionally, detectives recovered three handguns, a rifle, a silencer and multiple rounds, additional controlled dangerous substances, and a money counter.

State v. Fuquan Thompson - NTF# 2024-073 - An investigation resulted in the execution of two search warrants on December 12, 2024. Detectives seized 200 grams of raw cocaine, (493) glassine envelopes of heroin approximately 16 grams, (116) plastic jugs containing cocaine – approximately 12 grams, (12) Xanax tablets, narcotic packaging and processing paraphernalia, \$5,223.00 in U.S. currency and a loaded handgun.

State v. Anthony Green - NTF# 2024-042 – An investigation resulted in the execution of (4) search warrants on December 18, 2024. Detectives seized (5) handguns and ammunition, one rifle with ammunition, a taser, a ballistic vest, 160 grams of cocaine, Numerous unused packaging materials (commonly used to package cocaine), \$28,251.00 in U.S. currency, (80) bricks of heroin, (90) glassine vials containing cocaine.

State v. Edwin Median & Sandra Almodovar - NTF# 2024-029 - An investigation resulted in the execution of eight search warrants on July 3, 2024. Detectives seized 540 grams of cocaine (bulk), 10,812 vials containing suspected cocaine (packaged for

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distribution), 427 Xanax pills, one digital scale, and a large amount of narcotic packaging material & paraphernalia, and a digital money counter. Additionally, detectives seized narcotics proceeds including \$17,628.00. Detectives also recovered six firearms and ammunition.

In 2024, the Special Prosecutions Unit continued to coordinate with our federal, state, and local partners to reduce the violent and organized activities in Essex County. In 2024, the county of Essex investigated 140 shooting hit incidents which effected 181 shooting hit victims. This marked the third straight year shooting incidents have decreased in the county. Furthermore, there were 64 carjackings in Essex County during 2024. To help assist in these and other serious investigations the assistant prosecutors assigned to the Special Prosecutions Unit submitted over 1350 search warrants and communication data warrants.

In addition to facilitating several investigations on the local, state, and federal level, the attorneys in the Special Prosecutions Unit were very active in the courtroom. During 2024, our attorneys handled many violent crimes including homicides and gang related prosecutions. Some of the more notable convictions are:

State v. Jose Mercado, Indictment No. 22-09-2416 - This was a carjacking trial that occurred in July 2024. Judge Arre presided over this trial, which took place between July 18-July 25. On July 30, 2024, the jury convicted Mercado of all counts, which included carjacking, first-degree robbery and various second-degree weapons offenses. On September 30, 2024, Judge Arre sentenced Mercado to an aggregate term of 15 years in New Jersey State Prison with 85% parole ineligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act.

State v. Justen Couram, Indictment No. 22-04-775 - This was a homicide trial that occurred in October of 2024 that was before Judge Zunic. This trial also involved several counts relating to a shooting hit that involved the same Victim/Decedent that occurred approximately 8 months before the homicide. In both incidents, Couram was identified as the getaway driver. Following a five- day trial, the jury convicted Couram of all the counts relating to the homicide, but acquitted on the counts relating to the shooting hit. On February 13, 2025, Judge Zunic sentenced Couram to 35 years in New Jersey State Prison with 30 years of parole ineligibility.

State v. Adriano and Adriel Palamar-Dasilva, Indictment 18-12-3901 - This was an aggravated assault case tried before Judge Fuentes in April of 2024. The jury convicted the defendants of third-degree conspiracy and second-degree aggravated assault. The defendants were twin brothers who assaulted a victim outside of a club. The victim suffered a broken jaw amongst other injuries. The defendants fled to Brazil the day before jury selection. They are currently fugitives.

This was a homicide trial that occurred in May and June 2024 in front of Judge Wigler. The jury convicted the defendant of conspiracy to commit murder, first-degree aggravated manslaughter, and related weapons offenses. The defendant assaulted

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the victim in the Pink Cat Lounge. The defendant and his conspirators dragged the victim outside the car and stabbed him to death. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Campos fled to the Dominican Republic to evade law enforcement. Through the efforts of the Newark Police Department, Essex County Prosecutor's Office, the United States Marshal's Service, and the Drug Enforcement Administration, Mr. Campos was found in the Dominican Republic in 2020 and taken into custody. On October 23, 2024, Judge Wigler sentenced Campos to twenty-four years in prison with 85% parole ineligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act.

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Special Victims Unit

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit (SVU) investigates and prosecutes cases involving crimes against the most vulnerable members of the community. The Unit has a dedicated Child Abuse Unit (CAU) that investigates all cases of sexual abuse and maltreatment of children. SVU also investigates and prosecutes all cases involving the sexual assault and abuse of adults, including those with cognitive, developmental, or physical disabilities.

The cases are investigated under the auspices of the Sexual Assault Rape Analysis (SARA) Unit. An integral part of the SVU is the Forensic Nurse Examiner's Program that is tasked with performing sexual assault examinations on children and adults. The SVU also has a Bias Crimes Unit that includes teams of assistant prosecutors and detectives dedicated to investigating and prosecuting bias crimes. Additionally, SVU also investigates and prosecutes allegations of Elder Abuse, Human Trafficking, and Internet Crimes Against Children. Also, under the SVU umbrella is a dedicated Megan's Law Unit, responsible for evaluating how likely convicted offenders are to re-offend. The Megan's Law Unit is also responsible for prosecuting individuals convicted of sexual offenses who violate the conditions imposed at sentencing, including failure to register under Megan's Law, violations of parole supervision for life and community supervision for life.

The above units and teams were merged into the Special Victims Unit to better serve the victims through the most comprehensive investigations possible. All but the Megan's Law Unit are located at the Wynona M. Lipman Child Advocacy Center, better known as Wynona's House Child Advocacy Center, at 185 Washington Street in Newark. This allows for sharing of resources, information, and experience between the units. The functions within the Special Victims Unit now operate under the command of Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor, Celeste M. Montesino who is assisted by a Supervising Assistant Prosecutor, Kathleen Lyons-Boswick and Captain of Detectives, Carlos Olmo, Lieutenant Anneesha Ford and Sergeant Krista Tracey.

The units and teams are overseen by Chief Assistant Prosecutor Roger Imhof and Deputy Chief of Detectives Paulo DeSousa. Also, available to the victims are on-site Victim Witness Advocates who work closely with the staff to ensure that the needs of the victim are met during the investigative and legal process. The goal of this holistic approach is to ensure that victims, witnesses, and their families are provided with services and guidance and that their questions and concerns are addressed. The SVU staff receives specialized training in the most advanced best practice standards to ensure that the victims' legal rights and emotional well-being are the primary consideration. The SVU assistant prosecutors and detectives are assisted by allied professionals such as forensic interviewers, forensic pediatricians, trauma focused therapists and others in specialized fields. The SVU also works with advocates representing child abuse, sex crimes, elder abuse, and intellectually impaired victims. By working with allied professionals, prosecutions are enhanced and further trauma to victims is minimized.



Assistant Prosecutor Logan Teisch

The SVU also focuses on the training of law enforcement personnel and the education of the public through SVU seminars presented by SVU staff. The unit has presented a training seminar for all municipal, county and state law enforcement personnel working in Essex County, as well as Police Academy training. The unit also provided public education seminars to different community groups including religious organizations, multiple college groups, high school students and interns. The SVU and Megan's Law units work tirelessly to ensure that the needs of the victims are met. The Assistant Prosecutors work tirelessly to meet their court and administrative obligations by attending virtual hearings, trying cases, and handling in person court obligations. The assistant prosecutors in the Special Victims Unit serve as on-call legal liaisons to all the municipal police departments, including the police departments for the colleges and universities. In 2024, SVU executed over 65 Search Warrants.

In 2024, the Special Victims Unit processed a total of 1,666 cases.

CHILD ABUSE UNIT

The Child Abuse Unit (CAU) was established by the Essex County Prosecutor's Office (ECPO) in 1983 in recognition of an urgent need to protect abused children and prosecute those who harm them. ECPO placed specialized law enforcement personnel with the desire, training, and experience to serve abused children. Unlike most child abuse units throughout the country, the ECPO CAU serves all children up

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to the age of 18. The CAU is also staffed by various SVU assistant prosecutors, detectives, and support staff. The CAU maintains a 24-hour on-call service for all county municipal detectives and New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJDCF) caseworkers (Division of Child Protection and Permanency and Institutional Abuse Investigative Unit).

The children of Essex County are our greatest resource, and the CAU is committed to their protection. To accomplish this mission, the CAU uses the most advanced methods to successfully identify, apprehend and prosecute those who commit crimes against children. When crimes against children occur, the CAU diligently pursues the arrest, indictment, and conviction of those responsible. At the same time, the Constitutional rights of the accused are respected. By their very nature, child abuse investigations and prosecutions are extremely difficult. The CAU uses a multi-disciplinary team approach to investigations and victim services. In conjunction with Wynona's House, a non-profit organization, NJDCF, and the Metro Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Center, at Children's Hospital of New Jersey at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, the CAU is an integral part of the Wynona M. Lipman Child Advocacy Center in Newark. Wynona's House is only one of a few child advocacy centers in the country to have a full-time Prosecutor's Office unit, child protective service caseworkers, juvenile trauma focused therapists, forensic pediatricians, and multi-disciplinary coordinators all under one roof.

The philosophy of the Lipman Center is to put the "Child First," and a multidisciplinary approach is used to protect child victims from unnecessary trauma during the investigative stages of a case. Under this approach, a single interview of all victims of sexual abuse under the age of 12 years old, is conducted by a highly skilled primary interviewer, while professionals from other agencies view the recorded interview in an adjacent room. The technique prevents multiple interviews by law enforcement officials and reduces trauma suffered by the victim. In addition, the family members of victims receive a wide range of services. The Forensic Video Interview (FVI) of all children under the age of 12 who have been sexually and/or physically abused, neglected, or have been witnesses to violence was established in 2000. SVU has one highly trained civilian forensic interviewer, as well as specifically trained detectives who also conduct forensic interviews. The assistant prosecutors all undergo training in forensic interviews as well. During the FVIs members from NJDCF, the Metro RDTC, law enforcement and assistant prosecutors sit in a monitoring room nearby.

In 2024, there were 100 forensic interviews conducted by ECPO personnel. Cases are investigated either solely by the CAU or through joint investigations with municipal detectives or staff of NJDCF. The assistant prosecutors assigned to the Unit handle hundreds of cases from the inception of the investigation to the case's ultimate disposition. The Unit is responsible for investigating or co-investigating cases involving children under the age of 18 who were victims of crimes which include sexual abuse, child endangerment (abuse, neglect, cruelty, and abandonment), child sexual abuse material, interference with custody/kidnapping, and luring. Depending upon the results

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of the initial interview with the child, he or she may require a medical examination and assessment by medical staff. Wynona's House collaborates with the Metro RDTC, whose physicians have extensive training in both pediatrics and issues related to child abuse. Through the compilation of the child's medical history and the examination, evidence may be obtained and stored for the potential prosecution of the alleged perpetrator. Physicians also provide basic, preventative healthcare services to ensure the complete recovery of victims of child abuse.



Assistant Prosecutor Dolores Bujnowski

In 2018, the Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) Program began conducting pediatric forensic exams. SVU has implemented a 24-hour, 7-day a week on-call schedule for its investigative staff, thereby ensuring that all child abuse victims will be treated with the best care and concern, regardless of when they were victimized or choose to disclose. In 2024, there were 311 activations of the FNE Program.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Child Abuse Unit received 995 referrals for investigation.

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Notable Cases

State v. Luis Ferino -- Guilty by jury trial then sentenced to 37 years NJSP with 85%, pursuant to NERA. Subject to Megan's Law and PSL.

State v. Philip Kyle -- Guilty by jury trial—sentenced to 25 years NJSP, with 16 years of parole ineligibility. Subject to Megan's Law and PSL.

State v. Christopher Turner -- Guilty by jury trial—pending sentence on first-degree. manufacturing child sexual abuse or exploitation material, second- degree endangering the welfare of a child, and third-degree possession of child sexual abuse or exploitation material. Sentence is subject to Megan's Law and PSL. *Sentence is pending retrial of the hung counts the jury couldn't decide.

State v. Erik Bonilla Rivas -- Pre-Indictment Lunsford Guilty Plea for 15 Years NJSP w/ 15 Years Parole Ineligibility, Megan's Law Registration and Parole Supervision for Life.

State v. Deannared Chico-Feliciano -- Pre-Indictment Lunsford Guilty Plea for 15 Years NJSP w/ 15 Years Parole Ineligibility, Megan's Law Registration and Parole Supervision for Life. (TO BE SENTENCED IN FEBRUARY)

State v. Chad Drummer – Sentenced to 25 years NJ State Prison, NERA, Megan's and PSL registration.

State v. Steven Woodruff – Sentenced to 8 years NJ State Prison, Megan's and PSL registration.

State v. Phedell Harris – Sentenced to 8 years NJ State Prison, NERA, Megan's and PSL registration.

ADULT SEX CRIMES

Adult sexual abuse cases are investigated under the auspices of the Sexual Assault and Rape Analysis (SARA) Unit, which is one of the oldest investigative units in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. It originated in the 1970s after the Newark Police Department became one of the first police departments in the nation to establish a sex crimes unit. The SARA Unit was developed to provide legal guidance and investigative support for all municipal police departments in Essex County. The SARA Unit originally prosecuted all cases of sexual abuse in Essex County. As the field of sex crime investigations became more specialized in the early 1980's, a separate Child Abuse Unit was developed. By 2001, after the opening of the Wynona M. Lipman Child Advocacy Center, all cases involving juvenile victims of abuse (under the age of 18) were solely prosecuted by the Child Abuse Unit.

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Today, the SARA Unit exclusively handles cases involving adult victims of sex crime. The SARA Unit staff consists of experienced assistant prosecutors, detectives, and clerical support employees, and cooperates closely with the director of the onsite Forensic Nurse Examiners, who manages the FNE Program. Members of the legal and investigative staff are available 24 hours a day to assist local law enforcement with their investigations. The SARA Unit has also adopted a vertical prosecution approach, whereby prosecutors assigned to a case will handle it from start through trial. This allows for a more victim-centered approach. A victim is given the stability of having to deal with a single investigative and prosecution team, thereby sparing the victim the need to endlessly repeat the details of the sexually abusive act to countless people. This approach protects the victim from the need to continually relive the abusive act. The SARA Unit was involved in many cutting-edge legal issues, including the use of DNA evidence and internet-related crimes. With the establishment of a national DNA data bank by the FBI, Essex County was the first county prosecutor's office in New Jersey to have a positive match on a previously unidentified offender, as well as the first county prosecutor's office in the state to have a positive match on multiple cases committed by a serial sex offender.



2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the SARA Unit received 509 referrals for investigation.

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Notable Cases

State v. Kervin Joseph-Michel – Found guilty by jury trial of first-degree kidnapping, first-degree aggravated sexual assault, second-degree endangering the welfare of a child. The defendant is pending sentencing and is pending trial on four other aggravated sexual assault cases.

State v. Yenger Medina-Gomez – Entered guilty plea, then sentenced to 10 years NJSP with 85%, pursuant to NERA. Subject to Megan's Law and PSL.

State v. Esteban Barrett – Found guilty by jury trial, then sentenced to 10 years NJSP with 85%, pursuant to NERA.

State v. Todd Anderson – Entered guilty plea and will be sentenced on Friday 1/31/25 to 20 years NJSP with 85%, pursuant to NERA. Subject to Megan's Law and PSL.

State v. Mohamed Sakar – Entered guilty plea for 12 Years NJSP w/ 85% NERA, Megan's Law Registration and Parole Supervision for Life.

SEXUAL ASSAULT NURSE EXAMINER PROGRAM

On May 4, 2001, Assembly Bill 2083 was signed into law, providing for the establishment of a statewide Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) program. By doing so, New Jersey became one of the first states to develop a comprehensive program to address the needs of sexual assault victims. The law required that each county prosecutor appoint or designate a certified sexual assault nurse examiner to serve as program coordinator for that county. The legislation also established a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) program, which provides a team approach to assisting assault victims. The SART members include specially trained local police officers, nurse and/or physician examiners, and victim advocates. These programs are now being implemented in Essex County.

The overall goals are:

- To ensure timely and accurate collection of forensic evidence, thereby allowing for just determinations in sexual assault cases.
- To enhance the assessment and documentation of any medical trauma sustained by the sexual assault victim.
- To create compassionate and sensitive ways to address the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of sexual assault victims.
- To coordinate the efforts of local police, hospitals, prosecutors, rape crisis centers

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and service providers to improve the quality of care and services offered to sexual assault victims.

The FNE/SART Program utilizes a victim-centered approach to sexual assault cases. The overall program, which dramatically improves community response to sexual assault, offers immediate and effective attention to rape victims by nurses and /or physicians who have been specially trained to provide a compassionate, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive forensic evaluation and medical treatment. A FNE will perform a forensic examination following standardized procedures to collect and preserve relevant evidence once the victim's immediate medical needs have been addressed.

Additional support is provided by the SART members to address the legal, medical, psychological, and emotional needs of the victim. Similar programs in the State have been proven to provide highly reliable evidence to maintain aggressive prosecution of sexual assault cases. Currently, the Essex County FNE/SART program services six county hospital sites, and forensic examiners are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to the medical/forensic needs of sexual assault survivors. The Essex County Prosecutor's Office has received grants from the New Jersey State Office of Victim Witness Advocacy to help develop the program and to assume certain operating costs. The FNE/SART Coordinator is responsible for the operation and management of the countywide program.

2024 Accomplishments

The FNE Program is run by Nancy Cox, RN, FN-CSA, CFN. She has been the program director since 2021 and since then has taken the Program to new heights by working tirelessly to recruit new nurses and to ensure that they maintain the high level of accreditation needed to perform their functions. In 2024, Vivi Nguyen was hired as the fulltime FNE/ SART Assistant Coordinator to assist Nancy Cox in running the Program. Prior to becoming the Assistant Coordinator, Vivi Nguyen served as a SANE in the Program for approximately 8 years.

Currently, the FNE Program has thirteen nurses that are on-call 24-7 to meet the needs of victims. The success of the program is evidenced by the frequency with which the program was used. In 2024, in Essex County there were a total of 311 FNE/SART activations at participating hospitals in response to the needs of sexual assault victims. Included in that number were 48 pediatric cases. There were 256 female patients and 55 male patients.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TEAM

Human trafficking is modern day slavery that controls and exploits vulnerable members of our community. Victims are often lured into forced labor, sex trafficking and other forms of servitude using force, coercion, abduction, fraud, and other methods. The victims range from juvenile runaways to undocumented immigrants. The

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New Jersey Human Trafficking statute, N.J.S.A. 2C:13-8, is one of the most comprehensive statutes in the country, aimed at eradicating this criminal behavior. The Human Trafficking Team is led by a senior assistant prosecutor and senior detective. Investigations use the full resources of the Special Victims Unit as well as the Narcotics Task Force. The team shares intelligence and conducts joint investigations with multi-county, statewide and national human trafficking entities. It is common for an operation to include the New Jersey State Police, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, NJDCF, and allied professionals in the field such as Polaris. By having the Human Trafficking Team as part of the Special Victims Unit, the victims receive the best therapeutic services possible.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Human Trafficking Team investigated 16 cases.

ELDER ABUSE TEAM

The Elder Abuse Team is led by a senior assistant prosecutor, who is also a registered nurse, and a senior SVU detective, and staffed by SVU detectives and Victim Witness Advocates. The team uses the services of experts in fields involving the unique medical and emotional needs of the elderly. The team investigates and prosecutes cases involving physical abuse, neglect, fraud, and other crimes against those who are over 62-years old. The team also works with the Financial Crimes Unit and other units within the ECPO to enhance investigations.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Elder Abuse Team investigated eight cases involving alleged physical abuse, sexual abuse, and fraud on elderly individuals.

BIAS CRIMES UNIT

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office recognizes the distinctive fear that is generated, and unique trauma suffered by victims of bias crimes. The ECPO considers bias crimes to be serious crimes that can affect an entire community. Bias crimes are aggressively prosecuted through vertical prosecution by the Bias Crimes Unit. In 2013, the Unit was placed within the Special Victims Unit to better serve the victims through the most comprehensive investigations possible and provide the best therapeutic support for the victims. By law, a bias crime occurs when a person, group or their property is targeted for intimidation based upon race, color, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, or ethnicity. A person convicted of a bias motivated crime is subject to enhanced punishment. The Bias Crimes Unit is led by a designated assistant prosecutor and detective. Bias crimes are investigated by detectives trained to conduct interviews in a sensitive manner. Victims are also referred to counseling and other assistance programs.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the Bias Crimes Unit investigated 131 cases.

Notable Cases

State v. Martin Neilin – Defendant pled guilty to third-degree terroristic threats.

State v. Erick Liang – Defendant charged with fourth-degree bias – received a probationary term.

MEGAN'S LAW UNIT

The ECPO Megan's Law Unit is the busiest in New Jersey with approximately 1,600 sex offenders residing within the county at any given time, more than in any other county in the state. The ECPO established its Megan's Law Unit in January 1995 in response to New Jersey legislation designed to protect the public from convicted sex offenders. The Registration and Community Notification Laws, collectively known as "Megan's Law," established a system of registration, notification, and supervision of sex offenders. The law was named after Megan Kanka, a seven-year-old girl who was sexually assaulted and murdered by her neighbor, Jesse Timmendequas. Unbeknownst to her parents, Timmendequas, who lived across the street from their family, was a twice-convicted sex offender for sexually assaulting a five-year-old girl and a seven-year-old girl. The Kanka family was similarly unaware that Timmendequas' two roommates had also been convicted of sexually assaulting young children. On the date of her murder, Megan was riding her bicycle on her block with her parents' permission and encountered Timmendequas. He lured her into his home on the promise of showing her a puppy and once inside, sexually assaulted and murdered her. The promise of Megan's Law was to create a system of registration to ensure that the public is aware of the presence of sex offenders in their communities.

Pursuant to the system of **registration** established, a sex offender convicted of a qualifying sex offense is required to appear in person and register at the police department in the municipality in which they live. During the registration process, offenders are photographed and fingerprinted, provide information including proof of their residence, employment, and report whether minors reside at their home, and sign a form acknowledging their obligations pursuant to Megan's Law. These obligations include but are not limited to registering and re-registering, advising the police department where they are registered of their intent to move 10 days in advance, and advising the police department in the municipality/state to which they are moving that they intend to move there, and registering in the new municipality/state. Pursuant to the statute, failing to register is a third-degree crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

The **registration requirement** begins when an offender is released from a correctional facility or on the date that they are sentenced if they receive a non-custodial sentence

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(e.g. probation or suspended sentence). That is, offenders' obligations to register begin when they are out in the community, not while they are in custody. New Jersey residents who were convicted of sexual offenses in other states or jurisdictions may be required to register even if there was no such requirement in the state of the conviction or their prior residence. In these circumstances, the prosecutor's office reviews the offender's out-of-state, federal or military conviction and determines whether the elements of the crime of conviction are similar to the elements of an offense for which registration would be required in New Jersey. These offenders receive notice of their obligation to register and have the right to a judicial hearing to challenge the prosecutor's office's determination.

Once an offender is registered at an address, the **tiering and notification** phase begins. Pursuant to the statute and ensuing Attorney General guidelines, the level of community notification, or stated otherwise, who in the community will be notified of the offender's presence, depends upon the offender's "tier." In New Jersey, sex offenders are classified as Tier 1 (low risk), Tier 2 (moderate risk), or Tier 3 (high risk). It is important to note that an offender's tier solely governs who (if any) in the community will be notified and how, but the tier is *not* associated with any conditions or restrictions upon the offender. All Megan's Law offenders are subject to the same registration obligations, and all are prohibited from participating in youth-serving organizations. However, beyond that, simply being subject to Megan's Law does not impose restrictions upon where a convicted sex offender may work or reside or with whom. For example, a Tier 3 offender is not subject to any more restrictions or conditions pursuant to Megan's Law than a Tier 1 offender. Restrictions on where a convicted sex offender can live, work, etc. are based on conditions that may be imposed by parole or probation, if the offender is supervised. Non-supervised offenders will solely be subject to the obligations and prohibition set forth under Megan's Law.

The determination of an offender's tier begins with a comprehensive review by prosecutors in the Unit of the relevant discovery for the offender's sex offense(s). This review can include reports and evidence from prior sex offenses, the offender's prison records, psychiatric/psychological evaluations, and conduct while supervised by parole or probation. Provided the State has sufficient relevant evidence, their assessment can include sex offenses for which the offender was not convicted. During the evaluation the prosecutors complete what is known as the "Registrant Risk Assessment Scale" or "RRAS."

The **RRAS** was established by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General and is mandated for use statewide in tiering sex offenders pursuant to Megan's Law. The RRAS is a weighted scale with 13 categories, where each category has a designated total number of possible points and certain categories carry a higher possible point range than others. The most heavily weighted categories are those relating to the crime itself, such as the degree of force used (e.g. whether a weapon or physical force was used), the degree of sexual contact (e.g. sexual penetration or contact) and the age of the victim (e.g. younger than 13, 13-18, and over 18 years of age). Other categories relate to the relationship between the offender and the victim (e.g. family member, stranger, acquaintance, etc.), the number of victims, the duration of the offensive behavior, the

length of time since their last offense, and the offender's history of antisocial acts, which have the next highest number of possible points. The remaining categories focus on the offender themselves, including their participation and response to sex offender treatment, substance abuse history, therapeutic and residential support, employment, and educational status.

The RRAS requires the prosecutor to assess a score of low, moderate or high risk for each of the 13 categories, where each level of risk carries a different number of points. Adding the total scores in each category results in the final number which corresponds with a tier: 0-36 points is Tier 1; 37 to 73 points is Tier 2; and 74 – 111 points is Tier 3. The tier or level of risk determines the scope of community notification. Sex offenders who are deemed to be **Tier 1** offenders are considered low risk, and community notification is limited to the New Jersey State Police and to police departments where the offender lives and works - no notice is provided to the community and those offenders are not posted on the New Jersey Sex Offender Internet Registry (see below for an exception). Tier 1 offenders with New Jersey sex offense convictions do not generally require a court hearing because there is no notification to the community, and this determination can be made solely by the Prosecutor's Office. However, Tier 1 offenders with out-of-state sex offense convictions are entitled to a hearing and a judicial ruling on whether they are subject to Megan's Law and required to register in New Jersey. Additionally, since Tier 1 sex offenders who were convicted after July 1, 2014, who were found to be repetitive and compulsive are published on the Internet Registry, they are entitled to a hearing and a judicial ruling.

Tier 2 sex offenders are considered moderate risk, and notification is provided to law enforcement, schools, day-care centers, women's shelters and registered community organizations within a designated geographical area, which is based on the offender's registered address and place of employment (where applicable). Some but *not all* Tier 2 sex offenders are posted on the Internet registry. **Tier 3** offenders are considered high-risk, so notification is provided to the recipients of notification of Tier 2 offenders, *plus* to residences, businesses, schools, day care centers, women's shelters and registered community organizations within the offender's "likely to encounter" zone as specified in the court's tiering order, which is executed by law enforcement officials through a door-to-door law community notification. All Tier 3 offenders are also published to the Internet registry. As of July 1, 2014, all offenders, regardless of their tier classification, who were convicted of certain sex offenses whose criminal conduct was deemed "repetitive and compulsive" in the pre-sentence evaluation for the sex offense conviction will be posted on the Internet registry. It is important to note that since notification is based on the location of the offender's residence, this notification (and tiering) process can only proceed if an offender is currently registered.

After prosecutors have completed their review and the RRAS, they file a motion with the designated Megan's Law judge detailing the State's position on the offender's proposed tier and scope of community notification. Included with its moving papers are supporting documentation including the discovery from the offender's prior sex offenses, psychological/psychiatric evaluations, and other relevant court documents. Once the

INVESTIGATION UNITS

hearing is scheduled the offenders are hand-served with notice of the court date and are provided with the discovery and RRAS which informs them of the State's proposed tier and level of community notification including whether the State is seeking to post the offender on the Internet registry.

During the tier hearing, at which offenders are entitled to be represented by counsel, after Assistant Prosecutor presents the State's proposed tier, the offender's counsel can contest the State's submissions and findings as to the appropriate level of community notification. The assistant prosecutors are not, however, restricted to the total score in the RRAS and corresponding tier and can also ask the court to consider additional relevant information that they submit is not adequately captured by any of the categories. In certain cases, the State can argue, for example, that an offender with an RRAS score of a Tier 1 or Tier 2 offender should nevertheless be classified as a Tier 2 or 3 offender with the corresponding level of community notification. Similarly, the offender can argue that the RRAS score is not accurate and that there should be no community notification, or that the scope of the notification should be restricted, including asking the court not to order their publication to the Internet registry.

As to community **notification** via the New Jersey Sex Offender Internet Registry, an offender's final score and tier alone may not govern whether they are subject to that level of notification as there are fact-sensitive **exceptions** that the court may rely upon that prohibit the State from publishing an offender to the registry. These exceptions include offenders deemed moderate risk whose sole sex offense was a juvenile adjudication; offenders whose sole sex offense involved a victim to whom they were related by blood or affinity to the third degree or were a parent/guardian within the household; or where the offender's sole sex offense was for aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault, aggravated criminal sexual contact or criminal sexual contact (if the victim was a minor) and the offender's actions were illegal solely because the victim could not legally consent due to the victim's age. Pursuant to current case law, offenders with a single conviction who resided in the same household as the victim may still be excluded from publication to the registry even if they admit having sexually assaulted the same victim on more than one occasion.

Once the court issues an order designating an offender's tier, the Prosecutor's Office is then responsible for executing the community notification set forth in the court's order (if any). This involves preparing and distributing the sex offender **notification** flyers to the community for each offender, as ordered, including posting the offender to the Sex Offender Internet Registry. For Tier 3 High Risk offenders, law enforcement is authorized to execute a door-to-door notification during which notification flyers are distributed within the geographic location specified in the Order. During door-to-door notifications, adult residents are hand-served with sex offender notification flyers and letters are left for residents who are not home during the time of the notification advising them of where to obtain the information. Door-to-door notifications are resource-intensive and require the participation and reassignment of numerous law enforcement officers in addition to the resources expended on the planning and execution stages of the notification.

INVESTIGATION UNITS

Due to the transient nature of a significant portion of the sex offender population in Essex County, the number of court hearings required and conducted can be voluminous. The tiering process does not end after the initial tiering of an offender is completed by the issuance of a court Order. By law, the prosecutor's office must move for a new court hearing each time an offender for whom community notification was ordered moves to a new address within Essex County. When offenders move within the county, the Megan's Law Unit must seek a new hearing and submit a new risk assessment to the court to obtain a new court Order designating the tier and corresponding level of notification based on the location of the offender's new address. Transient sex offenders consume time, resources and manpower spent on locating, tracking and verifying their whereabouts on a continuing basis, and which can change during the tiering process. Once prepared and scheduled, tiering hearings and termination motions can be adjourned or withdrawn by the filing party, whether the State or offender's counsel, for several reasons including recent changes in the offender's custodial status or place of residence or the offender's failure to register. In those cases, motions may be refiled depending on the circumstances.

In addition to creating a system of registration and notification, "Megan's Law" also established a special type of **supervision**. Sex offenders convicted of qualifying crimes are, in addition to their sentence, also sentenced to a "special sentence of Community Supervision for Life," which was later amended to "Parole Supervision for Life." Pursuant to the statute, these offenders are supervised by the New Jersey State Parole Board upon release from custody or on their sentencing date if the offender receives a non-custodial or suspended sentence.

The Megan's Law Unit is also responsible for handling registrants' **motions to terminate** their Megan's Law obligations, and to terminate their supervision pursuant to Community or Parole Supervision for Life. In New Jersey, registrants who meet the statutory requirements can apply for termination of their Megan's Law obligations after 15 years "offense free." Being offense free however, does not ensure that the court will grant the motion as the offender must also show that he does not pose a risk to public safety. A disorderly persons or petty disorderly persons conviction during this 15-year period will disqualify an offender from termination of their Megan's Law registration obligations. Unlike the requirements to terminate Megan's Law obligations, offenders seeking to terminate their supervision under Community or Parole Supervision for Life are permitted to apply for termination if the offender can demonstrate that they were not convicted of a new *felony* crime during any 15-year period following their conviction or release from incarceration. Those offenders must also establish that they do not pose a risk to public safety, but disorderly persons and petty disorderly persons offenses do not prevent them from filing for termination. Motions filed by offenders can be withdrawn based on information developed by the prosecutor's office that affects their eligibility for termination. In addition to handling Megan's Law tier hearings and termination motions in civil court, the unit also handles **criminal cases** through indictment for offenders charged with Failure to Register pursuant to Megan's Law and those charged with Violations of Community Supervision for Life (CSL). The unit regularly moves for pre-trial detention of sex offenders who have violated CSL and who fail to register pursuant to Megan's Law.

INVESTIGATION UNITS

The unit also fulfills an advisory role to New Jersey State Parole Board officers and to local municipal police departments in the administration of Megan's Law and criminal investigations into the above-listed charges. Members of the unit, in conjunction with the New Jersey State Police, host an annual daylong training seminar for all municipal, county and state law enforcement personnel who are responsible for sex offender registrations in Essex County.

Because it can be a lifetime obligation, Megan's Law files are only closed when a registered sex offender dies, is relieved by way of a court Order of all Megan's Law obligations or moves to another state in which they register pursuant to the laws of that state. Thus, the overall number of Megan's Law cases or files being handled by the Unit increases on an annual basis. The tiering and community notification process described herein must be repeated whenever the offender changes their residence at any time after their tier designation and the State must file a new motion seeking the court's authorization to notify a different geographical area based upon the new address. The unit must also re-file motions when offenders are convicted of additional sex offenses or upon other material changes justifying a new evaluation and hearing.

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, more than 200 tiering hearings were held before the designated Megan's Law Judge, with court dates scheduled approximately twice each month. During that time, the court issued more than 150 orders designating each offender's tier. The ECPO Megan's Law unit, in conjunction with the police departments of the municipalities in which the offenders resided, executed 15 door-to-door community notifications, more than any other county in the state. Also in 2024, the unit handled approximately 26 termination motions filed by the offenders seeking to terminate their Megan's Law obligations and/or Community or Parole Supervision for Life.

Business Administration Unit

The staff of the Business Administration Unit oversees a \$42.5 million operating budget, along with Essex County Prosecutor's Office's criminal forfeiture accounts. Additionally, the Unit oversees ECPO's eight major on-going grant-funded programs and several special grants totaling more than \$2 million per year. The Unit provides crucial infrastructure support services at ECPO's six office sites, including facility management, supply distribution, inventory, purchasing, budgeting, personnel records, time keeping, payroll, employee assistance, and criminal case file storage and retrieval. Our capital equipment inventory — including copiers, telephones, fax machines, desk units, printers and file storage cabinets — is continually monitored to identify and prioritize replacement needs.



Financial Management Agent Eapen Mathen

The Unit assists the Prosecutor and the executive management team with long-term planning and strategic-decision support, including staffing plans, budgeting decisions, compensation policies, and capital spending/infrastructure decisions.

The Business Administration Unit's support functions also include:

- Cooperation with program and financial auditors

SUPPORT UNITS

- Workers' Compensation reporting
- Office renovation and safety improvements
- Personnel policy oversight, monitoring and assistance
- Purchase request processing and shipping receipt
- Supply storage, inventory, and distribution
- Liaison to County, State, and Federal government offices

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, The Business Administration Unit maintained its key role in budget planning, procurement oversight, hiring processing, personnel management, facilities repair and improvements, and grant funding oversight.

Record Room

The Record Room is a key part of the critical infrastructure that forms the backbone of ECPO, responsible for managing all the criminal files opened by ECPO. All 21 towns in Essex County send indictable offenses electronically to the Record Room. The complaints are processed by Central Judicial Processing (CJP), and AP supervisors then assign the cases to various Assistant Prosecutors. Together, the Records Room and CJP have 14 employees, and total cases processed for 2024 were 12,499. The caseload is so extensive that the office maintains files in three locations: the basement of Veteran's Courthouse, the third floor of the Leroy Smith Building, and a warehouse in Belleville, N.J.



The ECPO Record Room is responsible for storing, tracking, and archiving thousands of criminal case files generated each year in Essex County. The Record Room plays a critical role in helping ECPO carry out its responsibilities within the criminal justice system.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community Justice Unit

The Community Justice Unit promotes awareness of the role and function of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. The Unit acts as a liaison between law enforcement and Essex County residents by attending community meetings to address concerns related to crime, substance abuse, and prevention efforts. The Unit is dedicated to creating and executing programs aimed at preventing teen delinquency. The Unit also assists residents fighting drug addiction through the **Operation Helping Hand** initiative.

The Community Justice Unit provides workshops on important topics including:

- Overview of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office
- Careers in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office
- Criminal Justice System
- Interacting with Law Enforcement Officers
- Gang Awareness
- Internet Safety
- Operation Helping Hand
- Sexual Assault Prevention

2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, ECPO held its annual **Summer Youth Internship Program** for the 23rd consecutive year, providing high school students with valuable exposure to careers in public service. The Summer Youth Internship Program took place from July 5 through August 2. Thirty-two high school juniors from Essex County participated in this informative program that provides hands-on experience at the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. The program included workshops on decision making, substance abuse prevention, teen dating violence prevention, and internet safety. Interns participated in an art and poetry contest aimed at bringing awareness to the opioid epidemic. The interns also attended college and career readiness workshops and interacted with professionals from federal, state and local law enforcement. The program also featured college tours and field trips to New York and Philadelphia. At the end of the program, interns took part in a mock trial.

The community relations specialist along with representatives from **Morris Prevention is Key**, recovery support specialists held numerous informational and outreach events in 2024. These "operations" were aimed providing individuals with information on substance treatment services under the **Operation Helping Hand** program.

January 24, 2024: The Unit participated in Essex County's Homeless Connect Day held at the Codey Arena in West Orange. **Homeless Connect Day** is a community outreach initiative that provides homeless individuals with information on available resources. **Operation Helping Hand** engaged with over 100 individuals.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

March 21, 2024: The Unit continued its participation in ECPO's **Operation Helping Hand** by sponsoring a non-arrest operation outside the Irvington Neighborhood Improvement Corporation in Irvington. The Unit interacted with approximately 25 individuals. Six individuals expressed interest in treatment and two women were placed in the Elev8 (Elevate) Detox program.

March 22, 2024: The Unit led a non-arrest operation at the Irvington Neighborhood Improvement Corporation. It interacted with approximately 15 people. Two people requested services, and one woman was transported to the detox treatment unit at Carewell Health in East Orange.



Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams

May 2, 2024: The Unit held a non-arrest operation outside of the Irvington Neighborhood Improvement Corporation. ECPO staff and recovery specialists from CARES interacted with 20 individuals and five individuals expressed interest in treatment.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

June 6, 2024: The Unit led a non-arrest operation on Clinton Avenue and 17th Street in Newark. ECPO staff and recovery specialists interacted with approximately 20 individuals and three individuals expressed interest in participating in treatment.

September 10, 2024: The Unit led a non-arrest operation outside the Irvington Neighborhood Improvement Corporation. The Unit interacted with approximately 25 people and seven individuals expressed interest in treatment.

September 17, 2024: The Unit led a non-arrest operation outside a small, abandoned lot on Astor Street in Newark. ECPO staff and recovery support specialists interacted with approximately 15 individuals. Four individuals expressed interest in obtaining treatment.

September 18, 2024: The Unit provided information on Operation Helping Hand at the Solutions Opioid & Fentanyl Conference. The event was held inside Immaculate Conception School in Montclair.

September 24, 2024: The Unit led a non-arrest operation in Essex County's Senior Wellness Day at the Codey Arena in West Orange. The community relations specialist interacted with hundreds of seniors and provided information on Operation Helping Hand as well as other community outreach initiatives sponsored by the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

October 3, 2024: The Unit participated in a family resource event at Harriet Tubman Park in Newark.

October 8, 2024: The Unit led a non-arrest model in Newark. ECPO staff and recovery support specialists interacted with approximately 20 people and six people expressed interest in treatment.

October 24, 2024: The Unit participated in a health and wellness event at Newark Vocational High School. The specialist provided information on Operation Helping Hand and other ECPO community outreach initiatives.

November 26, 2024: ECPO staff joined members of the Newark Police Department for a turkey giveaway outside the department's 5th precinct.

December 18, 2024: The Unit held its annual youth conference called: "What's it All About?" World Against Violence (W.A.V.). The youth conference addressed issues impacting middle school students. The conference was held at the Student Center of the New Jersey Institute of Technology. 432 students from middle schools throughout Essex County attended. Students took part in workshops that focused on making positive choices, substance abuse prevention, college preparation, career exploration, and cyber safety. Representatives from various agencies and non-profits were on hand to speak with the students.

OPERATION HELPING HAND



Operation Helping Hand is an initiative sponsored and funded by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office. The goal is to fight the opioid crisis by disrupting the cycle that causes addicts to commit crimes to support their drug habits. Working with local law enforcement, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office has identified drug "hot spots" – places known for drug activity – and targets those areas for arrests or intervention. When drug users are arrested, they are immediately offered the opportunity to enter drug treatment. Such opportunities are also offered to drug users who are not arrested but seek treatment. Arrangements are made for them to get transportation and other services. Participants are tracked as they go through the treatment process. The program also includes law enforcement training, community outreach, and public awareness measures in Essex County.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



ECPO at Lincoln Park, speaking with residents about Operation Helping Hand, a diversion program where law enforcement officers connect those suffering from drug addiction with recovery services.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Nicole Graves-Watson, Community Justice Coordinator, at an annual event at Essex Community College connecting those who are homeless with service providers.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

REACHING OUT TO ESSEX COUNTY YOUTH



The Essex County Prosecutor's Office sponsors an annual summer internship program for county high school students. Community Relations Specialist and Internship Program Coordinator Nicole Graves-Watson, Prosecutor Stephens and Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams join the interns on the steps of the Essex County Historic Courthouse.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



ECPO's summer interns on a field trip to New York City's Museum of Arts and Design.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



ECPO's summer interns visit the Liberty Bell during a trip to historic Philadelphia.



Middle school students from across Essex County participated in the annual ECPO “World Against Violence” youth conference at NJIT in December. Experts discussed internet safety, college and career goals, as well as the dangers of gun violence and gang life.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Prosecutor Stephens addresses the 2024 “World Against Violence” youth conference at NJIT. Prosecutor Stephens talked to the students about the importance of education and careers in law enforcement.



Media Relations Office

The Public Information officer oversees media communications for the ECPO, the largest prosecutor's office in the state. The responsibilities of the Public Information Officer are:

- Serving as lead spokesperson for the Essex County Prosecutor's Office
- Maintaining daily contact with print and broadcast media
- Drafting press releases and coordinating press conferences
- Managing ECPO's social media channels and website
- Drafting the ECPO Annual Report

2024 Accomplishments

The **Public Information Officer** secured national coverage from broadcast and print media for the ECPO. The coverage informed residents about arrests, investigations, indictments, and convictions. The Public Information Officer also managed press conferences on high profile cases which were attended by local and national television networks such as ABC, CBS, NBC, News12 as well major print and online publications including the Star Ledger, The New York Times, and The New York Post.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

PRESS CONFERENCES: Informing the Public



Press conferences are essential to keeping the public informed about safety and law enforcement efforts throughout Essex County. ECPO holds press conferences as needed to notify the public about major investigations, arrests and convictions.



Victim-Witness Advocacy Office

The Essex County Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy was started by the Essex County Prosecutor's Office in 1982 pursuant to New Jersey law, which requires the county Victim-Witness Coordinator to implement and provide services to crime victims. The Office's primary mandate is to fulfill the provisions of the New Jersey Constitution and New Jersey statutes which require:

- Crime victims are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect.
- Victims are informed and consulted about matters such as plea bargaining.
- Victims are given the right to be heard at all stages of the criminal justice process.

The Essex County Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy supports victims and witnesses, especially those who live in Essex County's lower income neighborhoods. These victims are most at risk of experiencing violent crime and are most vulnerable to economic and personal disruption. The Office helps them to find resources for food, clothing, shelter, health care, employment, transportation, and daycare. It also supports victims and witnesses in coping with the psychological trauma of crime and connects them with professional help when needed. The Office helps victims and witnesses understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities within the criminal justice system. In addition, it offers ongoing communication and coordination about case progress and their involvement in legal proceedings.

As appropriate, the Office accompanies victims to court. Office personnel also assists victims in obtaining economic compensation for their losses through insurance, restitution and the Victims of Crime Compensation Office. The Office assures victims and witnesses that it is equally concerned with their overall well-being as well as with convicting the offender.

The Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy has qualified staff with extensive training and professional counseling experience in emergency assistance, crisis management and interpersonal violence. The staff includes a Victim-Witness Coordinator, Victim-Witness Advocates and Clerical Assistants. The coordinator meets bi-weekly with the advocates to review and evaluate cases, discuss progress and develop service plans to ensure procedural and programmatic compliance with state and federal regulations. The Office is supported in part by state and federal government grants.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



2024 Accomplishments:

In 2024, the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office assisted 9,874 new victims and witnesses, initiating approximately 72,400 items of correspondence on their behalf.

The Unit continued to expand its formal relocation program in 2024, assisting about 1,800 clients and their families. This program directly supports victims and witnesses who have been threatened, intimidated or harassed because they have provided information to law enforcement about organized crime, gang-related, and domestic violence cases. Trained advocates provided over 2,600 units of services to those seeking relocation assistance. Essex County victim-survivors received referrals to social service agencies offering emergency shelter placement, transitional and permanent housing, food, clothing, security, and protection. The advocates also worked closely with local housing authorities, welfare agencies, Social Security offices and school districts to ensure that the victim/witness is fully and successfully integrated into their new living environment.

Unit staff continued to enhance the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit's portal on the Office's general website throughout the year. The Victim-Witness portal is interactive, and user-friendly. The website includes information on the Crime Victims' Bill of Rights amendments, victim notification, crisis reaction, domestic violence restraining orders, and tips for witness testimony. The website also includes the V.I.N.E. (Victim

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Information Notification Everyday) Program, an automated system that notifies registered victims of an inmate's custody/release status while housed at the Essex County Jail or in custody of the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

The Victim Witness Unit also conducted and/or participated in ten community outreach forums throughout 2024. Over 500 Essex County residents and community partners as well as high school and college students received information on the services provided through the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office.



ECPO Victim-Witness Coordinator Pamela McCauley (left) and Prosecutor Stephens with ECPO Victim-Witness Office staff members at the Montclair Jazz Fest.

The Sanctuary Program, an intimate partner violence training initiative, is an intensive, interactive **100-hour training program** equips community members to provide crisis intervention and outreach services to victims of domestic violence related assault, sexual assault, child abuse, stalking, property crimes, as well as survivors of domestic violence-related homicide victims. The course is presented in a basic and advanced format. Upon completion, volunteers from religious institutions, local police departments, social service/ emergency agencies, and other Essex County groups will provide immediate, culturally sensitive outreach to domestic violence victims-survivors

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

and their families. 18 participants graduated in 2024. More than 700 community residents have completed the program since its inception in 2012.

Finally, in December 2024, Unit staff coordinated the ECPO's annual "Christmas Holiday Toy Drive" for families in need, many of which were assisted by the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit. Through the generosity of office staff, four local social services agencies received toys, gift cards, and monetary donations, that helped each agency expand their holiday outreach efforts for families in Essex County.

