ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE
2025 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

Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams, Chief of Detectives Mitchell G. McGuire III, First Assistant Prosecutor Alexander Albu, Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II

2025 was a significant year for ECPO's investigative unit. Nine new detectives were hired, and six supervisors were promoted to the ranks of sergeant, lieutenant, and captain.

Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II and Chief of Detectives Mitchell McGuire with promoted investigative supervisors

The Honorable Jamel K. Semper, U.S. District Court Judge for the District of New Jersey, served as keynote speaker and honoree at ECPO's 14th Annual Black History Month Celebration on February 20, 2025. Judge Semper served as an assistant prosecutor at ECPO for five years before moving to the U.S. Attorney's Office in 2018.

First Assistant Prosecutor Alexander Albu, Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams, Honorable Jamel K. Semper, Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II, and Chief of Detectives Mitchell McGuire

Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II addresses new assistant prosecutors at their swearing-in. 16 new APs were hired in 2025.

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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 slightly from 13,611 in 2024 to 13,642 in 2025. 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 decreased slightly from 14,531 in 2024 to 14,314 for 2025. In addition, the total defendants indicted increased from 3,216 in 2024 to 3,613 in 2025. In 2025, 61.1 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 754 juveniles from 1,457 cases in 2024 to 605 juveniles in 1,118 cases in 2025.

(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

I trust that you are well and thank you for taking time to review this document, which attempts to offer a synopsis of the work being performed at the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. During the past year I am pleased to report that this office has remained steadfast in its efforts to do our jobs with professionalism, integrity, and ethics, while remaining committed to seeking, serving, and doing justice, rather than simply securing a conviction at any cost.

I have playfully remarked at times that our goal is to enhance public safety such that we put ourselves out of business. Although there is little chance of that happening there is one key piece of good news - thankfully, following the national trend, homicides are down! ECPO ended last year with a record low 45 homicides. Without question, this encouraging statistic is the result of successful long-standing collaborations between this office and our local, state, and federal partners. Nonetheless, our units remain focused on our core responsibilities and are more active than ever. For instance, in 2025 the Adult Trial Team completed 57 trials and earned 63.2% guilty verdicts. In addition, our detectives boast an incredible 2025 closeout rate of 95% (well above the national average of 75%).

ECPO's commitment to justice requires that we engage numerous non-traditional strategies in the name of seeking public safety. We continue to robustly support prosecution diversion programs like Mental Health Court, Recovery Court (or "Drug Court" as it commonly called), Pre-Trial Intervention, and Expungement units. These efforts may provide the best opportunity to achieve accountability for crimes and other offenses and at the same time offer community requested alternatives that acknowledge that there are recognized root causes that may be the reason for such behavior and, if adequately addressed, can reduce recidivism.

Moving forward, ECPO will seek opportunities to further expand our focus on public safety. We are particularly interested in addressing difficult issues involving the safety of the elderly and children as well as juvenile justice, which deserve increased efforts and new and innovative strategies.

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 2025. 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.

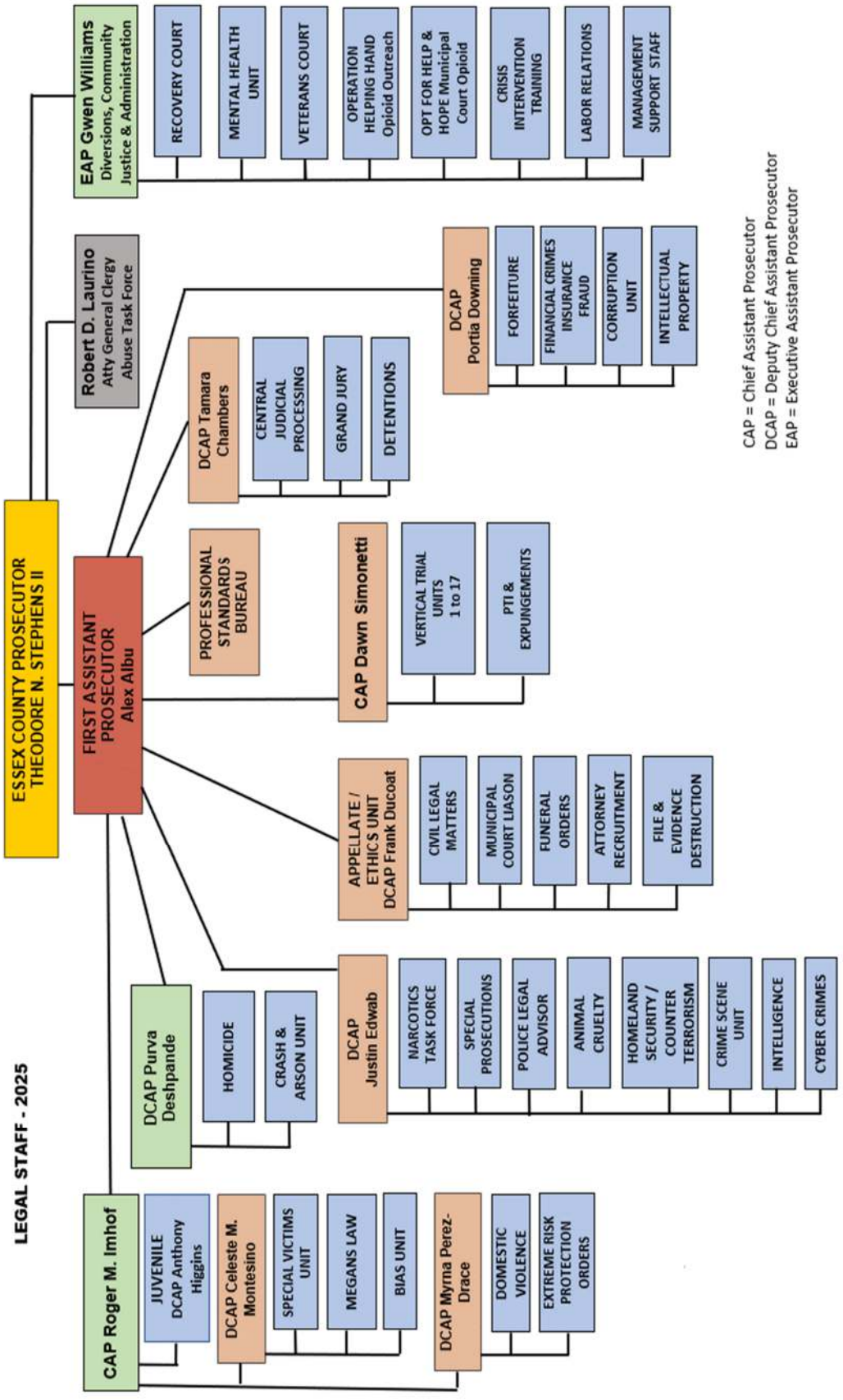
In 2023, Acting Prosecutor Stephens guided the office through ongoing post-COVID adjustments affecting the broader law enforcement system in both Essex County and the State of New Jersey. While the impact of COVID-19 remained a notable factor, most employees returned to in-person work as strict safety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

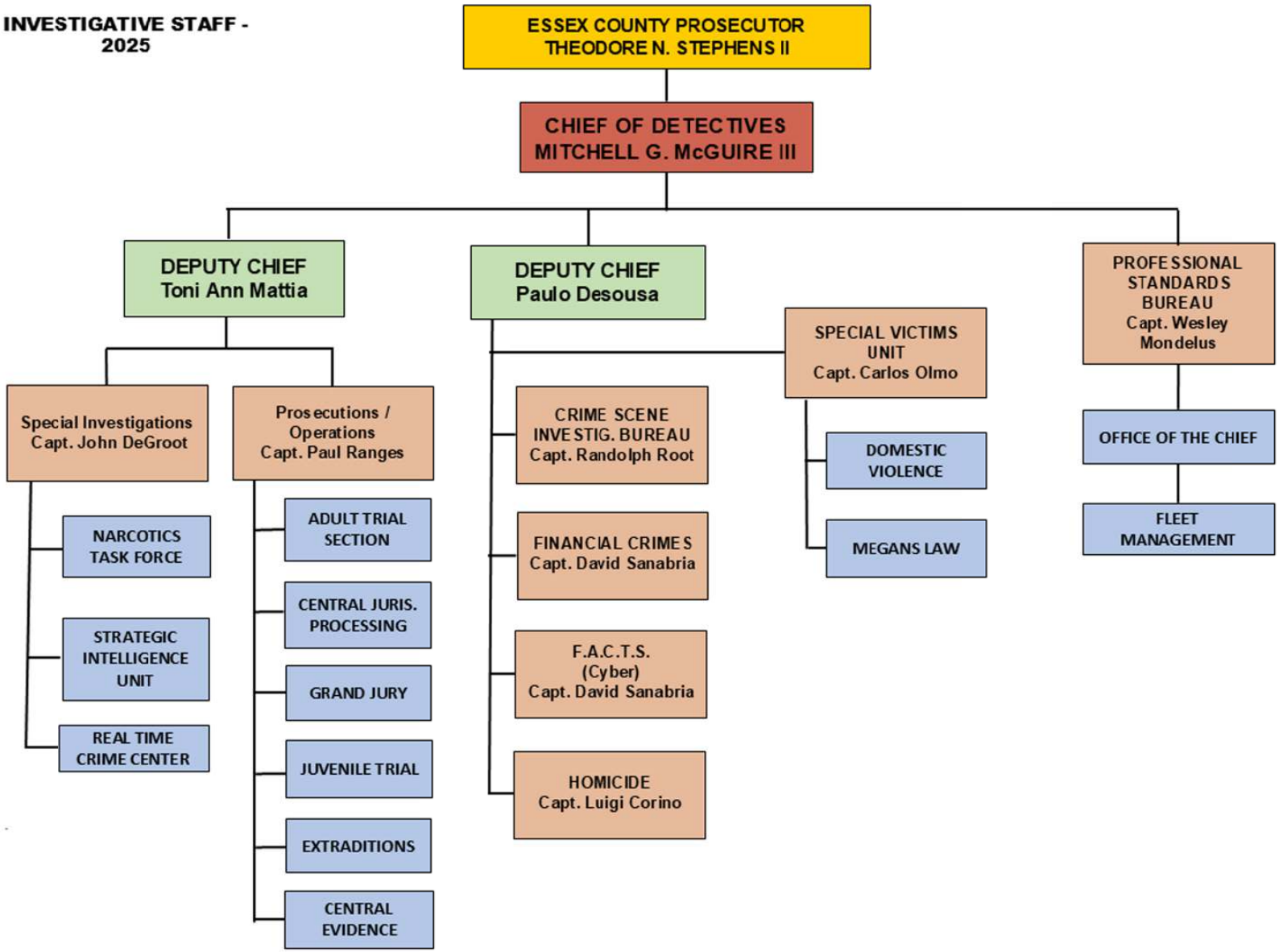
On February 16, 2024, Theodore N. Stephens II was officially sworn in as the Prosecutor of Essex County, following confirmation by the New Jersey Senate. Prosecutor Stephens remains firmly committed to securing justice for crime victims and enhancing public safety throughout the county. In addition, 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


LEGAL STAFF - 2025
ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR
THEODORE N. STEPHENS II
FIRST ASSISTANT PROSECUTOR
Alex Albu
CAP Roger M. Imhof
JUVENILE
DCAP Anthony Higgins
DCAP Celeste M. Montesino
SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT
MEGANS LAW
BIAS UNIT
DCAP Myrna Perez-Drace
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
EXTREME RISK PROTECTION ORDERS
DCAP Purva Deshpande
HOMICIDE
CRASH & ARSON UNIT
DCAP Justin Edwab
NARCOTICS TASK FORCE
SPECIAL PROSECUTIONS
POLICE LEGAL ADVISOR
ANIMAL CRUELTY
HOMELAND SECURITY / COUNTER TERRORISM
CRIME SCENE UNIT
INTELLIGENCE
CYBER CRIMES
APPELLATE / ETHICS UNIT
DCAP Frank Ducoat
CIVIL LEGAL MATTERS
MUNICIPAL COURT LIASON
FUNERAL ORDERS
ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT
FILE & EVIDENCE DESTRUCTION
CAP Dawn Simonetti
VERTICAL TRIAL UNITS 1 to 17
PTI & EXPUNGEMENTS
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BUREAU
DCAP Tamara Chambers
CENTRAL JUDICIAL PROCESSING
GRAND JURY
DETENTIONS
Robert D. Laurino
Atty General Clergy Abuse Task Force
DCAP Portia Downing
FORFEITURE
FINANCIAL CRIMES INSURANCE FRAUD
CORRUPTION UNIT
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY
EAP Gwen Williams
Diversions, Community Justice & Administration
RECOVERY COURT
MENTAL HEALTH UNIT
VETERANS COURT
OPERATION HELPING HAND Opioid Outreach
OPT FOR HELP & HOPE Municipal Court Opioid
CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING
LABOR RELATIONS
MANAGEMENT SUPPORT STAFF
CAP = Chief Assistant Prosecutor
DCAP = Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor
EAP = Executive Assistant Prosecutor


INVESTIGATIVE STAFF - 2025
ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR
THEODORE N. STEPHENS II
CHIEF OF DETECTIVES
MITCHELL G. McGUIRE III
DEPUTY CHIEF
Toni Ann Mattia
DEPUTY CHIEF
Paulo Desousa
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BUREAU
Capt. Wesley Mondelus
Special Investigations
Capt. John DeGroot
Prosecutions / Operations
Capt. Paul Ranges
SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT
Capt. Carlos Olmo
CRIME SCENE INVESTIG. BUREAU
Capt. Randolph Root
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF
NARCOTICS TASK FORCE
STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE UNIT
REAL TIME CRIME CENTER
ADULT TRIAL SECTION
CENTRAL JURIS. PROCESSING
GRAND JURY
JUVENILE TRIAL
EXTRADITIONS
CENTRAL EVIDENCE
FINANCIAL CRIMES
Capt. David Sanabria
F.A.C.T.S. (Cyber)
Capt. David Sanabria
HOMICIDE
Capt. Luigi Corino
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
MEGANS LAW
FLEET MANAGEMENT

2025
Annual Report

UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

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 30 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 four 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 supervised 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office successfully indicted or charged by accusation 3,178 defendants and resolved 2,892 post-GJ defendant cases. Of 2,892 resolved cases, 1,714 involved first or second-degree crimes. Of those 2,892 case defendants, 1,595 received a guilty outcome for at least one charge, including disorderly person's outcomes. Of the 1, 595 case defendants, 491 received a guilty outcome for at least one charge at the first-or second-degree level. Of the overall 2,892 outcomes, there were 52 pretrial intervention completions.

The ATS assistant prosecutors obtained 24 defendant dispositions by jury trial. 10 resulted in a guilty verdict and 12 resulted in a not guilty verdict. Two cases resulted in a hung jury.

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

Assistant Prosecutor Shelby Day and second chair Assistant Prosecutor Gianna Sanguinetti obtained a guilty conviction after the trial of **State v. Frederick Parisi**. Parisi was sentenced to 11.5 years on eight charges that included aggravated assault and impersonating a police officer. The defendant was working at a Family Dollar store when he chased the victim with his car for allegedly shoplifting soap. He struck the victim with his car and shot him in the face with a pepper ball gun causing significant injuries.

Assistant Prosecutor/Supervisor Brian Pollack and second chair Assistant Prosecutor Dana Kutzleb obtained a guilty verdict on the matter of **State v. Rahman Polen**. The jury returned a guilty verdict for unlawful possession of a weapon (a rifle). Pollack was sentenced to five years in state prison.

Assistant Prosecutor Bryashia Atchison tried **State v. Gabriel Perez**. The jury returned a guilty verdict for aggravated assault, conspiracy to commit aggravated assault, and eluding. The victim was assaulted in his home causing brain bleeding that resulted in him being in a coma for two weeks. Perez was sentenced to seven years in New Jersey State Prison with 85 percent parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor Marco Collemi tried the matter of **State v. Aziz Combs**. The defendant was apprehended and found to be in possession of a gun and drugs.

Combs was sentenced to five years in New Jersey State Prison with 30 months of parole ineligibility.

Assistant Prosecutor Leighton Cohen tried the matter of **State v. Lowery & Fryer**. Both defendants were observed dealing drugs, resulting in a car chase. Multiple types of drugs and two handguns were found in the car they were driving. Lowery was found guilty of gun and drug charges. The jury did not return a verdict against Fryer. Lowery's sentencing is still pending.

Assistant Prosecutor Alaric Azeez was Deputy Chief Justin Edwab's second chair when they tried **State v. Bynum and Headen**. The defendants chased the victims and shot at them while they were sitting in a car. One victim was killed and the other was injured. The victims were seen committing robberies by the defendants before they were chased and shot. A jury returned a guilty verdict for first-degree murder and aggravated assault. Both defendants were sentenced to 40 years in New Jersey State prison for the murder consecutive to 10 years for the aggravated assault.

Assistant Prosecutor Mattison Monteleone tried **State v. Michael Moody**. It was a case of domestic violence where Moody strangled his pregnant wife and kicked her in the stomach, while she was holding their baby. The jury returned a verdict of guilty for endangering the welfare of a child. The defendant received six years in New Jersey State prison.

Assistant Prosecutor Patick Wagner tried **State v. Eric Spotwood**. He was found guilty of unlawful possession of a weapon (handgun) and a certain persons not to possess a weapon. The defendant received seven years with 42 months parole ineligibility in New Jersey State Prison.

⚖ 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 pretrial 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 2025 Cases:

Supreme Court of New Jersey

State v. Jeremy Arrington, 480 N.J. Super. 428 (App. Div. 2024), *certif. granted***, 260 N.J. 208 (2025)** – 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 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 late 2025, the Section represented the State before the Supreme Court to defend this result. A decision is expected in 2026.

LEGAL UNITS

Appellate Division

State v. Anthony Gibson, 483 N.J. Super. 90 (App. Div. 2025) – The Section defended this police-officer defendant's convictions for official misconduct and theft based on his unauthorized use of sick time to work a second job. Although the Court vacated the official misconduct based on its understanding of the statute, the Court upheld the second-degree theft conviction and left undisturbed defendant's other convictions for official misconduct which had nothing to do with his theft of sick pay.

State v. Shahaad I. Jones, 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 1726 (App. Div. 2025) – After the Section's participation in the first appeal addressing the "adverse inference" provision in the body-camera statute, N.J.S.A. 40A:14-118.5(q)(2), see 475 N.J. Super. 520 (App. Div. 2023), defendant pled guilty and again appealed, this time challenging the court's decision that an adverse inference wasn't required and denying his motion to suppress. In this appeal, the Section successfully defended defendant's challenge, and the Appellate Division upheld his weapons convictions.

State v. T.N., 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 1664 (App. Div. 2025) – The Section brought an appeal in this case after the trial court ruled inadmissible a forensic video interview of a child sex assault victim. The appellate court found the trial court abused its discretion in finding the video statement unreliable and reversed. After the favorable appeal and reinstatement of this critical evidence, defendant pled guilty.

State v. Alberto Pena, 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 1392 (App. Div. 2025) - In this appeal the Section successfully defended defendant's convictions following a jury trial for aggravated assault (a shooting to the face) and weapons offenses against challenges to the evidence presented and the prosecutor's summation.

State v. Edisson Shumi-Palaguachi, 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 967 (App. Div. 2025) – The Section successfully defended the jury's verdict finding defendant guilty of the sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl. Despite defendant's arguments to the contrary, the Appellate Division found no trial errors.

State v. Phillips, Preston & Pinkett, 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 714 (App. Div. 2025) – The Section successfully had counts of second-degree unlawful possession of a weapon (a handgun) reinstated after a trial court dismissed them on Second Amendment grounds. The Section convinced the Appellate Division that each defendant lacked standing to bring such a claim because none had ever sought a carry permit. The Supreme Court later denied review.

State v. Rashad Zeigler, 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 433 (App. Div. 2025) – A jury convicted defendant of murder and on appeal defendant raised multiple trial and sentencing issues. The Section defended the jury's verdict and the trial court's 45-year NERA sentence, the appellate court finding no error.

State v. Sharod Massey, 2025 N.J. Super. Unpub. LEXIS 181 (App. Div. 2025) – The Section defended the jury's verdict in this case against multiple challenges to the warrant, defendant's statement, jury selection, and sentencing. The Appellate Division upheld defendant's convictions and his 18-year sentence.

State v. Martinez, 480 N.J. Super. 470 (App. Div. 2025) – The Section defended the jury's verdict in this homicide case where the Appellate Division held that when self-defense is established as to one category of homicide, it applies to all other categories of homicide charged or otherwise permitted for consideration as lesser-included offenses. The Court also recommend that the Model Criminal Jury Charge Committee consider creating a verdict sheet template for use in all cases where self-defense is considered for more than one category of homicide to ensure trial courts properly implement this precept.

Director/AP Frank Ducoat and Members of the Appellate Section

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 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.

2025 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 2025 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 2025 calendar year, CJP Custody Court handled detained defendants in their First Appearances and resulted in the filing of 2,402 detention motions on those matters. To maintain the safety of Court staff and the general public, the Administrative Office of the Courts determined that Non-Custody matters would be continued to be heard virtually in 2025. There were 11,532 defendants (Custody and Non-Custody) scheduled for their First Appearance in 2025. 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Forfeiture Unit, through appropriate civil and criminal process, forfeited $1,900,092.53, which was determined to be either proceeds or instrumentalities of crime. Of that amount, $1,730,238.53 was in cash, $ 156,234.00 was the value of vehicles, and $13,620.00 was from other property, including gift cards, various items of jewelry, and electronic devices.

In one case of note, a defendant was arrested at an illegal gambling and alcohol sale establishment in Newark. Over $5,000 was seized from the defendant and over $8,000 was seized from the establishment and other patrons. The defendant failed to file an answer to the forfeiture complaint and default was entered. The defendant, through his attorney, filed a motion to vacate the default and file an answer out of time. The State filed a brief opposing the defendant's motion arguing that the defendant did not demonstrate good cause or excusable neglect, nor did he assert a meritorious defense, as required by law. The Judge ruled against the defendant denying the motion.

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 Grand Jury Unit assistant prosecutors and the Adult Trial 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, All Grand Jurors were chosen to appear in person for all Grand Jury proceedings.

In 2025, the Grand Jury panels returned to sitting five (5) 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 2025, we presented more than 536 matters than the previous year. There were 3,909 matters calendared for the year 2025, 3,100 resulted in indictments; 135 were no billed; 21 resulted in No Cause of Action and 119 were referred to municipal court. The remaining cases were either held over, withdrawn, pled out or consolidated with other cases.

Juvenile Trial Unit

Director/DCAP Anthony Higgins with members of the Juvenile Unit

The Juvenile Justice Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office is committed to protecting public safety, supporting victims, and promoting positive outcomes for young people involved in the justice system. The Unit handles juvenile delinquency matters ranging from lower-level offenses to the most serious violent crimes, while working to ensure that each case is addressed fairly, promptly, and in a manner that reflects both accountability and the opportunity for rehabilitation.

Under New Jersey law, delinquency involves conduct committed by a person under the age of 18 that would constitute a criminal offense if committed by an adult. Certain matters, such as motor vehicle violations, curfew violations, and truancy, are handled outside the juvenile delinquency process.

The Unit is responsible for reviewing and prosecuting formal juvenile delinquency complaints involving Essex County youth, including matters that arise elsewhere in New Jersey. Because Essex County residents may become involved in incidents across the state, the Unit's work extends beyond county lines and reflects a broad commitment to serving Essex families and communities wherever these matters arise.

Assistant prosecutors in the Juvenile Justice Unit manage cases from beginning to end through a vertical prosecution model. This approach promotes consistency, accountability, and efficiency by allowing one prosecutor to oversee a matter through detention hearings, status conferences, plea negotiations, waiver applications, evidentiary hearings, trials, and disposition. The model also supports the Family Court's accelerated schedule and helps move cases forward in a timely and thoughtful way.

Just as importantly, the Unit's mission extends beyond courtroom advocacy. The Juvenile Justice Unit works closely every day with the 23 juvenile bureaus throughout Essex County, as well as with other law enforcement agencies and local schools, providing legal guidance, investigative support, and training. Members of the Unit also engage with the community through educational presentations focused on the consequences of delinquent and criminal behavior, helping young people and families better understand the justice system and the importance of making safe, responsible choices.

The Unit also plays a leadership role at the state level. Deputy Chief Anthony R. Higgins has been entrusted by the Office of the Attorney General to help train assistant prosecutors and law enforcement officers throughout New Jersey. As a founding member of the Juvenile Prosecutor's Leadership Network, Deputy Chief Higgins works with key justice system partners, including the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Youth Justice Commission, to advance fairness, consistency, and best practices for both juveniles and victims. The Unit's leadership also regularly provides educational programming for educators, parents, and community organizations. This work reflects the Unit's recognized expertise and its commitment to continued improvement in the administration of juvenile justice.

In 2025, the Juvenile Justice Unit handled approximately 1,750 juvenile delinquency events, reflecting the significant scope and importance of its work on behalf of Essex County. The volume and complexity of these matters continue to require close coordination with the Essex County Family Court, law enforcement agencies, schools, and community stakeholders.

As juvenile justice laws and due process requirements continue to evolve, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office remains committed to best practices, effective case management, and a balanced approach that promotes public safety, fairness, accountability, and the long-term well-being of young people and the community.

2025 Accomplishments

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Mental Health Unit

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office Mental Health Diversion Program (MHDP) 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 aides 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.

In 2025, ECPO filed an application for an Attorney General's Office, Division of Law and Public Safety Grant for funding to expand the Essex County MDHP. The grant was open to the counties around the state with existing mental health courts to assist in the expansion of the programs or starting mental health courts in counties that do not have one. In Essex County, the grant budget has been going through revisions in 2026 to meet the Attorney General's Office criteria. Our office has not received additional funding yet.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Mental Health Diversion Program Unit reviewed 23 defendant applications for the program. A total of eight were legally accepted into the program in 2025. There was a total of 14 rejections. Of that, four were legally rejected and 10 were determined not to be clinically acceptable for this program. Four defendants successfully graduated (Moved On). Please note that five applicants who applied to the program withdrew their applications. Please take note that three withdrawals were due to trial court pleas done around the date the defendant applied to MHDP, and the other two

withdrawals were fully accepted and on or around the date of plea, however, the defendants did not want to comply with the requirements of MHDP, So all five defendants who withdrew their MHDP applications, chose the route of 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 like 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.

2025 Accomplishments

During 2025, approximately 279 defendants applied for PTI. Pursuant to R. 3:28-1d, approximately 188 defendants applied for PTI that required the State's consent to further consideration of their application. Of those 188 requesting consent, 78 were refused and 79 were consented to.

During the year, 180 defendants were accepted into the program and 42 were rejected (this includes defendants who filed prior to 2025). The unit also litigated several appeals of PTI refusals and 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 expungement laws. 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 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 main 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, meaning 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, removing 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 in and will continue to result in a significant increase in the number of filed petitions, 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 will prepare, review and submit approval of orders for the Court’s signature; if the applicant is deemed ineligible, rejection letters or orders for dismissal will be prepared and forwarded to the Court or filed via eCourts.

2025 Accomplishments

The major accomplishment in the Expungement Unit for 2025 was the significant reduction of the backlog of filed petitions pending prosecutor review. At the end of the year, only approximately 149 petitions were pending review for more than 60 days.

In 2025, there were 15 new, manually filed, referred to as Traditional, Expungement applications (non-drug court). All Traditional Expungement petitions were resolved either via final order or dismissal. In 2025, 865 Regular Expungement petitions were filed electronically, 1,161 petitions were granted, 92 denied, dismissed, or withdrawn, and three were vacated. For Clean Slate petitions, 458 were filed electronically, 93 were granted, 83 were denied, and two were vacated. Marijuana had eight petitions filed, 17 Marijuana Decriminalization petitions were filed. In 2025, 11,149 Expedited Orders (these are expungements for cases that have been dismissed either in Municipal Courts or Superior Court) were received. This number of Expedited Orders is greater than that of the previous year. 4,107 Expedited Orders (including those from previous years) were reviewed and processed. Finally, 574 Out of County Expungement Orders were received in 2025, 570 of which were processed and

expunged. These are expungement petitions filed and signed in other counties where the petitioners had criminal contacts in Essex.

Recovery Court Program

The Essex County Recovery Court Program started in 1999, as New Jersey's original pilot program.

Recovery court is a collaborative effort involving judges, prosecutors, public defenders, court professionals, substance abuse evaluators, treatment facilitators, and probation officers.

Together, these professionals help participants achieve long-term recovery while addressing the underlying causes of substance use disorders. By combining the criminal justice system with evidence-based treatment and rehabilitative services, the program aims to break the cycle of addiction and reduce recidivism among eligible nonviolent offenders.

Participants receive intensive probation supervision and are subject to swift, graduated sanctions for noncompliance while participating in treatment, counseling, and recovery services. Public safety is enhanced through the close monitoring of each participant by probation officers and the multidisciplinary Recovery Court Team.

The Recovery Court Team includes judges, court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators, and treatment providers who work together to support and monitor each participant's progress. Team members meet with participants on a weekly, biweekly, monthly, or quarterly basis, depending on the individual's needs and stage of recovery.

2025 Accomplishments

As of April 30, 2025, the Essex County Recovery Court Program had 296 active participants. Of those participants, 115 were on bench warrant or detainer status.

Crash and Fire Investigation Unit

In 2025, the Crash and Fire Investigation Unit continued investigating all fatal crashes and fires as well as certain 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 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, CFIU APs and CSIB investigators investigated a total of thirty-nine motor vehicle fatalities, nine serious injury crashes, and six structure fires, which involved nine fatalities related to those 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.

In 2025, CFIU APs conducted three criminal jury trials and obtained convictions in all three trials, as follows --

Early in the year SAP Wells tried the matter of **State v. Shaquan Wiley**, where the defendant was convicted of two counts of First-Degree Vehicular Homicide for two teenaged victims, Tahtiyana Green and Imani Exum, killed in the crash, and Aggravated Assault convictions for two other injured victims, Shikeylah Hamlin and Michael Kirk. Wiley was sentenced to life in prison for his convictions.

Mid-year, AP Saraiva tried the matter of **State v. John Rodriguez**, where the defendant was convicted of Third-Degree Hindering in connection with a fatal motor vehicle crash that left Vitina Stern dead.

At the end of 2025, SAP Wells tried the matter of **State v. Lando Marc**, where the defendant was convicted of First-Degree Aggravated Manslaughter, Second-Degree Leaving the Scene of a Crash Resulting in Death and other offenses related to the death of Jenny Philistin.

Domestic Violence Unit

The Domestic Violence Unit, established in 1992, is dedicated to addressing domestic abuse involving intimate partners and adult household members. The Unit is staffed by seven assistant prosecutors, including five line-prosecutors, a supervisor, and a deputy chief assistant prosecutor. It is further supported by a captain, a sergeant, three detectives, two support staff members, and a victim-witness advocate. The Unit evaluates each case with the dual objectives of safeguarding victims' interests and ensuring the effective prosecution of domestic violence offenses.

Domestic violence remains a deeply entrenched and escalating societal issue that transcends all demographic boundaries, affecting individuals regardless of race, culture, religion, economic status, or sexual orientation. A critical component of the broader societal response to this pervasive problem is the application of appropriate criminal sanctions. The Domestic Violence Unit is committed to seeking the incarceration of violent and repeat offenders where warranted. At the same time, the Unit recognizes that, in certain cases, providing opportunities for offender rehabilitation is essential to breaking the cycle of abuse.

The profound psychological impact of domestic violence on victims and their families is a central consideration in the Unit's case evaluations. To that end, the Domestic Violence Unit works in close collaboration with the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit to provide comprehensive support services aimed at restoring victims' sense of safety and stability. When appropriate, referrals to shelters and other support resources are facilitated, reflecting the Unit's commitment to a holistic response. Many victims face significant barriers to participation in the prosecution process, including concerns related to personal safety, financial security, the well-being of children, and the complex dynamics of their relationships with the abuser.

Assistant prosecutors play a critical role in balancing the need for accountability and deterrence with the realities of victim cooperation, while steadfastly advocating for justice. The Domestic Violence Unit remains an essential component of the community's response to domestic abuse, working diligently to prosecute offenders and address the needs of victims.

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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Essex County Domestic Violence Unit processed 3,470 new domestic violence matters involving 3,501 defendants. During this period, the Unit's five assistant prosecutors presented 578 cases to the Grand Jury. The Unit also managed 1,622 disorderly persons domestic violence matters, each of which was subject to a comprehensive review by an assistant prosecutor to determine whether the case should be remanded to municipal court or elevated to Superior Court for further prosecution.

In addition, the Domestic Violence Unit maintained responsibility for the Family Court Contempt of Restraining Order docket, handling 222 cases in 2025.

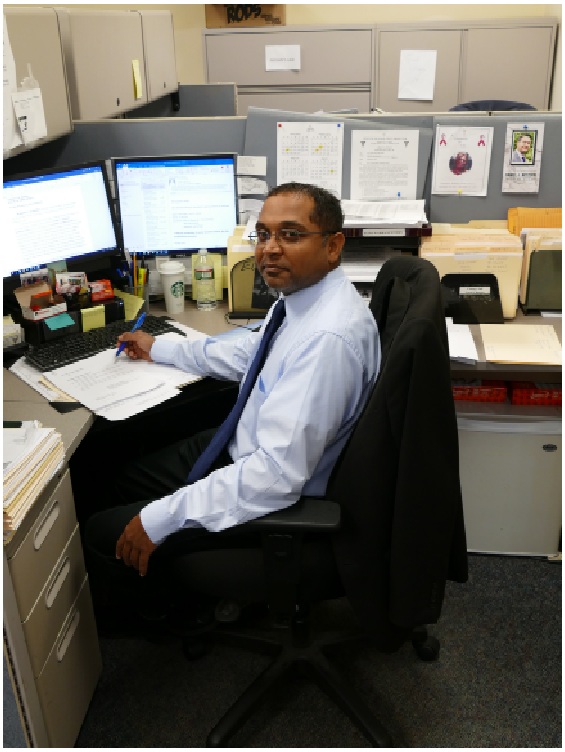
Extradition Unit

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.

Unit staff must have a familiarity and knowledge of the various legal mechanisms in both state and federal statutes to compel the return of a fugitive wanted for a crime committed in New Jersey. They must also understand the proper procedures for returning a fugitive to another jurisdiction. This may include securing a Governor's Warrant if a fugitive refuses extradition and extraditing both state and federal inmates via the Interstate Agreement on Detainers. The unit also works closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Extradition Unit received 353 requests for extradition. Essex County coordinated the legal paperwork to extradite and return 317 fugitives to other jurisdictions. The Extradition Unit also returned 167 fugitives to Essex County, including individuals brought back under Governor's Warrants, the Interstate Agreement on Detainers, and federal court writs for prosecution.



Detective Narvin Singh

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. Most recently many of these financial crimes involve cryptocurrency. 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 and one legal assistant.

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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Financial Crimes Unit conducted investigations into 301 cases, including 101 assists to local police departments seeking assistance from subject matter experts. In addition, there were several notable prosecutions.

One case of note is a matter where Edward Naula defrauded the Willshire hotel by placing his mother and father on the health insurance policy for the hotel. He pled guilty to second-degree theft (sentenced as a third-degree offender). He paid restitution to the hotel for approximately $116,000.

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 Unit 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office continued with the Homicide/Major Crimes Task Force. Detectives from the Newark, East Orange, Irvington, Bloomfield Police Departments and the New Jersey State Police are assigned to the Homicide Unit pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding and conduct investigations in the county. All homicides, death investigations 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

During 2025, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Homicide Unit investigated 43 homicides. Of these homicides, 40 have been charged. Additionally, the Task Force oversaw 38 special investigations. The 43 homicides in 2025 represent a decrease from the 59 homicides that occurred in 2024. 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 Wright**, the defendant shot the victim in the back. He was found guilty of murder by a jury and sentenced to life in prison.

In **State v. Matthew Colon & Tashauna Hairston**, both defendants were convicted of double murder for the killings of a pair of teens. They are awaiting sentencing.

In **State v. John Menendez**, the defendant pled guilty to 50 years for a double homicide. Defendant was a Hudson County corrections officer who shot his girlfriend and her friend upon picking them up from Newark airport.

In **State v. Rahdee Bennett**, the defendant was convicted of murder, attempted murder, and two other robberies. He was sentenced to 54 years in prison.

In **State v. Isaiah Knight**, the defendant was sentenced to life in prison for the murder, and 10 years for witness tampering.

In **State v. Justen Couram**, the defendant was convicted of murder for his role in a homicide that occurred on December 30, 2021, under the law related to accomplice liability. He was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

In **State v. Tyrone Cradle**, was convicted of murdering the victim. The victim was returning home with his daughter when Mr. Cradle emerged from the side of the house and ambushed the victim. He was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

In **State v. Terrance Bailey**, the defendant was found guilty of murder and sentenced to fifty years for fatally stabbing the victim with a machete-style knife.

In **State v. Dejuan Priester**, the defendant was found guilty of murder for a shooting that occurred on May 7, 2023, and aggravated assault for a shooting that occurred on August 6, 2022, amongst other charges. He was sentenced to a total of 61.5 years in prison.

ECPO Homicide Unit

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 or encounters 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the PSB received and investigated 301 new cases. There were several criminal cases in 2025, including officers entering the Pre-Trial Intervention Program and additionally forfeiting and being 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.

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, a lieutenant, and two sergeants. The assistant prosecutors are supervised by a deputy chief assistant prosecutor and a director.

The **Narcotics Task Force Section** is staffed full-time by one captain, one lieutenant, two sergeants and twelve detectives. Additionally, there are three detectives on loan to federal agencies. One to the Drug Enforcement Agency, one to the bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and one to the Auto Theft Task Force. 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 agent, and two investigative aids. Additionally, one detective assigned to the Newark Police Department Real Time Crime Center (RTCC). 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.

The **Special Prosecutions Unit** is staffed full-time by one deputy chief assistant prosecutor, one director, and five assistant prosecutors. The unit is supplemented by seven additional assistant prosecutors that assist with the on-call operations of the unit. 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-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. The assistant prosecutors in the unit are also tasked with evaluating investigations and making charging decisions on crimes that, per Prosecutor memoranda, require assistant prosecutor approval. 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the **Narcotics Task Force** conducted 67 narcotics investigations and 98 special investigations. Some of the more significant investigations the detectives and assistant prosecutors conducted include:

State v. Dashawn Isaac, Darlene Powell, and Geronimo Gordon Watson - NTF #2025-67 - An investigation that began in 2025 culminated in the execution of four search warrants where detectives seized approximately 528 grams of cocaine, 345 grams of black tar heroin, 144 glassine envelopes of heroin, and assorted paraphernalia associated with drug distribution. Detectives also recovered a Mossberg shotgun, Smith & Wesson handgun, boxes of ammunition, and $6,239.00.

State v. Alberto Rivera - NTF 25-021 – An investigation that culminated in search warrant executions that resulted in the recovery of 5,510 envelopes of heroin and 453 grams of cocaine.

Darling, Darling and Khawaja - 25-11-2524-I - A two-year BON investigation into a narcotics distributor in East Orange, Shaheed Darling. Darling, his brother Alhaqqah Darling and Aziz Khawaja were the targets. Investigation involved the execution of multiple search warrants in Essex County, Bergen County and Bronx, New York. The Bronx warrant revealed a narcotics mill that was the supplier to the Darling brothers' distribution network. Detectives recovered 260 bricks (approximately 650 grams) of heroin and $14,265.

In 2025, the **Special Prosecutions Unit** continued to coordinate with our federal, state, and local partners to reduce the violent and organized activities in Essex County. The Special Prosecutions Unit assistant prosecutors assisted law enforcement officers throughout the county in obtaining 1178 search warrants and charging 132 cases where charging authority was required.

The County of Essex investigated 142 shooting hit incidents which effected 151 shooting hit victims. Furthermore, there were 36 carjackings in Essex County during

2025. 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. Two of the more significant investigations the detectives and assistant prosecutors assisted in include:

State v. Alquan Harris and Alfuquan Craft - 25003705 - An investigation involving members of Homeland Security, ECPO NTF, and the individual municipalities resulted in the arrest of Alquan Harris and Alfuquan Craft for attempted theft and burglaries in residential homes. The defendants were charged in connection with 20 incidents from April 2, 2025 - April 17, 2025, in 9 municipalities.

Essex County Home Invasion Task Force Assist - Beginning in November 2025, members of the Essex County Home Invasion Task Force operating under the Homeland Security Investigation Border Enforcement Security Task Force / Seaport Group / Auto Export Crimes Task Force investigated the significant uptick in occupied home invasions occurring throughout multiple counties in the State of New Jersey. From October 2025 – January 2026, over 60 home invasions were attempted or successfully completed in Essex County targeting high-end luxury vehicles.

The unit assisted with over 70 SWs and CDWs. The investigation led to the recovery of 4 handguns and the identification and apprehension of 20 people. These adults and juveniles, working in different compacities of a home invasion network, were charged with crimes that occurred in Bloomfield, Montclair, Verona, Cedar Grove, Nutley, Glen Ridge, Newark, East Orange, South Orange, Millburn, Maplewood, Caldwell, Essex Fells, Livingston, Roseland, and West Orange. This led to a significant decrease in the number of home invasions throughout the entire State of New Jersey.

In addition to facilitating several investigations on the local, state, and federal levels, the attorneys in the Special Prosecutions Unit were very active in the courtroom. During 2025, our attorneys handled many violent crimes including homicides and gang related prosecutions. Some of the more notable convictions are:

State v. Jamil Phelps - P#23008350 - A carjacking trial where the defendant assaulted a delivery worker and stole his motorcycle. The victim testified at the trial and provided cellphone video depicting the defendant stealing the motorcycle and placing it into his vehicle after the assault. Newark detectives were able to track the motorcycle's GPS and found the defendant with the motorcycle in front of his home. In March 2025, there was a trial, and the defendant was found guilty of motor-vehicle theft.

State v. Torean Nixon - P#23006856 - A sexual assault trial in December 2025 in which the defendant was charged with sexually assaulting his minor stepdaughter and her minor friend. The defendant was convicted of First-Degree Sexual Assault and is pending sentence.

State v. Shakur Perry - P#21008352 - A first-degree robbery case in which the

defendant pled guilty at the inception of trial and was sentenced to 20 years subject to NERA.

State v. Branton Hall - P#23009865 – An attempted murder case in which the victim was paralyzed from the waist down. The defendant had no criminal history and was scheduled for trial back in December 2025 but pled guilty during jury selection and was sentenced to 15 years NJ State Prison (NJSP).

State v. Felica Bynum and James Headen - P#2300722 – A case involving a drive by shooting of a parked Lexus and resulted in the backseat passenger of the Lexus sustaining a gunshot wound to the head and dying and the driver of the Lexus sustaining a gunshot wound to the hip but surviving. A jury found both Bynum and Headen guilty of the murder of the backseat passenger and the aggravated assault of the driver. Bynum and Headen both received a 50-year sentence in NJSP.

State v. Andre Higgs - P#15002636/15002637 – A homicide from 2015 wherein Higgs shot and killed his child's mother in front of the East Orange Police. This matter was retried because the Supreme Court of New Jersey held the defendant was entitled to the internal affairs records of the East Orange Police. Following the providing of the internal affairs records to the defense, a jury was empaneled and subsequently found Higgs guilty of murder again. Higgs was sentenced to life imprisonment in NJSP plus a consecutive term of 20 years in NJSP.

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 direction of Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor Celeste M. Montesino, who is assisted by Director/Assistant Prosecutor Kathleen Lyons-Boswick, Captain of Detectives Carlos Olmo, Lieutenant Anneesha Ford, and Sergeant Krista Tracey. The units and teams are supervised by Chief Assistant Prosecutor Roger Imhof and Deputy Chief of Detectives Paulo DeSousa.

The victims and their families also have the services of our Victim/Witness Advocates who are available to them on site. The advocates work closely with the staff to ensure that the needs of the victims 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 the victims is reduced.

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 ongoing training for all municipal, county and state law enforcement personnel working in Essex County, as well as conducting training at the Police Academy in Cedar Grove as well as Newark. The unit has 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 vigorously litigating their cases, attending 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 as well as for the Division of Child Protection and Permanency and the Department of Corrections, both local and state. In 2025, SVU executed over 56 search warrants.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Special Victims Unit processed a total of 1,586 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 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 the few child advocacy centers in the country that 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, 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 nearby monitoring room.

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 result 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Child Abuse Unit received 989 referrals for investigation.

Notable Cases

State of New Jersey v. Javier Freire-Ramos, of Newark, was convicted by an Essex County jury of two counts of first-degree aggravated sexual assault, three counts of

second-degree sexual assault by contact, and one count of endangering the welfare of a child.

Prosecutors proved that the defendant abused the child multiple times between May 2021 and February 2022. The victim was 11 years old when the abuse began.

Freire-Ramos must serve 26 years of the 40-year sentence before he is eligible for parole.

State of New Jersey v. Torean Nixon, of Newark was convicted of sexually assaulting a minor.

Nixon was found guilty of two counts of first-degree aggravated sexual assault, two counts of second-degree sexual assault, and two counts of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child.

The prosecutors proved that Nixon assaulted the victim on two separate occasions– first in 2020 when the victim was nine years old, and again in 2023, when the victim was twelve years old.

State of New Jersey v. Terrence Mells, of Newark was convicted by an Essex County jury of three counts of first-degree aggravated sexual assault, three counts of second-degree sexual assault, one count of third-degree aggravated criminal sexual assault, three counts of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child, and one count of first-degree witness tampering.

The prosecution proved that the defendant abused three minors multiple times between March 2015 and October 2023. The abuse began when the victims were 12, 13, and 14. Prosecutors also proved that Mells threatened one of his victims after learning that he was being investigated for sexual assault.

State of New Jersey v. Osbourne Gooden, of Irvington, was convicted of first-degree aggravated sexual assault, third-degree endangering the welfare of a child, and third- degree criminal restraint for the sexual assault of a 10-year-old girl.

The prosecution proved that on June 22, 2020, the victim was sitting on her front porch with her mother and sister, enjoying ice pops along with the defendant and his friend. When the victim went inside the home to get another ice pop, the defendant followed her inside the house. That's when he grabbed the victim and raped her.

State of New Jersey v Jose Alvarez - The Defendant pled to first-degree aggravated sexual assault (Lunsford Act) and second degree endangering the welfare of a child. He was ultimately sentenced to 15/15 pursuant to the agreement.

State of New Jersey v. Jose Solano Chambra - The defendant was charged with Ct. first-degree aggravated sexual assault, 2C:14-2a(7) Ct. 2 second-degree sexual

assault by contact, 2C:14-2b Ct. 3 second-degree sexual assault by contact, 2C:14-2b Ct. 4 third-degree endangering the welfare of a child, 2C:24-4a Ct. 5 third-degree endangering the welfare of a child, 2C:24-4a. The charges are still pending, and the defendant is presumed innocent.

SEXUAL ASSAULT RAPE ANALYSIS UNIT

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 1970's 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.

Today, the SARA Unit exclusively handles cases involving adult victims of sexual violence. 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the SARA Unit received 509 referrals for investigation.

Notable Cases

State of New Jersey v. Arnulfo Ramos-Chavez - The defendant was charged with Ct. 1 first-degree aggravated sexual assault, 2C:14-2(2)(7) Ct. 2 third-degree aggravated criminal sexual contact, 2C:14-3b Ct. 3 third-degree invasion of privacy,

2C:14-9(b)(1) Ct. 4 third-degree invasion of privacy, 2C:14-9(b)(1) Ct. 5 third-degree invasion of privacy, 2C:14-9(b)(1). These charges are pending, and the defendant is presumed innocent.

State of New Jersey v. Anthony S. White of Irvington was charged with Ct. 1 second-degree aggravated assault, 2C:12-1(b)(1) Ct. 2 second-degree aggravated assault, 2C:12-1(b)(13) Ct. 3 third-degree terroristic threats, 2C:12-3(b) Ct. 4 third-degree criminal restraint, 2C:13-2(a) Ct. 5 first-degree aggravated sexual assault, 2C:14-2(a)(3) Ct. 6 first-degree aggravated sexual assault, 2C:14-2(a)(3). These charges are pending, and the defendant is presumed innocent.

State of New Jersey v. Gardy Louissant of West Orange was charged with Ct. 1 first degree attempted aggravated sexual assault, 2C:14-2(a)(4) Ct. 2 third-degree, PWUP, 2C:39-4d Ct. 3 fourth-degree, UPW, 2C:39-5d. These charges are pending, and the defendant is presumed innocent.

State of New Jersey v. Kervin Joseph-Michel - On November 21, 2025, the defendant was sentenced to 34½ years in prison for first-degree kidnapping, first-degree aggravated sexual assault while armed with a knife, third-degree endangering the welfare of a child, and fourth-degree aggravated assault.

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 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

2025 Accomplishments

The FNE Program is run by Nancy Cox, RN, FN-CSA, CFN and her Assistant Coordinator, Vivi Nguyen. Nancy 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 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 eight years.

Currently, the FNE Program has 12 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 2025, in Essex County there were a total of 374 FNE/SART examinations conducted at participating hospitals in response to the needs of sexual assault victims. Included in that number were 45 pediatric cases. The forensic nurses provide critical testimony at the trial of cases where a victim has had a forensic examination performed.

In 2025, the Office of the Attorney General mandated the creation of the BREATHE TEAM Initiative. The goal of this unit was for the FNE to also respond to hospitals to attend to victims of non-fatal strangulations, both in cases involving domestic violence victims and victims of sexual violence. In 2025, the FNE team conducted 46 examinations of victims who suffered non-fatal strangulations.

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 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Human Trafficking Team investigated 16 cases.

Notable Cases

State of New Jersey v. Tajhane Thomas, 29, of Newark, **Leslie Martinez**, 34, of West Orange, **Amayah Dent**, 28, of Maplewood, and **Yaislene Arguedas**, 29, of Paterson. On October 14, 2025, the four individuals were charged in connection with the human trafficking of a 17-year-old female.

The investigation began after the teenage victim, who had been reported as a runaway, contacted law enforcement on September 17, 2025, seeking help. Detectives determined that the victim had been trafficked and forced to engage in acts of prostitution arranged by the defendants.

Following an investigation led by the Essex County Prosecutor's Office and assisted by the Newark Police Division, NJIT Department of Public Safety, Passaic County Sheriff's Office, and the City of Orange Township Police Department, four women were identified and charged for their alleged roles in the trafficking operation.

These charges are pending, and all defendants are presumed innocent.

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 of age. The team also works with the Financial Crimes Unit and other units within the ECPO to enhance investigations.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, 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 the 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.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Bias Crimes Unit investigated 82 cases.

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's 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 (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 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. In 2025, the ECPO Megan's Law unit, in conjunction with the police departments of the municipalities in which the offenders resided, executed five door-to-door community notifications, more than any other county in the state. 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.

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 motions 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.

Criminal consequences and Megan's Law registration obligations are different for offenders who were adjudicated delinquent as juveniles for qualifying sexual offenses. Offenders adjudicated delinquent for a sex offense are not sentenced to Community or Parole Supervision for life as part of their criminal sentence. Additionally, as far as community notification, offenders whose sole sex offense was a juvenile adjudication are not published to the Sex Offender Internet Registry. Further, as a result of a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling in 2024, offenders who are subject to Megan's Law solely because of a juvenile adjudication for a sex offense are not subject to the 15-year waiting period to be eligible to seek termination of their Megan's Law registration obligations. However, these offenders must still demonstrate that they do not pose a risk to public safety to successfully terminate their registration obligations.

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. 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. Offenders' files are also classified inactive when they are relieved by way of a court Order of all Megan's Law obligations or move to another state and 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 that justify a new evaluation and hearing.

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, more than 160 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 100 orders designating each offender's tier and considered approximately 50 motions to terminate Megan's Law registration obligations and/or parole supervision.

Business Administration Unit

The Business Administration Unit oversees a $43.8 million operating budget along with Essex County Prosecutor's Office's criminal forfeiture accounts. The Unit oversees ECPO's eight major on-going grant-funded programs and several special grants totaling more than $2.4 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.

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
- 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

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, 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 the office. All 21 municipalities in Essex County send indictable offenses electronically to the Record Room. The caseload is so extensive that the office maintains files in three locations: the Record Room at 50 Market Street, Leroy Smith Jr. Building Third Floor, and 435 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd in Newark. The complaints are processed by Central Judicial Processing (CJP), and Assistant Prosecutor Supervisors then assign the cases to APs. The Records Room and CJP have 13 employees combined. 12,388 cases were processed in 2025.

ECPO Records Room Supervisor Martine Crosby and her staff

Community Justice Unit

The Community Justice Unit promotes awareness of the role and function of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office by engaging directly with the residents of Essex County. Through attendance at community meetings and outreach initiatives addressing issues related to crime, substance abuse, and crime prevention, the Unit serves as a liaison between law enforcement and the community.

The Community Justice Unit is dedicated to developing and implementing programs that provide children and teenagers with positive alternatives and intervention strategies aimed at preventing delinquency. In addition, the Unit assists individuals suffering from substance use disorders by referring them to treatment services through the Operation Helping Hand program (see section below on this program).

Community Outreach and Education

In 2025, the Community Justice Unit conducted educational workshops and presentations for community members on a variety of topics, including:

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

2025 Summer Youth Internship Program

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office hosted its 24th Summer Youth Internship Program to expose high school students to careers in law, law enforcement, and public service. The 2025 program started on July 7, 2025, and ended on August 8, 2025.

Thirty-two high school juniors from throughout Essex County participated in the program, which focused on college and career readiness, leadership development, and positive decision-making. Interns learned about the role and functions of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office and participated in a variety of educational workshops and activities.

Program Workshops and Activities Included:

- Internet safety
- Teen dating violence prevention
- Violence awareness
- Gang awareness
- Business etiquette
- CPR Training
- Substance abuse prevention workshops
- College and career readiness workshops
- Participation in New Jersey State Police Trooper Youth Week

Operation Helping Hand Outreach Initiatives

In 2025, the Community Relations Specialist, in collaboration with recovery support specialists from Greater Essex Counseling Services, conducted numerous outreach initiatives and under the Operation Helping Hand program. Operation Helping Hand is an initiative sponsored and funded by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office. These efforts focused on connecting individuals suffering from substance use disorders with treatment and recovery resources.

Outreach Events and Community Operations

January 19, 2025 – Essex County Homeless Connect Day

The Community Relations Specialist participated in Essex County's Homeless Connect Day at Codey Arena in West Orange. More than 100 individuals received information regarding Operation Helping Hand and available treatment resources.

May 13, 2025 – Newark Police Week

During Newark Police Week at Lincoln Park in Newark, approximately 100 community members received information regarding Operation Helping Hand services.

September 13, 2025 – East Orange Community Day

The Community Relations Specialist participated in a community event hosted by the East Orange Police Department at Elmwood Park in East Orange. Approximately 60 individuals received information regarding substance abuse treatment services.

September 17, 2025 – Newark Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on Frelinghuysen Avenue in Newark. Approximately 57 individuals were engaged, and 12 individuals requested additional information regarding treatment services.

September 19, 2025 – Branford Place Community Event

The Community Relations Specialist participated in a community outreach event on Branford Place in Newark and interacted with more than 100 community members.

September 24, 2025 – Irvington Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on 16th Avenue in Irvington. More than 100 individuals were engaged, and five individuals expressed interest in treatment services.

September 30, 2025 – Senior Wellness Day

During Senior Wellness Day, more than 200 senior citizens received information regarding Operation Helping Hand services and treatment resources.

October 3, 2025 – Newark Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on Frelinghuysen Avenue in Newark. Forty-five individuals were engaged, and five individuals expressed interest in entering treatment.

October 15, 2025 – East Orange Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on Central Avenue in East Orange. Twenty-five individuals were engaged, and three individuals expressed interest in treatment services.

October 22, 2025 – Irvington Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on 16th Avenue in Irvington. Thirty individuals were engaged, and seven individuals expressed interest in treatment.

October 29, 2025 – Newark Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on Frelinghuysen Avenue in Newark. Thirty individuals were engaged, and three individuals expressed interest in treatment services.

November 5, 2025 – Irvington Outreach Operation

A non-arrest outreach operation was conducted on 16th Avenue in Irvington. Forty individuals were engaged, and five individuals expressed interest in treatment services.

“What’s It All About?” World Against Violence (W.A.V.) Youth Conference

On December 17, 2025, the Community Justice Unit hosted our annual “What’s It All About?” World Against Violence (W.A.V.) Youth Conference at the Student Center of the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT).

The purpose of the conference was to address issues affecting middle school students while promoting positive decision-making, educational achievement, and violence prevention.

Approximately 400 students from schools in Newark, East Orange, Orange, Irvington, and the Essex County Schools of Technology attended the full-day conference. In

addition, nine students from the Boys & Girls Club of Newark participated as well. Students attended workshops focusing on:

- Positive Decision-Making
- Substance Abuse Prevention
- Goal Setting
- Pedestrian Safety
- Cyber Safety
- College and Career Readiness

The conference featured a keynote address from a motivational speaker. Representatives from 25 community organizations provided information on educational opportunities, mentorship, leadership development, and community support services.

The youth conference successfully increased awareness of community resources while reinforcing the importance of making positive choices and planning for future success.

Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn L. Williams and Community Relations Specialist/Internship Program Coordinator Nicole Graves-Watson speaking to middle school students at the annual ECPO "World Against Violence Youth conference.

Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II discussing the importance of education and as well as careers in law enforcement.

Community Engagement

In 2025, the Community Relations Specialist participated in numerous community meetings, advisory board meetings, outreach initiatives, and collaborative events aimed at strengthening the relationship between law enforcement and the residents of Essex County.

REACHING OUT TO ESSEX COUNTY YOUTH

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

2025 ECPO Summer Interns visit NJ State House in Trenton.

Media Relations Office

The Public Information officer oversees media communications for the Essex County Prosecutors Office (ECPO), the largest prosecutor's office in the state.

The responsibilities of the Public Information Officer include:

- 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
- Drafting the ECPO Newsletter
- Coordinating Black History Month Celebration and Latinx/Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration

2025 Accomplishments

In 2025, the Public Information Officer continued to secure media coverage from broadcast, print, and digital outlets for the ECPO. The media coverage informed the public on investigations, indictments, arrests, convictions, and sentencings. The Public Information Officer also managed press conferences on high profile investigations. These press conferences were attended by journalists from ABC, CBS, NBC, News12, NJ Advance Media, The Star Ledger, The New York Times, The New York Post and other outlets.

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 for crime victims. The Office's primary mandate is to fulfill the provisions of the New Jersey Constitution and New Jersey statutes which require that:

- 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 is funded in part by state and federal government grants. 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 supports victims and witnesses, especially those who live within Essex County's underserved communities. These individuals are frequently at risk of being victims of violent crime. They are also most vulnerable to economic and personal disruption. The Office provides victims and witnesses resources for food, housing, and mental health services where needed.

The Office educates victims and witnesses about their rights and responsibilities within the criminal justice system. In addition, the Office provides victims with ongoing communication and case coordination throughout the legal process. When appropriate, Office staff also accompany victims to court to provide support.

Office personnel also assist victims in obtaining financial 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.

Victim-Witness Coordinator Pamela McCauley

2025 Accomplishments:

In 2025, the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office assisted 9,440 new victims and witnesses, initiating approximately 73,200 items of correspondence on their behalf.

The Unit continued to expand its formal relocation program in 2025, assisting about 1,900 clients and their families. This program directly supports victims and witnesses who have been threatened, intimidated, or harassed for cooperating with in law enforcement on organized crime, gang-related, and domestic violence investigations. The Offices trained advocates provided over 3,100 units of services to those seeking relocation assistance. Essex County victim-survivors received referrals to social service agencies that offer 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.

Office staff continued to enhance the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit's portal on the Office's general website throughout the year. The Victim-Witness portal 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 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 Office conducted and participated in 15 community outreach forums throughout 2025. More than 450 Essex County residents and community partners representing the business, education, law enforcement, emergency and social services, mental health, and social justice sectors—including high school and college students—received information about the services provided by the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office.

The Office continued its intimate partner violence training initiative, "**Sanctuary**" in 2025. "Sanctuary" is an intensive, interactive 100-hour training program, which trains

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 both a basic and advanced format. Upon completion, volunteers from religious institutions, local police departments, social service/ emergency agencies, and other Essex County groups can provide immediate, culturally sensitive outreach to domestic violence victims-survivors and their families. Nine participants graduated from the program in 2025. More than 700 community residents have completed the program since its inception in 2012.

Finally, in December 2025, 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 to expand their holiday outreach efforts for families in Essex County.

PROSECUTOR'S
OFFICE
ESSEX COUNTY
NEW JERSEY