

# **2024**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**



Office of the Hudson County Prosecutor  
Esther Suarez  
Prosecutor

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## **Table of Contents**

	<b>Page</b>
Message From The Prosecutor.....	3
Executive Overview .....	4
Pretrial Division.....	7
Trial Division.....	9
Civil Litigation Unit.....	11
Forfeiture Unit.....	12
In-Court Unit .....	13
Insurance Fraud Unit .....	15
Major Case Unit .....	17
Narcotics Task Force.....	22
Security Planning Unit/Counter Terrorism Unit.....	25
Special Investigations Unit.....	29
Special Victims Unit.....	32
Juvenile Unit .....	38
Appellate Unit .....	40
Office of Victim Witness Advocacy .....	42
Community Outreach Office .....	44

## **MESSAGE FROM PROSECUTOR ESTHER SUAREZ**

I am pleased to present the 2024 Annual Report of the Office of the Hudson County Prosecutor for your review in accordance with the requirements of N.J.S.A. 52:17B-111.

Each year, I am proud of the dedication and professionalism of our staff. Our investigative staff works around the clock to keep our community safe. The Assistant Prosecutors of this Office work tirelessly to ensure justice is served. Our Victim Witness Advocates seek to provide assistance to individuals during their most difficult times. Our support staff and Agents ensure our Office operates efficiently. This report is reflective of their commitment to excellence.

It is my privilege to serve as the Hudson County Prosecutor and I am grateful to those who have helped us accomplish so much over these past 10 years. I would like to, specifically, thank our local, county, and state law enforcement partners for always being available to assist our Office, as well as the Hudson County Executive and the Board of County Commissioners for their continued support and cooperation.



**Respectfully submitted,**

**ESTHER SUAREZ**  
**Hudson County Prosecutor**

## **EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW**

The top priority of the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office (HCPO) has always been to seek justice on behalf of those we serve and treat everyone with dignity and respect. The members of the HCPO exemplify the very best of law enforcement and public service. Because of their professionalism, this Office reached a number of important milestones in 2024, some of which are highlighted below.

In 2024, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office officially opened its in-house DNA Laboratory, becoming only the second Prosecutor's Office in New Jersey to have this type of facility. This means our Office is now equipped to forensically examine items of evidentiary value collected at the scenes of major crimes, including sexual assaults, homicides, nonfatal shootings, and aggravated assaults. Prior to having this facility, our Office, along with our municipal law enforcement partners, relied on overwhelmed, State-operated laboratories. More often than not, we waited months to receive reports that were critical for time-sensitive investigations. Now, our team of highly skilled forensic experts examine these items in-house, with a much quicker turnaround time. We now serve as the primary DNA Laboratory for all of our municipal law enforcement partners in the County.

For the second year in a row, our Homicide Unit closed out 2024 with a 100% solve rate, meaning individuals were charged and/or arrested in connection with each of the 15 murders our Office investigated last year. The national average is in the area of 50%. These statistics demonstrate the importance of collaborative policing and highlights the success of programs like the Violent Crime Initiative, a federal program the HCPO participates in to combat violent crime in and around Jersey City.

The HCPO also has a Security Planning and Counter Terrorism Unit, which works closely with federal, state, and local officials to identify any existing public safety risks and ensure law enforcement is properly trained to respond in times of crisis and disaster. This team includes a Critical Infrastructure Coordinator who provides onsite assessments for houses of worship in Hudson County and assists in developing appropriate safety plans. In 2024, over \$1.5 million in state and federal grants were awarded to local houses of worship to implement stronger security plans. Of the 13 grants that were awarded, nine were directly assisted by the Hudson County Critical Infrastructure Coordinator.

The Hudson County Regional Collision Investigation Unit, the Hudson County Arson Task Force, Hudson County Regional SWAT, and the Hudson County Rapid Deployment Force, continued to be invaluable assets to the law enforcement community. These highly trained and skilled units respond to major collisions, fires, and large scale events, among other situations, to ensure public safety needs are met and to protect the integrity of complex investigations.

In 2024, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office became one of the first departments in the state to implement the ARRIVE Together Critical Incident Module. As part of a directive from the Office of the New Jersey Attorney General, Hudson County Regional SWAT, along with mental health professionals from Jersey City Medical Center are requested to respond to all calls involving barricaded individuals. Last year, Hudson County Regional SWAT responded to 12 calls for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. All responses resulted in a safe conclusion, both for the individual and law enforcement. In our Office, we recognize that having a mental health or substance use disorder, alone, is not a crime. We host Crisis Intervention Training for local law enforcement officers three times a year, and every seat in the classroom is filled. We facilitate

Resiliency Officer training courses so every law enforcement officer in this county has a colleague they can turn to when they, themselves, need support.

The achievements noted herein are the result of the dedicated employees who consistently strive for excellence. The Hudson County Prosecutor's Office, again, reaffirms its commitment to serving the citizens of Hudson County with respect, dignity, and compassion.

## **PRETRIAL DIVISION**

The Pretrial Division includes Central Judicial Processing Court, Criminal Justice Reform matters, and Early Disposition Court. The Pretrial Division is responsible for all aspects of criminal matters from first appearance through the Early Disposition Court date. The specialized units litigate matters vertically.

The Pretrial Division has a staff consisting of one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, one Assistant Chief Assistant Prosecutor, four Assistant Prosecutors, and support staff.

Assistant Prosecutors assigned to the Pretrial Division are responsible for case evaluation and screening of both warrant-complaints and summons-complaints at the first appearances for all matters not being handled by one of the HCPO's specialized units. Cases are assigned immediately after the first appearance. The assigned Assistant Prosecutor prepares the case, argues the detention motion when necessary, provides discovery, and makes an appropriate plea offer at the Early Disposition Conference. As part of this process, the assigned Assistant Prosecutor identifies whether a particular defendant is appropriate for Recovery Court or Pretrial Intervention. If the case is not resolved, the matter is assigned to an Assistant Prosecutor for Grand Jury presentation. The Pretrial Division also evaluates non-apprehended matters and screens citizen complaints generated on all indictable charges.

The Pretrial Division is responsible for collecting all relevant reports and evidence needed to evaluate and prosecute cases. When necessary, and at the direction of an Assistant Prosecutor, the investigative staff may initiate additional investigations independently or in concert with the appropriate local police authority.

Support staff are integral in preparing cases for each successive appearance and work closely with municipal departments to obtain reports, 911 recordings, CCTV video, and other relevant evidence.

The Pretrial Division collaborates with municipal departments and other arresting authorities in order to obtain all relevant information as quickly as possible for proper evaluation in all matters. Victim contact is essential and is made prior to the first appearance whenever possible.



## **TRIAL DIVISION**

The Trial Division is responsible for prosecuting all indicted cases involving crimes not handled by the HCPO's specialized units. These cases typically include robberies, aggravated assaults, firearms offenses, burglaries, and narcotics offenses. Cases that have not been resolved pre-indictment are assigned to the Trial Division for disposition. Initial plea offers for defendants in these indicted cases have already been extended and rejected in Early Disposition Court. The Assistant Prosecutors of the Trial Division attempt to resolve their assigned matters, but the plea offers increase in severity at each stage of the proceedings, in accordance with the escalating plea policy of the HCPO. Cases that cannot be resolved by plea are brought to trial.

The Trial Division consists of 14 Assistant Prosecutors under the supervision of the Trial Chief Assistant Prosecutor and two Assistant Trial Chief Assistant Prosecutors. The Division is further staffed with investigative personnel consisting of two Agents and two Detectives under the supervision of a Sergeant. These investigators are tasked with procuring evidence, maintaining contact with witnesses, and assisting in the presentation of the case to a jury.

The Chief Trial Assistant Prosecutor also supervises the Recovery Court Unit. The Recovery Court Unit represents the State in all aspects of the Judiciary's Recovery Court Program. The overall goal of Recovery Court is to identify offenders who would benefit from drug and alcohol counseling in an attempt to break the cycle of substance use and recidivism. Recovery Court is an intensive probation created by statute that targets drug and alcohol dependent offenders who would otherwise be looking at State Prison sentences. The Recovery Court Program is unique as it is a team-based approach to a participant's treatment and recovery.

The Recovery Court Unit is staffed with an Assistant Chief Prosecutor, an Assistant Prosecutor, and support staff. The Assistant Prosecutor who is assigned to Recovery Court reviews

each application for admission into the program and determines if an applicant meets the statutory requirements for admission. The Assistant Prosecutor attends weekly team meetings and any court hearings that involve the applicant/participant to assess the progress that each individual is making in their recovery. This ensures that any violation of the Court's sentencing and/or probationary conditions are addressed by sanctions or termination from the Recovery Court Program. The Assistant Prosecutor handles Recovery Court expungements once a participant successfully completes the program.

## **CIVIL LITIGATION UNIT**

The Civil Litigation Unit of the HCPO is responsible for overseeing and handling civil matters. This includes overseeing litigated civil matters, responding to subpoenas, responding to requests under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA), and administration of notices of real estate foreclosures.

The Civil Litigation Unit is responsible for providing materials sought through a subpoena. If the Unit determines that disclosure of the materials is not proper or will jeopardize an underlying criminal prosecution, then Motions to Quash or Motions for Protective Orders are filed. Additionally, in civil actions where the HCPO is a named party, the Civil Litigation Unit acts as a liaison to, and works in consultation with, civil attorneys representing the HCPO. This Unit tracks and monitors the progress of both state and federal lawsuits.

The Unit responds to requests under OPRA from the press, attorneys, and the public. The Unit makes all efforts to respond to these requests as quickly as possible to promote transparency in government, which is a primary goal of OPRA.

The Unit also acts as a liaison to all police departments in Hudson County. Because of various Attorney General Directives, local police departments forward OPRA requests and other records requests to the HCPO for review or comment. As a result, the Unit receives requests for guidance from local police departments and their municipal attorneys. The HCPO Custodian of Records helps guide municipalities through requests involving OPRA and Common Law Right of Access.

In addition, the Unit receives, copies, and files all real estate foreclosure notices where the HCPO or the County may be named as a creditor of the foreclosed party. These notices and pleadings are delivered to County Counsel for all appropriate action.

## **FORFEITURE UNIT**

Civil forfeiture actions are instituted against money or property that is deemed to be proceeds of illegal activity or that has been, or was intended to be, used in the furtherance of illegal activity. The purpose of seeking forfeiture of such money or property is to deter future acts of criminality by preventing individuals from profiting from their unlawful conduct and/or the use of said money or property in future crimes. The Unit also works on behalf of victims to return money or property that was been unlawfully taken from them.

In civil forfeiture actions, the State bears the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, the criminal character of the property. Defendants/claimants have the right to challenge the forfeiture. If the State prevails in a forfeiture action, the forfeited money or property is utilized for law enforcement purposes.

The Forfeiture Unit consists of a Chief Assistant Prosecutor, one Assistant Prosecutor, and two support staff. The Chief Assistant Prosecutor and Assistant Prosecutor are responsible for handling all civil forfeiture actions from inception through trial. The two support staff are responsible for providing administrative assistance to the Chief Assistant Prosecutor and Assistant Prosecutor.

## **IN-COURT UNIT**

The primary function of the In-Court Unit of the HCPO is to provide post-investigative support for those cases assigned to the Pretrial and Trial Units, which are responsible for prosecuting and resolving criminal cases. In 2024, the Unit was comprised of one Captain, one Lieutenant, two Sergeants, 12 Detectives, six Agents and two support staff.

The investigative personnel of the In-Court Unit aid Assistant Prosecutors in completing their assignments with a variety of investigative tasks including but not limited to the following:

- Further investigation of post-indictment cases
- Locating victims and witnesses
- Interviewing victims, witnesses, and suspects
- Conducting formal recorded statements
- Personal service of subpoenas
- Transporting and retrieving evidence to and from various agencies and labs
- Retrieving documents and evidence through evidence.com
- Recovering additional surveillance footage for cases
- Uploading and reviewing Body Worn Camera footage submitted by law enforcement
- Transporting victims and witnesses
- Apprehending fugitives
- Arresting bail violators and others for various criminal offenses
- Performing background investigations of HCPO applicants
- Generating subpoenas for active criminal investigations conducted by local law enforcement
- Conducting investigations that arise during the course of pretrial and trial preparation
- Screening civilian walk-in/telephone complaints that may be either criminal or civil in nature and referring those complaints to the proper jurisdiction for investigation
- Obtaining hair and buccal swabs by either a court order or consent from defendants, victims, and witnesses for laboratory DNA analysis
- Assisting outside law enforcement agencies with investigative follow up

Local police departments are required to upload all incident reports directly to InfoShare and all digital evidence via Evidence.com to meet the 2017 Criminal Justice Reform performance standards. In-Court personnel and the Administrative Services section continue to work with municipal police

departments with the uploading process to achieve total compliance. Utilizing evidence.com provides a more expeditious and efficient way to handle digital, documentary, and photographic evidence.

During 2024, the investigative efforts of the In-Court Unit resulted in the completion of approximately 8,012 detention requests. The detention requests consisted of Assistant Prosecutor investigative follow through on cases being processed by the Pretrial and Trial divisions. The In-Court Unit conducted 344 original exclusive investigations (walk-ins), resulting in 12 original complaints with criminal charges.

Additionally, Detectives assigned to the In-Court Unit conducted 58 background investigations including but not limited to prospective employees of the HCPO. In-Court Detectives and Agents assisted Hudson County municipal police departments by generating 1,074 Grand Jury subpoenas for active and on-going investigations. Personnel assigned to the Unit work diligently to enhance cases as they transition from pre-indictment to post indictment stages, thereby further ensuring that justice is served for the residents of Hudson County.

## **INSURANCE FRAUD UNIT**

The Insurance Fraud Unit (IFU) of the HCPO continues to investigate and prosecute violations of New Jersey insurance fraud statutes and related criminal activity. The IFU's enforcement efforts include an emphasis on insurance fraud, health care claims fraud, the manufacture and sale of fictitious documents, and insurance related arsons involving both dwellings and vehicles. Arrests effectuated by municipal police departments and other law enforcement agencies are also routinely reviewed by the IFU to determine if further investigation is warranted. These arrests are evaluated for their trends in insurance fraud.

### **SELECTED CASE SUMMARY INSURANCE FRAUD UNIT**

#### **State v. Marco Marin and Edgar Vargas**

IFU's investigation of this matter originated with a request for assistance from the Weehawken Police Department. Weehawken advised that a citizen was involved in a motor vehicle accident with a jitney bus on August 15, 2023. The citizen attempted to file a claim with the jitney bus company's insurance, however, his claim was denied as the insurance company did not insure the bus and the insurance card was not genuine. Following a de-confliction, the IFU found that the citizen had also submitted a tip to New Jersey's Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor. The IFU reviewed body worn camera footage of the accident scene. The bus was registered to Alfa & Omega Tours. Edgar Vargas, a director of Alfa & Omega Tours, was on the scene. Vargas can be seen on the footage providing the insurance card to the police officer. The officer retained a photograph of the card. The named insured was USA Bus Services, and the VIN number matched the bus on scene. The IFU obtained policy documents for the USA Bus Services policy with Incline-5 Star that was listed on the card. The policy insured only one bus, and that

was not the bus involved in the accident. USA Bus was found to be operating several jitney buses in Hudson County, but only had one insured. In the insurance application, Marco Marin, a director of USA Bus, maintained that the insured bus was not being used to transport unscheduled public passengers. Incline-5 Star would not insure this type of vehicle. The Weehawken Police Department, in coordination with the IFU, sent undercover Detectives on two occasions to ride on the policy bus as unscheduled passengers. Weehawken Police Detectives successfully rode the bus for a fare on both occasions. On December 19, 2024, Marco Marin and Edgar Vargas were admitted into the PTI program. Vargas was enrolled for one year, and Marin was enrolled for three years.



## **MAJOR CASE UNIT**

The Major Case Unit (MCU) is comprised of approximately 50 sworn and civilian personnel under the command of a Captain. The Detectives assigned to the MCU are tasked with investigating a wide variety of complex crimes. Additionally, investigative staff engage in partnerships with local, state, and federal authorities in an effort to provide the community with the highest level of innovative law enforcement service.

Detectives participate in information sharing forums to discuss crime trends and investigative techniques with local, state, and federal partners. The MCU consists of the Homicide Unit, the Gang Intelligence Unit, the Crime Scene Unit, the Regional Collision Investigation Unit, and the Regional Arson Task Force. A Chief Assistant Prosecutor has primary oversight responsibility for all investigative and legal activities. The legal staff consists of several highly trained Assistant Prosecutors and support staff who are on call 24/7 to provide counsel, prepare charging documents, and seek court authorization for search warrants, communication data warrants, orders of temporary detention, and any other legal action which will facilitate the investigation.

The Homicide Unit investigates all homicides, suspicious deaths, in-custody deaths, and nonfatal police-involved shootings in Hudson County. The Homicide Unit is comprised of approximately 20 sworn and civilian personnel divided into four squads under the direct supervision of a Captain, a Lieutenant, and four Sergeants. Detectives assigned to the Homicide Unit are available on a 24-hour basis to respond to incidents. The moments and hours immediately following a homicide are often the most important for investigators. Detectives will examine the scene of the incident, locate and interview witnesses, obtain video surveillance, speak with family

members or friends who may have relevant information, and work concurrently with other units in an attempt to develop suspect information.

The Gang Intelligence Unit (GIU) seeks to combat crime by gathering actionable intelligence relating to suspects and organizations that disproportionately drive violent crime within Hudson County. Under the direct supervision of a Captain, a Lieutenant and a Sergeant, the GIU targets those individuals and enterprises for aggressive investigation and prosecution with an overall goal of violent crime reduction. Detectives participate in community outreach programs in an effort to educate the community on the dangers of street gangs.

The Crime Scene Unit (CSU) is comprised of a squad of highly educated and trained Detectives who work under the direct supervision of a Captain, a Lieutenant and a Sergeant. CSU Detectives are available on a 24-hour basis to respond to incidents. Detectives are responsible for identifying, collecting, preserving, and packaging physical evidence at the scene of a crime. A great deal of the CSU work is performed at a crime scene, where Detectives collect everything from firearms and fingerprints to DNA samples and photographic evidence. Detectives then maintain chain of custody throughout the forensic process until the investigation is resolved. The CSU works closely with all federal and local law enforcement partners.

The Regional Collision Investigation Unit, under the direction of multiple Assistant Prosecutors, a Lieutenant, and a Sergeant, is a Task Force comprised of highly trained HCPO Detectives and law enforcement officers from municipal departments. This Unit was created to ensure a comprehensive and uniform approach is taken to investigate collisions resulting in fatalities and life-threatening injuries. By utilizing the Task Force concept, Hudson County residents are guaranteed that every collision investigation is completed with the highest level of investigative service to the point of prosecutable standards or assurance of all civil implications.

The Regional Arson Task Force (RATF) assists local authorities in the determination of the origin and cause of fires that result in death, create widespread damage, or are suspicious in nature. The RATF consists of both fire department personnel and law enforcement personnel. These combined fields are essential for conducting a thorough fire investigation and complete scene examination. Experienced on-loan members of local fire departments who have knowledge of fire behavior and suppression tactics are teamed with law enforcement officers to investigate these matters. Members of the RATF work to provide the highest level of service to the citizens of Hudson County.

## **SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES**

### **HOMICIDE UNIT**

#### **State v. Albert Morales**

On April 28, 2024, the Hoboken Police Department received reports of shots fired in the area of 320 Marshall Drive, Hoboken. The victim, later identified as Damon Murray, sustained a gunshot entry wound to his torso and was transported to Hackensack University Medical Center where he was pronounced dead at 12:04 a.m. on April 29, 2024. The Cause of Death was determined to be Gunshot Wound of the Torso and the Manner of Death to be Homicide. During the course of the investigation, a murder weapon was recovered near the scene. A suspect was positively identified as Albert Morales. Utilizing law enforcement databases, it was determined that Morales had a relative in Massachusetts. Homicide Detectives contacted the Chicopee Police Department and directed police units to conduct surveillance operations at the identified address where Morales' vehicle was observed parked in the driveway. Chicopee Police were advised of Morales' criminal warrant for Murder, Unlawful Possession of a Weapon, and Possession of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose. Chicopee Police, along with the Massachusetts State Police

Fugitive Unit located Morales and placed him under arrest on April 30, 2024, on a Fugitive from Justice warrant pending extradition to New Jersey.

### **State v. Darren Estevez and Freddie Castro**

On April 7, 2024, the Jersey City Police Department was notified of a shooting in the area of Central Avenue and Bowers Street in Jersey City. As a result of the shooting, two victims sustained non-fatal injuries while a third victim, later identified as Freddie Posey, sustained multiple gunshot wounds and was pronounced dead at 9:38 p.m. The Cause of Death was determined to be Gunshot Wound of the Torso and Manner of Death to be Homicide. During the course of the investigation, Homicide Detectives identified two suspected shooters, Darren Estevez and Freddie Castro. On June 23, 2024, Estevez was arrested in Orlando, Florida for making a false reports/knowingly providing false information and for possession of CDS (cannabis). Estevez provided Orlando Police officers a Florida identification indicating his name was “Nathan Perez.” On June 27, 2024, HCPO Homicide Detectives traveled to the Orlando and informed Estevez of his charges of Murder, corresponding weapons charges and two counts of Aggravated Assault. On July 11, 2024, members of the U.S. Marshals Florida/Caribbean Regional Fugitive Task Force located and apprehended Castro in Intercession City, Florida. Castro was taken into custody without incident pending extradition to New Jersey on Murder, corresponding firearms charges and two counts of Aggravated Assault.

### **SELECTED CASE SUMMARY REGIONAL ARSON TASK FORCE (RATF)**

On Wednesday, October 16, 2024, the Jersey City Police Department and Jersey City Fire Department received 911 calls for a working fire at 121 Garfield Avenue, Jersey City. Upon arrival, a witness was observed flagging down the fire department advising that his brother, Pablo

Renta, was still inside the apartment. Fire and smoke could be observed within the third-floor apartment. The Jersey City Fire Department conducted offensive fire operations in an attempt to prevent the spread of fire to adjoining units. The fire was ruled under control at 10:36 a.m. The JCFD found Renta in his bedroom and transported him to Jersey City Medical Center, where he was subsequently pronounced dead at 6:59 p.m. The Regional Arson Task Force conducted the Origin and Cause of the fire investigation along with the Jersey City Fire Department. During the investigation, numerous interviews were conducted by RATF investigative staff identifying the first signs of fire and smoke in the bedroom of Renta. Signs of improper disposal of smoking materials were present on scene. The cause of the fire was listed as Accidental.

#### **SELECTED CASE SUMMARY REGIONAL COLLISION INVESTIGATION UNIT (RCIU)**

##### **State v. Sonia Salazar**

On Thursday, May 30, 2024, the Kearny Police Department responded to a pedestrian struck in the area of Kearny Avenue and Columbia Avenue in Kearny. Upon arrival, responding police officers found a victim, later identified as Carlo Dlugosh. Dlugosh was allegedly walking in the marked crosswalk when he was struck by a vehicle and sustained serious bodily injury. The investigation was conducted by members of the Regional Collision Investigation Unit, and it was determined that a 2016 Nissan Murano struck the victim, slowed down and then fled the scene. On May 31, 2024, the striking vehicle was located at a business in Belleville. Upon interviewing the registered owner, he advised that a friend had borrowed his vehicle. He supplied the name of Sonia Salazar. On Thursday, June 6, 2024, Salazar was arrested and charged with one count of Knowingly Leaving the Scene of a Collision resulting in Serious Bodily Injury, one count of Causing Serious Injury while Driving with a Suspended License, and one count of Endangering the Welfare of a Victim. Salazar's criminal court processing is still pending.

## **NARCOTICS TASK FORCE**

The mission of the Narcotics Task Force (NTF) is to identify, investigate and dismantle large scale and violent drug trafficking organizations in and around Hudson County. In 2024, the NTF was comprised of one Captain, one Lieutenant, two Sergeants, 10 Detectives (including two Detectives assigned to Federal Agencies) one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, one Assistant Chief Prosecutor, three Assistant Prosecutors, and two support staff.

The NTF is responsible for investigating mid- and high-level drug and firearm traffickers. Many of these cases involve multi-state jurisdictions and occasionally international locations. The NTF not only focuses on seizing and recovering large quantities of controlled dangerous substances, but also tracking and identifying any assets obtained in connection with the trafficking and distribution by drug organizations. The Assistant Prosecutors assigned to this Unit prosecute cases that involve firearms and shooting offenses.

The following section highlights investigations from 2024.

### **SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES NARCOTICS TASK FORCE**

#### **State v. Jose Restrepo, Mauricio Jurtado, and Carlos Flores**

In February 2024, the NTF, the United States Department of Homeland Security Investigations, and the United States Postal Inspection Service conducted a narcotics investigation after U.S. Customs and Border Protection intercepted a parcel from Spain containing narcotics concealed inside a solar panel. The pink powdery substance tested positive for ketamine and MDMA, commonly known as pink cocaine or tuci. A controlled delivery of the parcel to a residence in North Bergen led to the arrest of Jose Restrepo. Further investigation identified two individuals, Mauricio Hurtado and Carlos Flores, who were arrested when they arrived to retrieve

the parcel. A subsequent search warrant executed at Hurtado's residence in Secaucus resulted in the seizure of over five kilograms of MDMA/ketamine in various colors, one handgun, and more than \$100,000 in United States currency. All three defendants were charged with multiple CDS possession and distribution charges. Hurtado was additionally charged with firearms and money laundering offenses.

**State v. Nelson Villegas-Rios, Larry Brito Marin, and Sebastian Ospina-Osorio**

In March 2024, the NTF initiated an investigation into an organization distributing tuci. The NTF conducted multiple undercover narcotics buys, leading to the identification of three members: Nelson Villegas-Rios, Larry Brito Marin, and Sebastian Ospina-Osorio. Surveillance revealed a stash location in Lyndhurst. In August 2024, a coordinated buy-bust operation resulted in the arrests of Villegas-Rios and Ospina-Osorio and the seizure of approximately 160 grams of tuci. A search warrant executed simultaneously in Lyndhurst resulted in the recovery of an additional 100 grams of cocaine, 20 grams of tuci, a handgun, \$2,670 in United States currency, and one vehicle for forfeiture. In September 2024, Brito Marin was arrested at Newark International Airport upon re-entering the United States. All three individuals were charged with first-degree CDS offenses.

**State v. Giovanni Alfaro and Jamie Juarez-Castillo**

In October 2023, the NTF opened an investigation into Giovanni Alfaro, a known CDS distributor in Bayonne. Alfaro was also suspected of possessing handguns. Through a series of undercover controlled narcotics buys, NTF detectives observed Alfaro using his vehicle and conducting transactions while accompanied by his girlfriend, Jamie Juarez-Castillo, and their 5-year-old daughter. One undercover buy resulted in the purchase of a handgun from Alfaro. In June 2024, search warrants were executed for Alfaro's residence, his vehicle, and his person.

The searches yielded approximately 180 grams of cocaine, 2.5 pounds of marijuana, 92 Xanax pills, 413 Oxycodone pills, and more than \$3,500 in United States currency. Both Alfaro and Castillo were charged with more than 30 CDS-related offenses, sale of a handgun to an undercover officer, and endangering the welfare of a child.



## **SECURITY PLANNING UNIT/COUNTER TERRORISM UNIT**

The Security Planning Unit/Counter Terrorism Unit (SP/CTU) is a squad within the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office that works closely with local, state, and federal officials related to disaster response plans, utilization/coordination of resources, security planning, training, and various federal and state funding initiatives that involve Hudson County. The SP/CTU is also involved in the review of vulnerability at various critical infrastructure sites, development of Target Hardening and Risk Mitigation plans, and maintaining and updating information related to each site. The Unit acts as the liaison to the local Office of Emergency Management.

During 2024, the SP/CTU was comprised of one Captain, one Detective, and one Risk Mitigation Planner. The Lieutenant and Detective serve as the Office Liaison to the Hudson County Office of Emergency Management and County Counter Terrorism Coordinator (CCTC). They were also assigned in an on-loan capacity to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force (FBI JTTF).

During 2024, the SP/CTU continued to serve various roles related to the Hudson County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Urban Area Security Initiative Region (UASI), County Working Group (CWG) for Homeland Security Grant Programs, and the Hudson County Counter Terrorism Task Force (CTTF). These duties include attending meetings, developing Investment Justifications and Spending Plans for grant funding initiatives, procuring and installing equipment, as well as working on various committees and sub-committees for OEM, CWG, UASI and CTTF related issues.

The Unit continued to enhance both the Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) program and the Behavioral Threat Assessment Team and Management initiative (BTATM). Through direct involvement in UASI, members participated in the design, funding, and procurement processes, as well as installation of hardware and software related to the ALPR project. Installation

of this equipment required coordinating with the vendor and with each police department to complete the deployment of this important tool. For the BTATM project, the HCPO was able to facilitate training for law enforcement, school administrators, and mental health professionals.

The Unit's Risk Mitigation Planner (RMP) is a member of the UASI Critical Infrastructure Protection subcommittee and the County Working Group. Through these memberships, the RMP represented the County on matters involving the National Infrastructure Protection Plan and grant funding directly related to the protection of critical infrastructure sites within Hudson County. The RMP continued to monitor the status of existing critical infrastructure sites. This monitoring, coupled with intelligence components at the FBI JTTF, provides seamless sharing of intelligence between the law enforcement community and various critical business sites.

The RMP also provided security assessments. The assessments included Site Assistance Visits for private and public sector partners under the auspices of the HCPO and the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP). The RMP was directly responsible for the identification, updating, and assessing of the list of infrastructure sites within the county. In addition, the RMP conducted training sessions and presentations throughout the county to assist local agencies with security surveys for the 12 municipal school districts.

Outreach efforts by the SPU increased the number of House of Worship applications for the DHS/FEMA Non-Profit Security Grant Program. The SPU continued to work with Houses of Worship for the 2024 grant program that was set at \$150,000 per site.

Also during 2024, the unit continued oversight and maintenance of radiological detection equipment obtained through OHSP and New Jersey State Police. This equipment is part of the ongoing Secure the Cities Initiative, developed by the Department of Homeland Security, in conjunction with the New York City Police Department, and is intended to enhance radiological

detection capabilities in the region. Radiological terror attacks are of great concern in the region. The Unit has been tasked with receiving equipment for all county law enforcement agencies, setting up training courses for local departments, ensuring annual calibration of equipment, distribution of equipment, as well as participating in regional planning, exercise drills, and deployment plans.

The Counter-Terrorism Task Force (CTTF) is comprised of a County Counter Terrorism Coordinator (CCTC), who is a Captain from the SP/CTU, a Risk Mitigation Planner, and a Detective from the SP/CTU. The CTTF also has Municipal Counter Terrorism Coordinators from municipal police departments and other law enforcement agencies within the County. The CTTF works closely with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, and the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Local and county coordinators were tasked with investigating leads and conducting follow-up investigations that may be related to terrorism. The information gained through these investigative leads is maintained in a statewide intelligence database known as Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) overseen by the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. The County Coordinators are also charged with overseeing the implementation of added security during periods of heightened alert levels, as well as overseeing various other security and intelligence initiatives.

The CTTF continued its work this past year, working closely with the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, the Joint Terrorist Task Force, Department of Homeland Security, and other state and local agencies. The CTTF carried out various initiatives throughout the year, including immediate response to various investigative leads and potential threats. The responses included assisting local, state, and federal agencies investigating terrorism related

leads/cases connected to Hudson County. Due to the CCTC being assigned in an on-loan capacity to the FBI JTTF, the CCTC was able to provide current threat streams to the CTTF and provide guidance on investigative leads and potential threats.

During 2024, the CTTF assisted OHSP in the handling of investigative leads, many of which were forwarded to local coordinators for further investigative action. All of these leads were entered into the SAR's database at CT Watch located at the Regional Operations and Intelligence Center in Trenton. The CTTF also participated in regional Homeland Security exercises, distribution of related equipment, and arranging training for their respective departments.

## **SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT**

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) is responsible for criminal investigations involving white-collar crimes including public corruption, bank/mortgage fraud, identity theft, credit card fraud, voter fraud, embezzlement, money laundering, and other financial crimes. This unit also conducts investigations into acts of cargo theft. The SIU routinely assists outside agencies and other units within the HCPO when investigating matters involving financial records.

During 2024, the SIU was comprised of one Lieutenant, one Sergeant, two Detectives, one Agent, one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, and one Assistant Prosecutor. Many of the matters handled by the SIU are long-term financial crime investigations that often require extensive records analysis, detailed report writing, spreadsheet preparation, and physical and electronic surveillance. In addition, the SIU remains active in various public and private sector networking and information sharing groups/forums. These groups — which include law enforcement agencies, banks, investment firms, and other businesses — are often instrumental in the furtherance of investigations, and help streamline the ability to obtain necessary information in a short amount of time. The SIU also works closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the United States Secret Service, the United States Department of Homeland Security, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, and local police departments.

In 2024, arrests were made for various types of crimes, including a number of cases referred by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission as part of its Facial Scrub Initiative. The following section contains examples of highlighted investigations from 2024.

## **SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES**

### **SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT**

#### **State v. Eric Li**

On March 21, 2024, the Special Investigations Unit received a referral from the Union City Police Department regarding a theft committed by President Eric Li of the Park of West Union City Condo Home Owner Association. Members of the Union City Police Department conducted several interviews of the Home Owner Association board members who all indicated Li misused funds belonging to the Home Owner Association during his time as president from 2017 through 2023. Specifically, Li requested reimbursement for purchases allegedly made from Amazon and Home Depot and provided fraudulent receipts for such purchases. In addition, Eric Li withdrew money from the Homeowner Association's reserve bank account for his own personal use. The financial analysis conducted revealed a total amount stolen by Eric Li to be more than \$150,000. On November 4, 2024, Li plead guilty to third-degree theft. He was sentenced to three years non-custodial probation and \$100,000 in restitution.

#### **State v. Christopher Poppe, et al.**

In November of 2023, an investigation was initiated into the president of a Bergen County construction company and his father which resulted in a theft of nearly \$380,000 intended for subcontractors on a Jersey City church project. Christopher Poppe and his father, Glen Poppe, were each charged with second-degree theft by deception and conspiracy to commit theft by deception in connection with work their company, Centurion Companies, performed for a church in 2021. Christopher Poppe was additionally charged with three counts of forgery. Christopher Poppe is the president of Centurion. The investigation revealed that the church paid Centurion \$378,000 to pay third-party contractors for services at the site of a new church. Falsified records

were submitted to the church indicating the third-party contractors had been paid, when the money had not been dispersed. Prosecution is pending.

## **SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT**

In 2024, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit (SVU) continued to function in accordance with preexisting protocols within the county. The SVU investigated allegations of sexual penetration, sexual contact with victims under the age of 13, and child physical abuse cases resulting in serious bodily injury. The SVU also investigated sexually related offenses where strangers, law enforcement officers, teachers, and religious leaders were accused. The SVU continued to work closely with state and local law enforcement agencies on reported sexually related offenses.

The SVU worked with the Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP) on child physical and sexual abuse cases. The unit partnered with county Specialized Care Coordinators (SCC), who are part of the new state program to address Problematic Sexual Behavior among children. The SVU worked with SCCs to provide appropriate services for children in cases involving child-on-child sexual assault cases where DCPP was not involved.

Municipal and college police departments remain involved with sexual assault investigations in Hudson County. The SVU provides assistance, guidance, and direction to law enforcement partners when needed. The SVU remained involved with the activation of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) on sexual assaults that occurred within seven days, or nine days if injuries were present. The SVU handles Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits and related forensic evidence collection, and submits the findings to the forensic lab for analysis.

The unit continued to provide local law enforcement agencies with training on the protocol and best practices for investigating sexually related offenses. Additionally, local law enforcement agencies were alerted to other sexual assault training opportunities available throughout the state.



Municipal law enforcement agencies, college law enforcement agencies, and recruits at the Hudson County Public Safety Training Center also receive this specialized training.

The SVU continued to assess internal protocols concerning arrests, case file preparation, legal reviews, evidence processing and analysis, and security. SVU personnel received in-house training pertaining to operations, various investigative functions, and field tactics.

In 2024, the SVU investigated 295 cases compared to 313 cases in 2023. There were 262 reports of sexual assaults, 17 child physical abuse investigations, and 16 miscellaneous cases investigated. Criminal charges were filed in 63 of the cases with 58 arrests and five non-apprehended complaints filed.

The unit has one Captain, one Lieutenant, and four Sergeants. Each Sergeant supervises a squad of three detectives. The unit has 12 Detectives, four of which are on loan to the SVU from local law enforcement agencies. Two investigative squads work steady shifts 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the two remaining squads work weekly rotating shifts of 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. Each squad is on-call for one week, every four weeks. The unit has one agent and two support staff.

The SVU has remained active with community outreach. Presentations on sexual assault awareness, prevention, and handling of disclosures continued to be offered at local police departments, schools, and universities. The unit also advocates for survivors of criminal activity by participating in events such as candlelight vigils and Take Back the Night.

Additionally, members of the SVU take part in the New Jersey Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC). Last year, three Detectives served on the ICAC. In 2024, the ICAC received 213 cyber tips and closed 238 cyber tips between 2023 and 2024. The ICAC referred 36 cyber tips to other jurisdictions, conducted eight investigations, made eight arrests, and served 210

subpoenas. The ICAC executed nine search warrants and assisted in the execution of other state and local search warrants.

The use of electronic devices continues to increase in crimes against children, and often contain critical evidence. In 2024, there were approximately 163 electronics devices forensically analyzed for investigative purposes.

In 2023, Jersey City Medical Center, Hoboken University Medical Center, and Christ Hospital were certified SART sites. In 2024, Bayonne Medical Center and Palisades General Hospital were added as SART sites. There were 157 SART activations in Hudson County that required a SVU Sergeant or Detective to contact the SART Coordinator to initiate a response from Law Enforcement, a Forensic Nurse Examiner, and a Rape Crisis Advocate. In 2024, 70 sexual assault forensic exam kits were collected.

The SVU investigated several complex and challenging cases in 2024. SVU supervisors, Detectives, Assistant Prosecutors, and local law enforcement officers collaborated to make arrests subsequent to many investigations. The thorough canvass for surveillance cameras and subsequent review of footage has been a critical investigative step in many cases. The Unit has also conducted an increasing amount of consensual intercepts pursuant to the New Jersey Electronic Surveillance and Wiretap Act, which continually prove their value in garnering critical information on cases. Local police departments are now successfully using this investigative tool.

SVU investigative and legal personnel continued to work with the Office of the New Jersey Attorney General's Clergy Abuse Task Force. The SVU continued to interview victims and witnesses in cases involving clergy abuse within the Catholic Church. The case files and related documents have been forwarded to Task Force Prosecutors, who continued to prepare for grand jury presentment.

The cases summarized below attest to the high quality investigative performance by SVU personnel.

## **SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT**

### **State v. Marc Toledo**

On June 2, 2024, the HCPO's SVU received a call from the Jersey City Medical Center regarding the sexual assault of a 22-year-old female by an unknown male, later identified as Marc Toledo. Two unknown males stopped her before she entered her residence. One of the males drove her to a secluded area where he physically and sexually assaulted her inside a vehicle. The review of video surveillance footage and additional investigative efforts led to the identification and arrest of the suspect. Toledo was charged with Aggravated Sexual Assault, Sexual Assault, Kidnapping, Aggravated Assault, Terroristic Threats, and Criminal Restraint.

### **State v. David Bradow**

On August 1, 2024, the HCPO Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force received multiple cyber tips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Several electronic service providers became aware of numerous items of suspected child sex abuse material in various accounts. The HCPO ICAC verified the items to be CSAM. Using various investigative efforts, it was determined that the accounts belonged to David Bradow. Bradow was initially charged with second-degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child. Forensic analysis of numerous devices secured during a court-authorized search warrant resulted in the recovery of more CSAM. Bradow is facing an Additional first-degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child charge as the total amount of CSAM surpassed 400,000 items.

### **State v. Carlos Ruiz Castro**

On July 27, 2024, the HCPO's SVU was notified by the West New York Police Department regarding the sexual assault of a 42-year-old female by an unknown male, later identified as Carlos Ruiz Castro. The victim reported she met an unknown male on the street and they began a conversation. She was then forced into an alley and physically and sexually assaulted. Ruiz Castro was identified by review of video surveillance footage and additional investigative efforts. Ruiz Castro was charged with Aggravated Sexual Assault, Sexual Assault, Kidnapping, Aggravated Criminal Sexual Contact, and Simple Assault.

### **SVU LEGAL TEAM OVERVIEW**

In 2024, the legal side of the SVU was staffed with a Chief Assistant Prosecutor, two Assistant Chief Prosecutors, and five Assistant Prosecutors. In addition to prosecuting sex crime cases originating from HCPO investigations, the team also prosecuted sex crime cases investigated by municipal police departments. The SVU also prosecutes child abuse cases and all disorderly persons domestic violence contempt cases in the Chancery Division, Family Part. The SVU is responsible for the tiering of Hudson County registered sex offenders, prosecuting failures to register and violations of Community Supervision for Life, and applying Megan's Law registrants and Community Supervision for Life parolees for termination of their obligations.

The SVU participated in quarterly meetings of the Domestic Violence Working Group, which includes members of the Family Part staff, municipal police department domestic violence liaisons, municipal court judiciary members, Northeast Legal Services, and WomenRising. The Chief Assistant Prosecutor and the Assistant Chief Prosecutors served as intermediaries between municipal police departments and the Superior Court Family Division Manager's Office when issues arose on domestic violence restraining orders, particularly on the subject of service of restraining orders and the handling of after-hours Temporary Restraining Order applications.

Additionally, along with the SVU supervising Detectives, the Assistant Chief Prosecutors participated in biweekly Multidisciplinary Team Meetings to share information on open cases with representatives from the four Hudson County offices of the DCP&P, a Deputy Attorney General, and representatives from the Audrey Hepburn Children's House.

SVU Assistant Prosecutors are responsible for providing legal advice to SVU investigators and all Hudson County municipal police officers with questions about domestic violence, sex crimes, and child abuse. SVU Assistant Prosecutors provide on-call coverage for these questions, as well as assistance with search warrants and CDWs, on a 24-hour, 7-day basis throughout the year.

Pursuant to AG Directive 2018-5, the Chief Assistant Prosecutor and the Assistant Chief Prosecutors review all sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault charges and approve filing of the appropriate charges. The Chief Assistant Prosecutor screened new cases processed through CJR court and filed the appropriate detention motions.

## **JUVENILE UNIT**

The purpose of the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Juvenile Unit is to advocate the State's position in the Family Part against juveniles alleged to have committed delinquent acts.

In 2024, the staff of the Juvenile Unit consisted of one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, two Assistant Prosecutors, one Detective, and one support staff.

Attorneys assigned to this section are responsible for the review, evaluation, preparation, and disposition of all complaints against juveniles assigned to the Superior Court Chancery Division, Family Part. The Chief Assistant Prosecutor assigned to the Juvenile Unit directly supervises the Assistant Prosecutors and support staff.

Investigative staff assigned to this section are responsible for obtaining police reports and other relevant documents as well as collecting all evidence in the case and discovering it to defense attorneys. At the direction of an Assistant Prosecutor, the investigative staff also conduct supplemental investigations. The support staff manages the internal juvenile database and all records related to juvenile matters. The support staff provides all other clerical needs of the Unit.

The Chief Assistant Prosecutor is responsible for reviewing the complaints entering the Family Court Juvenile Intake Unit each day. The Team Leader reviews the complaint to see if the case warrants involvement by the HCPO. In making this determination, the Assistant Prosecutor uses the following criteria:

1. The nature of the offense
2. Whether any harm was inflicted on the victim
3. The age of the juvenile
4. The juvenile's past delinquent behavior
5. The juvenile's community and educational ties

6. The likelihood of the juvenile's success in any alternative disposition program

Thereafter, the preliminary or initial hearings are conducted. The HCPO is present at all cases designated for the Counsel Calendar. At the hearings, the State, if warranted, may argue for pretrial detention.

After the case is reviewed, the complaint and related documents are uploaded to the internal computer system, InfoShare, and the file is assigned to an Assistant Prosecutor. The Assistant Prosecutor then works with the investigative staff to subpoena or locate victims and possible witnesses and obtain evidence for the case. During this process, the Assistant Prosecutor completes pending pretrial motions and engages in plea negotiations. After disposition, the support staff closes the file in InfoShare and inputs the disposition including the charge, sentence, and any conditions imposed by the Judge.

## **APPELLATE UNIT**

The Appellate Unit is responsible for representing the State's position in both the appeals of convictions returned by the Appellate Section of the Division of Criminal Justice and in response to Petitions for Post-Conviction Relief filed in Superior Court. The unit is also responsible for the prosecution of municipal appeals. Additionally, the unit is responsible for filing an Answer in a select number of Petitions for Writ of Habeas Corpus filed in the District Court of New Jersey and any resultant appeals in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. The Unit responds to all expungement petitions filed in Hudson County.

In 2024, the Appellate Unit staffed one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, one Assistant Chief Prosecutor, two Assistant Prosecutors, one support staff, and season law clerks.

The legal staff assigned to the Appellate Unit has several responsibilities. The first responsibility is the preparation of appellate briefs raised by appeals of cases generated by the HCPO, which have been returned by the Appellate Section of the Division of Criminal Justice. If oral argument is ordered on those issues, the legal staff is responsible for that argument before the Appellate Division and the Supreme Court.

The legal staff assigned to the Appellate Unit is also responsible for the handling of miscellaneous matters heard by the Superior Court, Law Division. These include hearings on Post-Conviction Relief and municipal appeals. These cases require the preparation of briefs to be submitted to the Superior Court. As oral argument is often ordered in these matters, the legal staff is responsible for these arguments. The legal staff is also responsible for the handling of all expungement petitions. For expungement matters, the legal staff must first determine eligibility under the statute and then draft and file an objection if necessary.



The Legal Staff assigned to this unit is also responsible for the handling of Petitions for Habeas Corpus relief in federal court. The responses necessary for such petitions require the wholesale digital reproduction of the entire trial and appellate record for the federal court in addition to preparing the State's legal response. The legal staff provides legal research and writing assistance to support other units of the HCPO as needed.

## **OFFICE OF VICTIM/WITNESS ADVOCACY**

The mission of the Hudson County Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy is to ensure that all crime victims are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect by the criminal justice system per the New Jersey Constitutional Amendment for Victims' Rights (N.J. Const., art. I, Para. 22) and the Crime Victims' Bill of Rights (N.J.S.A. § 52:4b-36). The goal of the Hudson County Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy is to safeguard and uphold the legal rights of all victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses. The Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy strives to improve the image of the criminal justice system, in order to promote a cooperative, mutually beneficial environment for victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses involved in the criminal justice process in Hudson County.

To achieve this goal, the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy provides services and resources to assist victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses in coping with the aftermath of a crime and their victimization. Such services provided by the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy include:

- Advocacy
- Informing victims of their rights within the criminal justice system
- Providing information on the status/disposition of adult and juvenile criminal cases
- Referring to social service agencies and counseling/therapeutic services
- Assisting in filing applications with the Victims of Crime Compensation Office
- Assisting with the return of property
- Providing information about the criminal justice system to orient the victim
- Accompaniment to court
- Assisting with Victim Impact Statements
- Serving as a liaison for victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses with prosecutorial staff, investigative staff, agencies, and social service providers
- Providing notification of offender release from incarceration, parole and other related releases

The Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy is responsible for responding to the concerns of all crime victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses regarding their victimization, and delivering the appropriate services. This is accomplished in a safe, responsive environment where they can have

a Victim/Witness Advocate attend to their concerns. Providing these services and resources, as well as a responsive environment, promotes healing and empowers those victimized by crime.

In addition to providing services, the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy maintains statistical data on all victims, witnesses, and victim-survivors and the services rendered by the unit. This statistical data and coordinating narratives are compiled quarterly and provided to the Office of the New Jersey Attorney General and the State Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy to maintain grant funding.

In 2024, the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy was comprised of a Victim/Witness Coordinator and six Victim/Witness Advocates. Three of the advocates are bilingual in English and Spanish.

The Victim/Witness Coordinator and Advocates sit on multiple committees and boards, including the New Jersey Victim/Witness Coordinators Association, Multi-Disciplinary Team Coordinators Association, Hudson SPEAKS Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Sexual Assault Response Team Advisory Board, and Domestic Violence Working Group. The Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy also partners with various county and national victim-centered and community organizations to remain updated on new legislation and current trends with victims and victimization. These committees, boards, and partnerships are an imperative element to the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy's functionality, as well as its commitment and duty to serve Hudson County.

The Hudson County Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy remains dedicated to victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses of crime. The Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy will continue to offer the appropriate support and knowledge that ensures victims can overcome their victimization and begin to heal.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

The Hudson County Prosecutor's Office remains committed to serving the community in various ways and significant efforts expanded our reach and impact across the county. The HCPO participated in approximately 90 community events, highlighting the commitment of the HCPO to actively engage, support, and empower Hudson County residents through events that foster unity, awareness, and positive community-police relations.

Throughout 2024, the HCPO hosted and participated in events that created welcoming spaces for residents to connect with law enforcement. Notable successes included a Trunk or Treat event in October and participation at National Night Out events throughout Hudson County in August. Smaller initiatives during the year where the HCPO was visible and approachable included events such as Shop with a Cop, Coffee with a Cop, and Touch-a-Truck. These and other events such as reading to children, career fairs, and senior mobility workshops made a significant impact in fostering trust and building personal connections with residents.

Small consistent efforts have led to tremendous progress in the communities the HCPO serves. Attending community events, hosting junior police academies, visiting local schools, and collaborating with local businesses have all helped the HCPO strengthen relationships and create a lasting positive impact.

The focus of our community outreach efforts remains on growth, inclusivity, and being responsive to the needs of Hudson County residents.