



OFFICE OF THE MERCER COUNTY PROSECUTOR

JANETTA D. MARBREY
Prosecutor

Chief of County Detectives

209 S. Broad Street, 3rd Floor
P.O. Box 8068
Trenton, New Jersey 08650-0068
Phone: (609) 989-6350
mercercountyprosecutor.com

JENNIFER DOWNING-MATHIS
First Assistant Prosecutor

BRIAN KIELY
Deputy Chief of County Detectives

July 31, 2025

I am pleased to enclose the 2024 Annual Report of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office. This report is compiled in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 52:17B-111b* and reflects my staff's sincere dedication to public service and the people of Mercer County.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Janetta D. MarbreY".

JANETTA D. MARBREY
MERCER COUNTY PROSECUTOR

*MERCER COUNTY
PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE*



2024
ANNUAL REPORT

*JANETTA D. MARBREY
MERCER COUNTY PROSECUTOR*

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MESSAGE FROM THE PROSECUTOR

It is my pleasure to submit this annual report reflecting the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office continued commitment to excellence, both in the courtroom and in the community. These dedicated professionals work tirelessly to ensure that, as the face of justice in the community, all persons and cases we interact with receive justice while being treated with dignity and respect.

2024 was a year of change for the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office. In July, Angelo Onofri retired after serving 9½ years as Prosecutor. Assistant Attorney General Theresa Hilton was appointed Acting Prosecutor and steered the office for five months. On December 20, 2024, after being appointed by Governor Phil Murphy and unanimously confirmed by the New Jersey Senate, I was sworn in as Mercer County Prosecutor. And while the office continued to experience some staffing challenges during 2024, the one constant through the year was the exemplary work of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office team. Our legal staff secured numerous hard-fought convictions while maintaining the highest standards of professionalism and service. The investigative staff continued its excellence in conducting numerous high-profile investigations and operations removing narcotics, illegal firearms and child predators from the streets. The office's mission and dedication to the pursuit and attainment of justice for all was supported and advanced by the administrative and professional staffs.

Like many counties in New Jersey, Mercer saw a reduction in homicides and overall violent crime in 2024. While even one life lost is too many, the Mercer County Homicide Task Force had an extraordinary 85 percent solve rate in 2024, resolving 19 of the 22 homicides in the county, and bringing closure and justice for surviving family members. We are only a few years removed from back-to-back 40-plus homicides in 2020 and 2021 during the coronavirus pandemic, when Trenton

alone had 40 murders each year. We hope and will continue to strive for fewer homicides in the coming year and solving those cases that are presented to the office.

The Special Investigations Unit/Mercer County Narcotics Task Force seized 42.2 kilograms of cocaine, two kilograms of heroin, 180 grams of fentanyl, 2,608 pounds of marijuana and 30 illegal firearms in 2024. Additionally, in August of this year, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office hosted Top Gun Class 62, and the unit played an instrumental role. This statewide, week-long training program instructs law enforcement officers and attorneys on the best tactics in investigating and prosecuting gang, gun and drug cases. With both classroom instruction and practical exercises, sponsoring this intensive training is a massive undertaking, and the commitment and professionalism of the SIU/MCNTF were vital in the success of the class.

In 2024, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Unit conducted more than 166 investigations into the online sexual exploitation of children. Of those cases, 40 resulted in an arrest being made and charges being lodged.

Along with many law enforcement leaders across New Jersey and the nation, our office is utilizing Packetalk's video surveillance and ALPR systems security intelligence solutions to combat violent crime and improve public safety in our communities. Packetalk's cutting edge, integrated technologies have helped Mercer County and the city of Trenton achieve significant reductions in crime while garnering positive community feedback and support.

At the end of 2024, the Mercer County Packetalk camera system contained 275 fixed cameras installed throughout the county, 22 additional locations pending installation, and 14 trailers with five cameras each that are deployed to crime hot spots, violence-prone locations, and community events with anticipated large volumes of attendance. More than 100 additional cameras are planned for installation in 2025, which will expand the system's video coverage to every municipality within Mercer County.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office continued to prioritize addressing the opioid epidemic in our communities through our partnership with Addiction Recovery Management & Marketing LLC (ARM&M) as part of the Attorney General's Operation Helping Hand (OHH) and Opt for Help and Hope initiatives.

OHH is a diversionary program in which MCPO staff connects persons suffering from substance abuse disorders with services. The goal of OHH is to interrupt the cycle of addiction that often leads individuals to spiral down the path of incarceration. Routine interaction and visibility in the community by outreach personnel is intended to foster trust so that those in need of coaching and/or treatment services will voluntarily seek a sober lifestyle. To support this program, peer recovery specialists are on call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, to respond to requests for service throughout Mercer County. Throughout 2024, OHH sponsored many outreach events in Mercer County, joining with social service agencies and community groups to offer information on recovery services.

As one of the pilot sites for Opt for Help and Hope, implemented by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office in partnership with the Hamilton Police Division, the Hamilton Township Municipal Court and ARM&M, we continue to offer early intervention for non-violent narcotic offenders who are subject to prosecution in the municipal court system. The goal of this treatment and recovery program is to help establish additional pathways to recovery that save lives and to minimize the harmful impact that arrests and convictions can have on the stability needed to sustain recovery. Those eligible for the program are individuals who have been arrested for low-level, non-violent offenses that are motivated wholly, or in part, by substance abuse. During 2024, 165 participants were enrolled in the program.

Mercer County also continued our involvement with Attorney General Platkin's ARRIVE Together initiative. ARRIVE utilizes a community-based approach by bringing police officers and mental health professionals together to provide multidisciplinary resources to those experiencing mental and behavioral health emergencies. This program has advanced law enforcement's ability to use tactics such as time, de-escalation techniques, and crisis intervention teams to better respond to individuals in the community. The program has grown exponentially since its inception and is continuously promoted to law enforcement, which has resulted in a dynamic shift in law enforcement's willingness to make referrals to those who may require mental health services. In 2024, ARRIVE Together had 221 referrals from five participating law enforcement agencies and is on track to gain countywide participation during 2025.

During 2024, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office expanded the ARRIVE Together program to include ARRIVE Critical. This initiative provides mental health professionals, legal liaisons and unified command during tactical operations in Mercer County involving barricaded subjects and/or hostage scenarios. Our partnership with Capital Health has allowed us to provide clinical partners to aid police in achieving successful outcomes and ensure that resources are readily available to assist law enforcement in slowing down the tempo of critical incidents.

Outside of the courtroom, civic engagement continued to be of the utmost importance. The Community Outreach Unit has elevated the office's visibility in Mercer County to a new level. We have strengthened partnerships with countless organizations in Mercer County and continue to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community by participating in important events like National Night Out, Trunk or Treat, holiday toy drives, coat drives, book fairs, back-to-school events, the annual Trenton Father Daughter Dinner Dance, Special Olympics New Jersey, and Overdose Awareness and Autism Awareness days.

The office continued our volunteer efforts with the Hamilton Police Athletic League, Younity, formerly known as Womanspace, Project Freedom, the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, Meals on Wheels and Code Read, to name just a few causes. We also partnered with Senator Shirley Turner and the Mercer County Bar Foundation to provide thousands of books to the students at the Darlene McKnight Elementary School.

Members of the office attended numerous civic association meetings, spoke to school and community groups, and gave their time and talents to a variety of non-profit organizations. The office used a variety of forums to educate young people, parents, teachers and community leaders about the opioid crisis, the Immigration Trust Directive, illegal firearms, gangs, bullying, cyberbullying and use of force. We also addressed each of the topics as part of the Attorney General's "21 for 21" community outreach agenda.

I am excited to mark my first year serving as the Mercer County Prosecutor. Though I assumed this office in December of 2024, I have served this office in various capacities over the last 40 years. It is particularly gratifying that I began my legal career at the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and will potentially end my professional career here. I look forward to building on the goodwill and achievements of the current employees of this office and adding more promising public servants to continue our excellence.

I appreciate the support and congeniality afforded to me by all our outside colleagues and stakeholders as we work together to serve the constituents of Mercer County and assure that we provide 'justice for all.' I especially thank the Mercer County Chiefs of Police for their welcoming support and willingness to collaborate with me and the office to keep Mercer County a safe place to live, work, and play. I also look forward to working with the Mercer County Executive, his staff, and the County Commissioners to further our mutual goals for the betterment of Mercer County and its citizens.

To all the members of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, I look forward to working in partnership with you and for you to ensure the safety of the citizens of Mercer County. My experience with the office has shown me that as an office you are well regarded in the legal and law enforcement communities. I have seen your individual excellence in your every endeavor. I sincerely hope and will strive to be an asset to your efforts and goals. I thank you and your families for the time, effort, and commitment you give this office every day.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Janetta D. Marbrey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**JANETTA D. MARBREY
MERCER COUNTY PROSECUTOR**

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office is to preserve and enhance the quality of life of Mercer County residents by fostering an environment of law abidingness, safety and security. To that end, this Office is dedicated to the pursuit and attainment of justice.

To accomplish this mission, the following goals have been adopted to provide a framework for success:

1. To use reasonable and lawful diligence to successfully detect, investigate and prosecute criminal offenses within Mercer County;
2. To lawfully and aggressively pursue a coordinated, effective and all-encompassing proactive stance in narcotics enforcement;
3. To staunchly defend the rights of crime victims and to accord them the highest level of dignity, respect and sensitivity;
4. To fulfill a law enforcement leadership role by:
 - A. Assisting and working cooperatively with police and all law enforcement agencies;
 - B. Ensuring law enforcement compliance with Constitutional safeguards, state and federal laws, directives and regulations;
 - C. Identifying law enforcement needs, striving to meet those needs and establishing new and relevant initiatives;
 - D. Providing law enforcement with guidance, training and continuing legal education;
5. To elevate public confidence in the criminal justice system by promoting public awareness regarding the role of law enforcement, crime prevention, public safety, and victims' rights through relevant educational, community outreach and public information programs and policies; and
6. To take a community leadership role by forming partnerships with schools, community groups, public officials, and business leaders to spearhead coordinated efforts to eliminate conditions that precipitate crime and to reduce the incidence of crime.

Each and every member of the Office of the Mercer County Prosecutor enthusiastically pledges their collective talents, training, energy and commitment to this ongoing mission and its corresponding goals.

*CREED OF THE MERCER COUNTY
PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE OF
VICTIM WITNESS ADVOCACY*



I Believe:

- ❖ A *VICTIM* is the most important person to enter the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office;
- ❖ A *VICTIM* is not an interruption to my work;
- ❖ A *VICTIM* is the purpose of it, I am not doing the *VICTIM* a favor;
- ❖ A *VICTIM* is entitled to my help;
- ❖ A *VICTIM* is a human being with hurts and wants like my own;
- ❖ A *VICTIM* is a person who brings me real needs and it is my job to help as expeditiously and as courteously as possible;
- ❖ Take care of the *VICTIMS* - that is why I am here.

INTRODUCTION

The Mercer County prosecutor, appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, is the chief law enforcement officer in the county. According to the enabling statute, the prosecutor “shall use reasonable and lawful diligence for the detection, arrest, indictment and conviction of offenders against the law.”

GENERAL ORGANIZATION

The Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office is divided into four main components: legal, investigative, administrative and victim witness advocacy. The prosecutor and first assistant prosecutor are responsible for the supervision of all components and directly supervise the legal staff. The investigative staff is directed by a chief of detectives and a deputy chief. A business administrator oversees the daily business operations, and a support staff supervisor oversees the administrative staff.

The primary responsibility of an assistant prosecutor is to prosecute all criminal, quasi-criminal and juvenile delinquency matters within the jurisdiction of the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office. Thus, without attempting to be all-inclusive, the legal staff supervises investigations and handles case screening, detention hearings, juvenile detention hearings, extradition and interstate agreement on detainers matters, juvenile waiver proceedings, grand jury presentations, arraignments and status conferences, plea negotiations, pretrial intervention (PTI) applications and appeals, pre-trial motions, drug court applications, trials, post-trial motions, sentencings, juvenile dispositions, appeals, expungements and municipal appeals. In addition, as an adjunct to criminal prosecution, assistant prosecutors initiate and handle civil forfeiture actions when appropriate. Legal advice is provided to Mercer County law enforcement agencies and to state and federal law enforcement agencies investigating criminal offenses occurring in Mercer

County. The legal staff also teaches police, corrections officers and park ranger recruits at the Mercer County Police Academy and provides in-service training to Mercer County law enforcement officers on a variety of subjects. In addition, the legal staff members also serve as instructors at the Citizen Police Academies established in the county as well as the Trenton Police Explorers program.

The investigative staff operates in two somewhat distinct areas. First, prosecutor's detectives serve much like police detectives everywhere, conducting investigations of alleged criminality. Some investigations are reactive in nature. That is, an alleged criminal offense occurs and, if it is a matter appropriate for handling by this office, an investigation is initiated. In some cases, particularly those involving arsons, animal cruelty, homicides, serious traffic collisions, sexual assaults and child abuse, on-call detectives work directly with the municipal or state police agency having primary jurisdiction. In other cases, this office supports the agency having primary jurisdiction, providing investigative assistance when requested. Finally, this office conducts investigations, when appropriate, based directly upon citizen complaints or referrals from other agencies.

Other investigations are proactive in nature and are usually handled by the Special Investigations Unit/Mercer County Narcotics Task Force (SIU/MCNTF). In such cases, information regarding ongoing criminal matters, including but not limited to drug distribution, gambling, organized crime or governmental corruption, may lead to the initiation of an investigation. In support of such investigations, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office may utilize undercover operatives and visual or electronic surveillance. Investigations may be handled solely by the SIU/MCNTF or be handled in conjunction with local, state or federal law enforcement agencies.

In 2014, the Mercer County Homicide Task Force was formed in order to improve the quality of homicide investigations. The Homicide Task Force, with personnel from the prosecutor's office, Trenton Police Department, New Jersey State Police and other local police departments, investigates homicides using a vertical investigation/prosecution model. These investigations employ a variety of investigative techniques and use technology in order to solve these cases.

The second main category of investigative services involves support of the prosecution function. Prosecutor's detectives and agents prepare cases for juvenile proceedings, detention hearings, grand jury presentation, trial, and Megan's Law proceedings. The success of assistant prosecutors in court often depends upon the diligence, thoroughness and hard work of detectives and agents outside the courtroom in preparing files, guaranteeing the presence of witnesses and evidence, working with victims and witnesses, and investigating possible defenses. In addition, members of the investigative staff process the civil forfeiture of money and property from defendants, prepare extraditions and interstate agreement on detainer cases, and recommend the forfeiture or return of firearms involved in domestic violence matters.

Investigative staff members seek to bring fugitive defendants before the court so that prosecution may proceed. This is an ongoing effort, conducted cooperatively with the Mercer County Sheriff's Office and with municipal, state and federal law enforcement agencies, supplemented by periodic fugitive sweeps designed to reinforce the message to defendants and to the public that the jurisdiction of the courts is not to be evaded. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office also has detectives assigned to the United States Marshals Service New York/New Jersey Regional Fugitive Task Force, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the New Jersey Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory and the Mercer County Shooting Response Team.

Finally, staff members are heavily involved in training other law enforcement officers. From animal cruelty to serious motor vehicle collisions, wiretap investigations to search and seizure update training, the expertise of assistant prosecutors and detectives helps keep municipal police officers in Mercer County prepared and updated.

The administrative staff performs a variety of invaluable functions. First, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office is a large and complex business organization, with a staff of more than 220 and a multi-million-dollar budget. Further, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office is also the center of operations for the Mercer County Homicide Task Force and Mercer County Narcotics Task Force, which adds additional task force officers to our operation. Thus, the Business Office faces a myriad of personnel, payroll and purchasing issues that must be attended to on a daily basis. In addition, the staff prepares grant applications and then, when a grant is received, monitors expenditures and performance, and writes the requisite reports.

Second, the work of the legal and investigative staffs creates mounds of paper and records, including legal briefs and other court papers, witness statements and investigative reports. The creation and proper recording of such documents require clerical and administrative support. In addition, the administrative staff receives incoming criminal complaints, opens files and is responsible for storing and retrieving those files and seeing that they get to the appropriate person or court when needed. Moreover, in order for the criminal justice system to function, file information must be shared, particularly with defendants and their lawyers. This vital discovery function is a major responsibility of the administrative staff. When files are completed, they must be closed out and appropriate notifications sent to the affected municipal courts, victims, submitting agencies and defendants.

This procedure was simplified by the full implementation of the InfoShare Case Management System and Axon Justice. InfoShare catalogues a case as it progresses from the

original criminal complaint, through investigation, screening and grand jury proceedings, to trial and finally appeal. Administrative staff, prosecutors and investigators can access the network to input data and scan or upload documents into the system, and an automated email feature notifies assigned staff of important updates pertaining to specific cases. Due to the mass of information that is available in the system, there is also a feature that blocks certain users from accessing confidential files such as investigative materials. Axon Justice also streamlines the process by helping prosecutors and defense attorneys access digital evidence and discovery.

Although the entire office has dedicated itself to protecting and serving victims of crime, the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy is charged specifically with the responsibility of providing for the needs of crime victims and witnesses during the entirety of their involvement in the criminal justice system. Some of the services provided include notification of case status, notification as to inmates pending release on bail, parole or sentence expiration, and liaison with both office personnel and court staff, including court accompaniment, needs assessment, short-term counseling, and referrals to and assistance with community service agencies. The work of the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy not only directly benefits those receiving its services, but also increases the likelihood of willing victim or witness participation in the justice system, thus aiding the entire prosecution function.

The Public Information Office serves as a central focus for receiving media inquiries and for releasing information to the media on behalf of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office. As the community's interest in the work of prosecutor's offices continues to grow, the Public Information Office guarantees that both media requests and the release of information under Executive Order 69 and the Open Public Records Act are handled accurately, efficiently and expeditiously.

CASELOAD ORGANIZATION

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office utilizes a mixed organizational approach to manage its significant caseload, including both "horizontal" and "vertical" prosecution formats and aggressive case screening strategies.

The intake section of the prosecutor's office is responsible for the receipt, logging and initial processing of all complaints or investigative reports likely to result in indictable criminal prosecutions. The intake section provides a central point for data collection, file initiation and record keeping, which facilitate supervision of, and control over, a large and complex prosecution operation.

After the intake and detention functions have been completed, the vast majority of case files proceed to the Grand Jury Unit for further review and action. Assistant prosecutors assigned to this unit present cases to two grand juries, each meeting once per week. Following indictment, the case files processed by the Grand Jury/Screening Unit are reassigned to Trial Unit assistant prosecutors for motion practice, plea negotiations and trial. This form of organization is termed "horizontal" prosecution.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office utilizes several subject-matter prosecution units: Bias Crime, Special Victims, Cyber Crimes, Domestic Violence, Economic Crime, Homicide, Insurance Fraud, Serious Collision Response Team and Special Investigations. Such units are essential to permit the development of the high degrees of specialization needed because of the complexity and/or sensitivity of the matters prosecuted. Case files falling within the jurisdiction of a subject-matter unit are assigned there following completion of intake functions. Those cases not dismissed, downgraded, or diverted during the screening processes performed by unit investigative and legal staff are then presented to one of two other grand juries by assistant

prosecutors assigned to the unit. Thereafter, indicted cases remain the responsibility of unit personnel for motion practice, plea negotiations and trial. This form of organization is termed “vertical” prosecution.

Indictable cases are downgraded for many reasons: when proof is lacking, when the facts of the case suggest that the elements of a disorderly or petty disorderly persons offense fit better, when victim or prosecution interests will be furthered thereby, or a combination thereof. Downgraded cases, whether handled by the Grand Jury/Screening Unit or a subject-matter unit, are referred back to the appropriate municipal court for prosecution in the normal course, although in select cases, assistant prosecutors may be assigned to handle the municipal court prosecution. By retaining control of select downgraded cases, this office can manage the municipal court plea negotiation process and handle the trials of cases that are not resolved by plea negotiations.

In an attempt to obtain speedy disposition of selected indictable cases, the Screening Unit and the subject-matter units may designate cases for inclusion in Mercer County’s Pre-Indictment Conference (PIC) Program. PIC cases generally include crimes of the third and fourth degree, which normally carry a presumption of non-incarceration, but also include all drug-free school zone crimes and any case that an assistant prosecutor believes would be amenable to a fast-track negotiated disposition. Defendants whose cases have been selected for PIC processing are called before a judge, provided with discovery materials, and given the opportunity to consult with an attorney. Defendants willing to accept proposed dispositions may be diverted to Pretrial Intervention (PTI) or enter guilty pleas to accusations as appropriate. PIC cases not resulting in dispositions are returned to the referring unit for grand jury presentation.

Original investigations, whether conducted solely by the prosecutor's office or in concert with other agencies, are handled either by an appropriate subject-matter unit or by other specifically assigned legal and/or investigative personnel.

The Family Court Unit handles the prosecution of offenses allegedly committed by juveniles (persons under the age of 18). This unit also initiates and processes selected applications to waive juvenile court jurisdiction in favor of adult prosecution. If a waiver is granted, the case will be transferred to the intake section and then to the Grand Jury/Screening Unit or appropriate subject-matter unit for grand jury preparation and presentation. The Family Court Unit's legal, investigative, clerical and victim witness staffs work closely with the intake and probation personnel of the Superior Court, Family Part, to assure proper dispositions of specialized and sensitive juvenile matters.

The Superior Court, Family Part, also handles adult cases involving violations of domestic violence restraining orders. Prosecutions of such matters are conducted by the Family Court Unit legal staff, with assistance from members of the Domestic Violence Unit and the Trial Unit as necessary.

In addition to the traditional prosecutorial roles of investigating, indicting and prosecuting those who violate the law, the prosecutor's office must also tend to a number of related responsibilities. The most significant of these are appeals, asset forfeitures and Megan's Law administration, each of which places substantial demands upon office manpower and resources. Somewhat less demanding functions, but nonetheless important, include evaluating applications for gun permits, expungements, PTI, intensive supervision (ISP) and monitoring parole eligibility. The office also aggressively pursues its training missions.

Finally, the prosecutor's office devotes substantial effort to crime prevention and other community outreach activities. The office is committed to year-round community involvement, as well as other outreach activities.

LEGAL STAFF

PROSECUTOR

Business Office
Civil Discovery
Forfeiture
HTF
Human Resources
ICAC
Officer Involved Shootings
OPRA
SIU

FIRST ASSISTANT PROSECUTOR

HTF
ICAC
Internal Affairs
IT/Cyber
Officer Involved Shootings
SCRT
SVU/ML
Support Staff
Victim Witness

DEPUTY FIRST ASSISTANT

Appellate
Bias/Human Trafficking
CART (Chief)
Civil Discovery
Cold Case Task Force
Corrections (including
DOC/Mercer County Corrections
Internal Affairs)
DNA/Fingerprint Compliance
DV
Economic Crime
ERPO/Mental Health
Extraditions
HTF/SCRT/OIS
Insurance Fraud

DEPUTY FIRST ASSISTANT

Expungements
Humane Law Enforcement
Internal Affairs
Interns
Juvenile
KROL
Municipal Appeals
Pre/Post Backlog Reduction Project
PTI
SIU

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

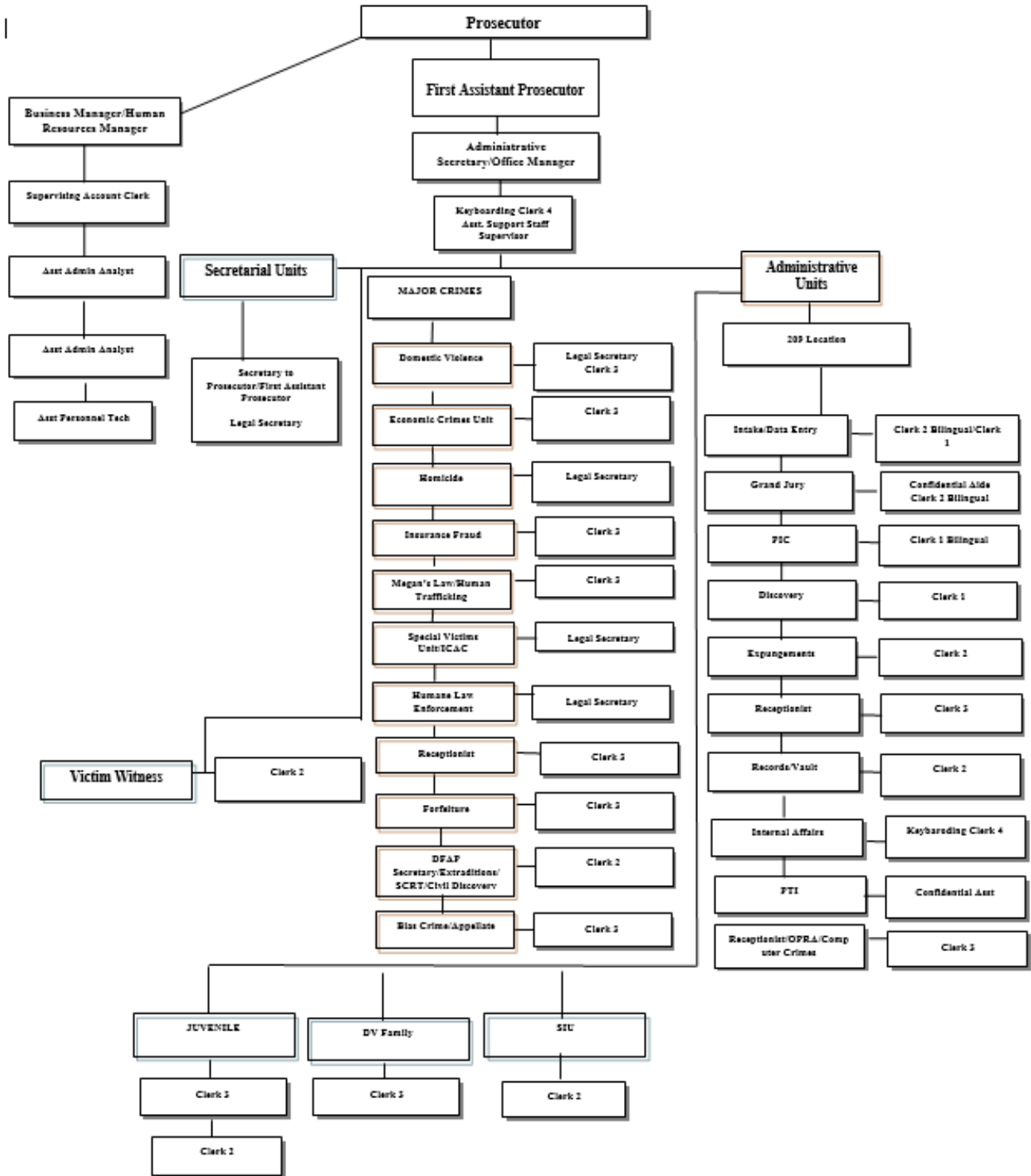
Detention Unit/PIC
DMFU
Drug Court/Veterans Court
Grand Jury
PCR/Habeas Corpus
Police Academy
Search Warrants
Trial

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

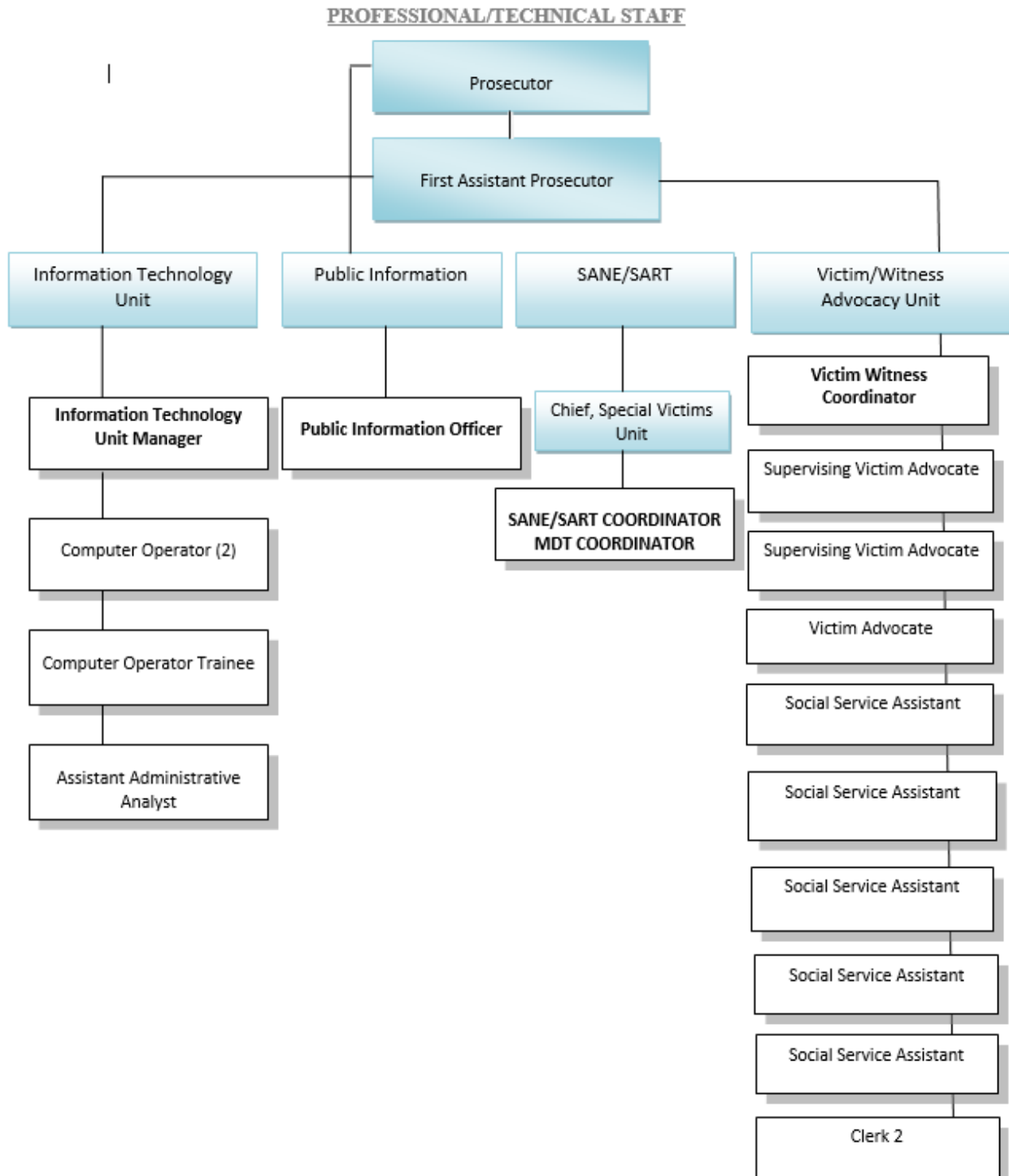
Cold Case Task Force
HTF
Official Misconduct
OIS
Public Corruption
SCRT
SRT

ADMINISTRATIVE/SUPPORT STAFF

ADMINISTRATIVE/SUPPORT STAFF

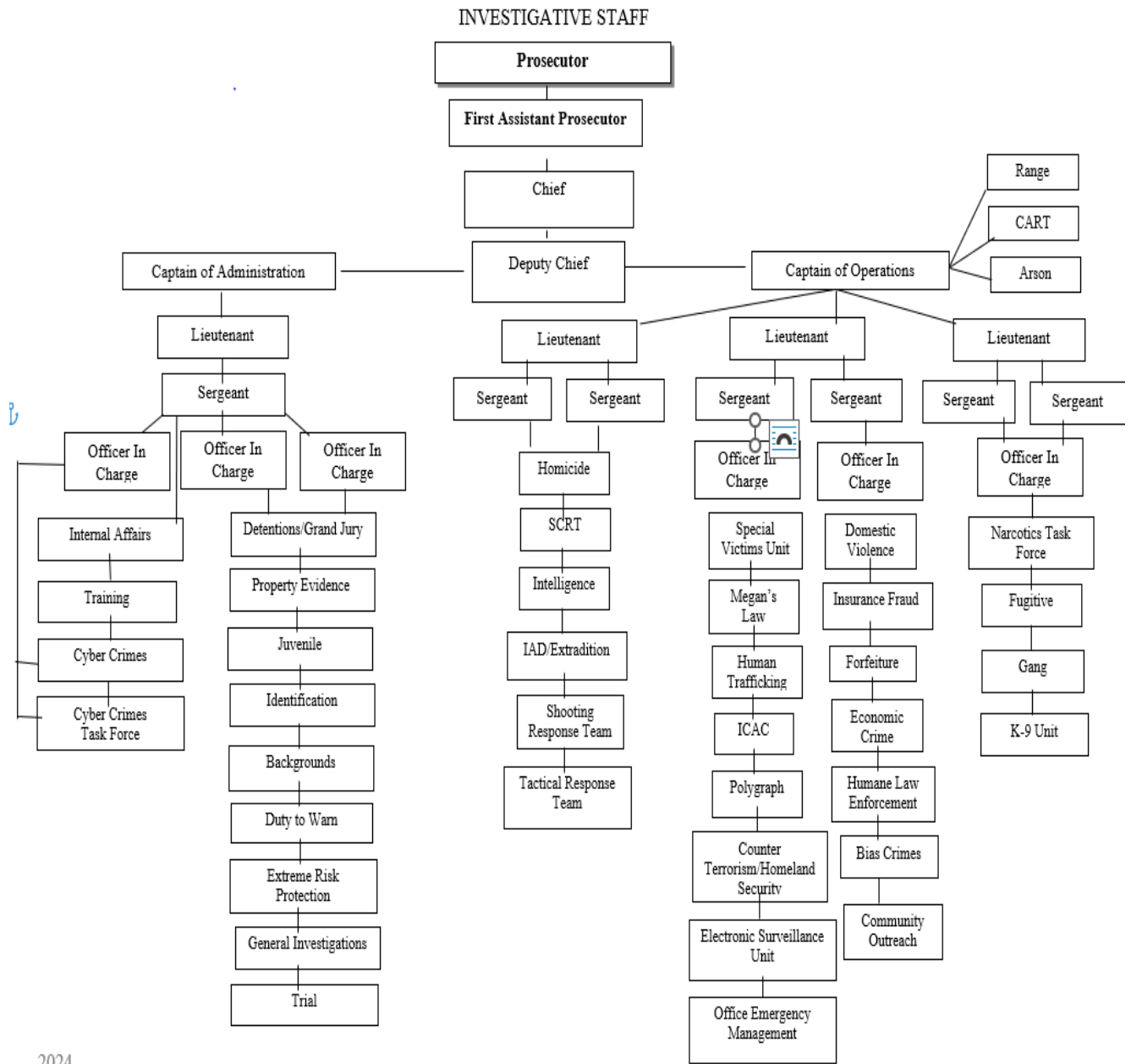


PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL STAFF



2024

INVESTIGATIVE STAFF



2024

APPELLATE UNIT

The Appellate Unit is responsible for representing the state in appeals from convictions obtained by this office that the state Division of Criminal Justice refers to our office for disposition. The unit is also responsible for conducting oral arguments before the state court Appellate Division, and for responding to petitions for certification to the New Jersey Supreme Court. It is the mission of this unit to aggressively defend the convictions obtained by this office, by trial or guilty plea, and the sentences imposed by our trial courts, as well as favorable and legally sound outcomes of motions decided by the trial courts.

The unit is centralized with one attorney working as a primary assignment and numerous other attorneys working as secondary assignments to successfully complete those appellate matters undertaken by the office. The unit's supervising attorney oversees appellate research and is available to conduct or assist in trials, motions and various legal issues that arise in the courtroom, as well as research projects for other members of the staff. The supervising attorney also assists in emergent applications such as emergent and interlocutory motions for leave to appeal and pretrial detention appeals. The attorneys who work in the unit are responsible for handling the writing of appellate briefs and any oral arguments before the Appellate Division and Supreme Court. In addition, the supervising attorney has appeared as amicus curiae in support of cases being heard by the New Jersey Supreme Court, the New Jersey District Court and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

During this past year, numerous appeals were referred to this office by the Office of the Attorney General. Of the referred appeals resolved this year, the majority were affirmed.

Of note, the state prevailed in *State v. Walter Townsend*, a case stretching back to the defendant's December 1981 murder of his girlfriend. On December 11, 1981, the defendant entered the home he shared with his girlfriend and beat her with a wooden 2x4 with exposed nails

while her sons, a seven-year-old and a three-year-old, watched in horror. The defendant then threatened to kill the young boys if they told police what they saw, and demanded they both lie to police regarding their mom's injuries. The case was closed without anyone being charged.

In August 2001, the boys requested the investigation be re-opened. After re-evaluating the autopsy report, which listed the cause of death as "undetermined," the medical examiner determined the victim's injuries were consistent with having been beaten. Detectives then filed charges against the defendant.

After a jury trial in October 2002, the defendant was found guilty of murder. The court sentenced the defendant to an extended sentence of 30 years to life in prison.

The case has been through quite an appellate process throughout the past two decades. On direct appeal, the Appellate Division reversed the murder conviction, determining the trial court erred in permitting expert testimony on battered woman syndrome and by failing to provide a jury instruction on the limited purpose of expert testimony. The Supreme Court affirmed in part and reversed in part, finding the expert testimony was properly admitted. The court remanded the matter to the trial court to reinstate the murder conviction and resentence the defendant. The sentencing court determined the defendant was a persistent offender and sentenced him to a term of life in prison with a 25-year period of parole ineligibility. The defendant appealed, and the Appellate Division remanded the matter for recalculation of jail credits.

The defendant also filed his first petition for post-conviction relief, which the trial court dismissed due to that pending appeal. When the appeal was decided, the trial court reinstated the PCR petition, which it ultimately denied. The defendant appealed, and the Appellate Division remanded the matter to the trial court to consider two issues: whether PCR counsel failed to investigate the defendant's claim for a new trial based on newly discovered evidence – an alleged recantation letter from a witness; and whether defense counsel was deficient for (a) failing to call

an expert witness to rebut the state's expert, (b) failing to investigate the motives of the prosecution's eyewitness, and (c) failing to request a limiting instruction on battered woman syndrome, past acts testimony, and dying declaration testimony. On remand, the PCR court denied the petition. The defendant appealed again, and the Appellate Division affirmed.

In June 2021, the defendant filed a motion to correct an illegal sentence, alleging imposition of the persistent offender statute violated his rights under the New Jersey and United States Constitutions, as the predicate crimes occurred after the murder. The trial court denied the motion, concluding that multiple convictions can be considered by the sentencing court irrespective of their chronology.

The defendant then appealed to the Appellate Division, who considered his claims this year. The defendant raised the same argument, that his sentence as a persistent offender was unconstitutional because the predicate crimes were committed after the murder. The defendant claimed such an imposition violated the Ex Post Facto clause of the Constitution.

The Appellate Division considered the persistent offender statute, as well as the Ex Post Facto clause, and determined that the defendant's sentence was, in fact, legally imposed. The appellate court noted that our case law is clear that "multiple convictions may be considered by the sentencing court in determining if a defendant is a persistent offender irrespective of their chronology so long as the other statutory criteria are met." Therefore, "[w]hen a sentencing judge considers the issue of whether a defendant is a persistent offender . . . the judge may weigh judgments of conviction entered chronologically after the defendant committed the instant crime." Although the sentencing court relied on an opinion decided after the 1981 murder in imposing the extended term, the appellate court found that such was not a violation of Ex Post Facto, as the opinion was merely "a well-supported judicial clarification of an existing legislatively-derived standard."

Accordingly, the Appellate Division affirmed the denial of the defendant's motion to correct an illegal sentence. The Supreme Court subsequently denied the defendant's petition for certification.

In another case, *State v. Michael Owens*, the majority of the Appellate panel reversed the defendant's conviction for first-degree murder and 45-year sentence, finding the trial court erred by not instructing the jury on passion-provocation manslaughter. One judge on the three-judge panel issued a dissent. The state, therefore, subsequently filed an appeal as of right to the Supreme Court, which is currently pending.

All but one petition for certification filed by defendants to the New Jersey Supreme Court were denied. Cases on the Sentence Oral Argument calendar were mostly affirmed. Finally, defendants' appeals of orders granting pretrial detention were mostly all affirmed in favor of the state.

BIAS CRIME UNIT

The Bias Crime Unit is committed to the prevention of bias crimes and the improvement of law enforcement's relationship with the community. Bias crimes are acts of prejudice, hate or violence directed against individuals, groups or institutions because of race, color, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin or ethnicity. These incidents may result in physical or emotional injury, or property damage. A person who is convicted of a bias-motivated crime is subject to extended terms of imprisonment.

The unit works directly with local, state, and national police agencies to apprehend and prosecute bias crime offenders. The unit also acts as a liaison between law enforcement and community groups that have an interest in bias incidents, ensuring that the lines of communication are open.

At the beginning of 2024, one assistant prosecutor, two detectives and one administrative assistant staffed the unit as secondary assignments. In the fall of 2024, the unit was expanded to include two additional assistant prosecutors.

Bias incidents are reported to the prosecutor's office by various methods but most commonly through the Bias Incident Offense Report. In New Jersey, when a police agency investigates an actual or potential bias crime, a report summarizing the salient aspects of the incident must be filed with the state Office of the Attorney General and the county prosecutor's office no later than 24 hours after the offense was reported so that all appropriate personnel may respond promptly.

Two hundred and twenty-three bias incidents were reported to the unit in 2024. Three of these incidents resulted in criminal charges.

In 2024, the Bias Unit chief continued her involvement with the Prosecutor's Youth Inclusion Program. This Mercer County pilot program was created with the goal of addressing

bias-related incidents in which our elementary, middle school and high school children were engaged. It has evolved from simply addressing bias incidents to combating everyday youth conflict and bullying through restorative practices.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

The Domestic Violence Unit seeks to protect victims of domestic violence by holding batterers accountable for their actions. To reach this goal, the unit prosecutes cases despite uncooperative or unavailable victims, and provides victims with support throughout the disposition of their case. The unit also educates the community in the dynamics of domestic violence and its prevention while providing mandatory training to law enforcement agencies concerning domestic violence investigations and charging.

When fully staffed, the DV Unit is comprised of five assistant prosecutors, four detectives and two victim witness advocates. Four assistant prosecutors, three detectives and one victim witness advocate are assigned to the cases opened or investigated as indictable or felony cases to be prosecuted in the Superior Court – Criminal Part. One assistant prosecutor, one detective and one victim witness advocate are assigned to the cases opened as restraining order violations to be prosecuted in the Superior Court – Family Part. The advocates meet with victims to provide case information, emotional support, address financial and housing needs, and make referrals to outside agencies when needed. The advocates also assist with navigating court appearances and will accompany victims to same. Importantly, the advocates assist in the completion of New Jersey Crime Compensation Office claim applications.

During 2024, the DV Unit reviewed approximately 1,649 complaints related to domestic violence with charges ranging from attempted murder and aggravated assault to terroristic threats and harassment. Those approximately 1,649 complaints included approximately 979 cases in which the top charge was a disorderly persons offense and approximately 180 cases that were initially screened as downgrades to the municipal courts or the Family Part for disposition. The remaining complaints were opened as indictable cases to be prosecuted in the Criminal Part. The DV Unit has generally been able to immediately screen and review every domestic violence

complaint in Mercer County within 12 hours of its issuance. This has allowed for immediate follow-up with the issuing officer if required and allows for the victim witness advocate to contact the victim at an early stage in the prosecution. When complaints are remanded to the Family Part, the DV Unit continues to prosecute the case. These restraining order violations are routinely screened to identify potential stalking cases.

The DV Unit also handles firearm forfeiture actions involving firearms seized during the investigation of domestic violence incidents. To determine whether a weapon should be returned to its owner, assistant prosecutors and detectives review the circumstances of the seizure, speak to the victim, and review all available records to determine whether there are any prohibitions preventing weapon possession. Determinations to return a weapon are only made after a complete review of the subject's background is conducted. If a Firearm's Purchaser Identification Card or firearm is to be forfeited, the appropriate motion is filed with the court and a hearing takes place. In 2024, there were 23 such DV Weapons files.

During 2024, the DV Unit continued working cooperatively with the Homicide Task Force, Special Victims Unit, and Trial Unit. *State v. Shameka Blackwell* was prosecuted throughout 2024 by members of the DV and Homicide units. The defendant is charged with murder, arson and felony murder in relation to an alleged domestic violence incident. The case has involved several motions and hearings, and remains pending in 2025. Despite having been charged, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. In *State v. Jeremy Ratliff*, which was prosecuted by the Homicide Unit along with the DV Unit, the defendant was convicted upon plea of guilty to aggravated manslaughter and sentenced to 25 years imprisonment followed by five years of parole supervision pursuant to the No Early Release Act.

In *State v. Matthew Smith*, in which the defendant was charged terroristic threats and unlawful possession of a handgun, the defendant pleaded guilty to unlawful possession of a

handgun and was sentenced to six years in prison with three and a half years of parole ineligibility. In *State v. Breon Mickens*, in which the defendant was charged with firing a handgun through the victim's window, the defendant was convicted upon plea of guilty to unlawful possession of a handgun and sentenced to five years imprisonment with three and a half years of parole ineligibility. In *State v. Arthur Gelentser*, in which the defendant was charged with strangulation, the defendant pleaded guilty to third-degree aggravated assault and received a sentence of five years imprisonment with two years of parole ineligibility. Numerous other defendants were prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to pre-trial intervention, probation and/or terms of incarceration providing both offender deterrence and/or offender rehabilitation – both of which are important in the DV Unit's effort to keep victims safe from future acts of domestic violence.

When the DV Unit encounters cases in which an act of violence was committed in the presence of a child, the unit actively notifies the state Division of Child Protection and Permanency and screens the case for prosecution as a child endangerment matter for engaging in violence while in the presence of a child.

The DV Unit has also taken an active role in combating witness tampering, intimidation and stalking. The unit's use of subpoena power to retrieve calls made from the county jail, victim interviews, and consensual intercepts have led to witness tampering charges in some cases.

The DV Unit continues to take an active role in pursuing violations of probation to ensure probationers are receiving domestic violence/substance abuse counseling and abiding the provisions of their sentences requiring them to refrain from making contact with their victims. This is part of a continuing effort to keep victims safe after the disposition of their cases.

The DV Unit also takes part in a wide range of community service projects aimed at preventing domestic violence. Unit members frequently speak about domestic violence to community organizations and provide training to community volunteers (Domestic Violence

Response Team advocates) and local police departments. Members of the DV Unit teach a module on domestic violence to new police recruits at the Mercer County Police Academy. Further, all members of the DV Unit rotate on-call responsibilities. While on call, DV assistant prosecutors are available to members of law enforcement by phone 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, to answer legal questions, give advice, and assist in the procurement of search warrants and communication data warrants as necessary.

ECONOMIC CRIME UNIT

The Economic Crime Unit is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of fraud, theft, and related “white collar” crimes, particularly those involving deception and unlawful concealment. The unit focuses on fraud-based crimes, including theft by deception, theft by wrongful disposition, forgery, issuing bad checks, commercial bribery, trafficking in identity theft, embezzlement, and retail theft rings. Public corruption, official misconduct and attorney misconduct involving fraud also fall within the unit’s purview.

The legal staff of the unit is comprised of one assistant prosecutor who serves as unit chief as a primary assignment and one assistant prosecutor who serves the unit as a secondary assignment. The investigative staff includes two full-time detectives and one sergeant.

The Economic Crime Unit investigates matters referred from county, state and federal departments and agencies, municipal police departments, the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, public and private companies, and private citizens. In 2024, the unit worked with other agencies, including the United States Postal Inspection Service, the United States Department of Agriculture, the New Jersey Division of Taxation, the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice and the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

The Economic Crime Unit continued investigation into predatory practices and continued to work hand in hand with the Insurance Fraud Unit on certain matters.

In 2024, the unit originated 54 investigations and obtained indictments of more than two dozen defendants, which included situations of thefts by fiduciaries, trafficking in personal identifying information, computer-related and wire fraud, and home improvement contractor fraud. Thirteen cases were resolved through guilty pleas and nine cases were resolved by admission to the Pretrial Intervention program. More than \$500,000 in restitution was ordered to crime victims in these resolved actions.

EXTRADITION & FUGITIVE UNIT

The mission of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Extradition and Fugitive Unit, working in conjunction with the Mercer County Sheriff's Office as well as other law enforcement agencies both nationwide and internationally, is to apprehend fugitives from justice. The unit addresses outstanding bench warrants, arrest warrants and warrants of indictment.

The unit is comprised of four people. One detective works in the unit as well as a member of the professional support staff. In addition, two assistant prosecutors staff the unit.

When individuals within our jurisdiction are wanted in another state, the requesting state contacts the unit. In order to accomplish the return of these individuals to the states where they are awaiting prosecution, certain criteria must be met. While some individuals simply choose to waive extradition proceedings and voluntarily return to other states for prosecution, many individuals challenge extradition. In such cases, the unit must contact the requesting state and coordinate the issuance of governors' requisition and rendition warrants. Procuring these specialized warrants allows the county to transport individuals over state lines for the purposes of prosecution. Without the governor's approval on these cases, extradition cannot be accomplished.

In cases when individuals choose to waive extradition, a governor's warrant is not necessary, and the requesting agency simply transports the fugitive back with approval of the court. When a person who is being extradited still has matters pending in Mercer County, the pending matters are usually resolved prior to extradition. If it is necessary to extradite an individual prior to a case being resolved, the unit confirms that necessary detainers are filed in order to assure the return of the defendant.

In addition to dealing with extraditions to other states, the unit is also responsible for bringing fugitives located in other states back to Mercer County for prosecution. As is the case when fugitives are extradited to other states, governor's warrants or extradition waivers are

required in order to guarantee that fugitives are properly returned. In order to obtain a governor's requisition warrant, the unit must complete paperwork including affidavits, fingerprint analysis, certified indictments, or complaints as well as certified warrants. The unit works closely with the New Jersey governor's extradition secretary to procure these documents.

Often fugitives are serving sentences in another state. In that case, the Interstate Agreement on Detainers is used to facilitate extradition back to Mercer County. By virtue of the agreement between the party states, expeditious transfers are made possible. The Extradition and Fugitive Unit completes the necessary paperwork, which includes affidavits and certified documents, and then tracks the case to make sure that time limits imposed by the Interstate Agreement statute are met. A missed deadline results in the dismissal of the pending charges.

Besides dealing with the actual extradition of the fugitives, detectives assigned to the unit regularly search for fugitives from our jurisdiction both within the state and outside its borders. Those fugitives who are found within the county or state are arrested and returned to custody to face pending charges. Those fugitives who are discovered outside of New Jersey are arrested and extradition proceedings are initiated in Mercer County. The location and arrest of fugitives out of the area is accomplished with the help of other law enforcement agencies that lend support and manpower to our searches. Before beginning any search for a fugitive, the case is reviewed to determine whether prosecution will still be possible once the person is captured.

In reviewing files, it is also this unit's responsibility to make sure that any warrants issued and entered into NCIC are labeled with appropriate geographic parameters for extradition. Such decisions are made by an assistant prosecutor after reviewing the files and must be made prior to entry of warrants into NCIC. These levels are reviewed regularly in order to ensure that they remain appropriate.

Over the course of 2024, the unit was involved in several extraditions. The unit completed six Interstate Agreement on Detainers extraditions and seven governor's warrant extraditions in order to return fugitives to this jurisdiction. Along with handling requests for disposition under the Interstate Agreement on Detainers, the unit also fielded more than 50 inquiries regarding the status of pending charges. These inquiries are made by federal and state correctional facilities as well as defendants themselves. Our office researches each case individually and answers all inquiries appropriately and efficiently. In addition, a number of out-of-state governor's warrants were received requiring the extradition of individuals to other states. These individuals waived extradition and were returned to the states seeking them.

The unit is also involved in enforcing witness subpoenas under the Interstate Agreement to compel the attendance of out-of-state witnesses. Upon receipt of a request, the unit's assistant prosecutor must present a petition to the presiding judge of the Superior Court, Criminal Part, setting forth the facts of the out-of-state matter, the need for the witness, the date and time the witness is required for testimony, and the arrangements that have been made to transport the witness to and from the requesting state. The court then issues an order to show cause that provides the subpoenaed witness an opportunity to explain why the subpoena should not be enforced. Following the hearing on the show cause order, the court issues an order compelling the witness to present for testimony at the out-of-state matter. Failure to comply with the court's order results in arrest for contempt. The unit also assists in having out of state material witnesses subpoenaed for matters here.

In order to further its goals, the Fugitive Unit works in conjunction with the U.S. Marshals New York/New Jersey Regional Fugitive Task Force. Working as a task force allows all parties to locate fugitives more easily and safely return them to the jurisdictions requesting their presence. By joining resources, all members of the task force benefit as do the people of Mercer

County and the surrounding jurisdictions.

Overall, 2024 was another successful year for the resolution of fugitive matters. The Fugitive Task Force/Trenton Division located approximately 300 Mercer County fugitives and assisted in 90 out-of-county fugitive arrests. In particular, the task force aids in the apprehension of homicide suspects nationwide. The apprehension of fugitives within the state as well as out of state involves the cooperation of several local, state, and national agencies and organizations. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office has partnered with the Mercer County Sheriff's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the U.S. Secret Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the New Jersey State Police, and police departments from Trenton, Hamilton, Ewing, Lawrence, West Windsor, Princeton, Pennington Borough, Hightstown Borough, Robbinsville Township and Hopewell Township in performing its mission. Numerous other county prosecutor's offices also routinely assist the unit, including Hunterdon, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Burlington, and the unit has worked closely with the Bucks County District Attorney's Office in Pennsylvania.

FAMILY COURT UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Family Court/Juvenile Unit is responsible for prosecuting all juvenile complaints and non-indictable domestic violence contempt complaints. In 2024, a total of 487 complaints were filed in the Juvenile Unit. Thirty-seven cases were diverted to the Juvenile Conference Committee or an Intake Service Conference, while 68 cases were handled by the juvenile hearing officer. It should be noted that, as of November 2024, the position of the juvenile hearing officer was eliminated so that resource is no longer available as an alternative to placing cases on the formal calendar for prosecution. Twelve complaints were transferred out of Mercer County to be prosecuted in the county in which the juvenile resides. Three hundred seventy cases were scheduled on the formal calendar before the Superior Court Family Part Judge. Several hundred cases of domestic violence were downgraded to Family Court.

At the beginning of 2024, there were three assistant prosecutors, one agent and two administrative assistants staffing the unit as their primary assignments. One detective was assigned to the unit as a secondary assignment to assist the agent. One staff member from the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy was also assigned to the unit. In the fall of 2024, one of the assistant prosecutors was replaced with a law clerk. Two months later, the law clerk was replaced by an assistant prosecutor. Thus, at the end of 2024, the unit was staffed with four assistant prosecutors.

Consistent with the prosecutor's policy to prosecute certain serious juvenile offenders, applications to waive the Family Court's jurisdiction and to prosecute juveniles as adults were filed in seven cases. In one case, the juvenile was waived after a hearing. In the other six cases, a waiver hearing was held in January 2025, and the State is still awaiting decisions on those motions. In four other cases, juveniles voluntarily waived up to the Criminal Part prior to a formal motion

for waiver of jurisdiction being filed. The prosecutor's office takes these decisions very seriously. An assistant prosecutor from the Juvenile Unit (or the Homicide Unit in homicide cases) screens the case and writes a memo that is then reviewed by the chief of the unit, who makes a recommendation. The memo is then sent to the deputy first assistant prosecutor, the first assistant prosecutor and the prosecutor before a decision is ultimately made. The statutory factors set forth in 2A:4A-26.1 are considered in each case prior to filing a waiver. Only after this thorough review process is complete does the motion for waiver get filed. Should additional information pertinent to the waiver decision come to light at a later date, the prosecutor retains the right to withdraw such motions when justice requires it.

In 2024, Mercer County continued the Interventions Moving Probation and Community Together Program (IMPACT). The goal of the IMPACT program is to organize community resources and collaborate with program partners to optimize services and eliminate behaviors leading to chronic delinquency. The program recognizes the importance of utilizing resources to support each juvenile in successfully completing their probation term and establishing a successful lifestyle in the community. This program is comprised of an assistant prosecutor, a deputy assistant public defender, several probation officers, court personnel, social service agencies and community partners. This group meets bi-monthly to review each juvenile's level of probation supervision and need for additional services provided by community partners. In addition to IMPACT, the probation department also established the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative. The goal of this program is to provide additional services and support for those juveniles either adjudicated delinquent for gun-related crimes or juveniles whose lives have been touched by gun violence in some manner. This program is comprised of an assistant prosecutor, a deputy assistant public defender, several probation officers and social service agencies and community partners.

This group meets monthly to review each juvenile's overall history and level of progression on probation and discusses the need for additional services that could be provided by community partners.

The Juvenile Unit continues to be involved in providing law-related education. Aside from teaching at the Mercer County Police Academy, the unit chief engaged in school appearances to discuss topics such as cyber bullying. There was also a collaboration between the Juvenile and Bias units to jointly conduct presentations in those respective, sometimes overlapping, areas of law. Additionally, the unit chief accompanied representatives from PEI Kids, a social service agency dedicated to providing prevention, intervention and advocacy programs for children, in conducting weekly group sessions in three Trenton middle schools, discussing issues from substance use to gun violence to conflict resolution.

The unit chief continued participation in the Youth Services Commission (YSC). The chief is a member of the Executive Committee of the YSC in order to provide a more influential voice in the administration of YSC services. The chief is active in a statewide program entitled the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative. In addition, the unit chief continues to be a member of the executive committee of the Juvenile Prosecutors' Leadership Network. This group is comprised of the chiefs of juvenile units from around the state. They meet quarterly to discuss issues in the Juvenile Justice System. In 2022, the executive committee sought formal recognition from the County Prosecutors Association of New Jersey, as well as the Office of the Attorney General, in order to establish statewide standards for New Jersey prosecutors in an effort ensure that professionalism and consistency is maintained in the highly specialized area of juvenile prosecution. As a result of this formal recognition, the Juvenile Prosecutors' Leadership Network continues to submit comments on new rules in the area of juvenile justice.

This year, the unit continued participation in the establishment of a restorative justice hub pursuant to the “Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities” pilot program. The chief attended several committee meetings and site visits to continue the progress toward launching this program to Trenton community members. The Trenton Center for Healing, Unity and Belonging (or the “HUB”) finally opened its doors in December 2024.

The unit chief also sits on the Mercer County Youth Fire Setter Advisory Committee. The program gathers input from law enforcement, fire departments and other community safety groups, along with educational and therapeutic professionals, to continue to offer a program for treating children who are prone to setting fires and to help identify those children who do not pose a risk of future pyromania. The program is diversionary in nature in that it works to keep children from being thrust into the Juvenile Justice System when their behaviors do not threaten serious harm to people or property. Another diversionary program that the unit chief is involved in is the Prosecutor’s Youth Inclusion Program. This Mercer County pilot program was created with the goal of addressing bias-related incidents in our elementary, middle schools and high schools. It has evolved from simply addressing bias incidents to combating everyday youth conflict and bullying through restorative practices.

FEDERAL & STATE GRANTS

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office believes in assertively and diligently pursuing grant funding opportunities to enhance the delivery of services to the public at no expense to the county. The following is a list of grants currently managed by the office.

INSURANCE FRAUD GRANT

The goals of this grant are to aggressively detect and investigate insurance fraud occurring within Mercer County, and to apprehend and prosecute those responsible for engaging in those activities. The unit specializes in the prosecution of insurance fraud and acts as a liaison between the insurance industry and local law enforcement. The award for this grant is \$300,000.

JUSTICE ASSISTANCE GRANT

The funds are shared by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, the Trenton Police Department and the Hamilton Police Division to aggressively investigate crimes through increased patrols, technology improvements, enhanced equipment, training and intelligence-driven policing.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office administers the funds on behalf of the Trenton Police Department and the Hamilton Police Division. The total amount of the award is \$149,091.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office uses its share of \$14,909 to hire interns to supplement the criminal intelligence section, through various data analysis procedures, to provide police officers with up-to-the-minute information about criminal activity and law enforcement operations.

The Trenton Police Department utilizes its share of \$111,215 for the purchase of police equipment and supplies to help combat criminal activity in the city of Trenton.

The Hamilton Police Division uses its share of \$22,967 to hire officers for overtime to saturate areas where spikes in crime and quality-of-life issues are observed.

SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM / FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINER (SART/FNE)

With the establishment of a countywide Sexual Assault Response Team, the collaborative and specialized response to sexual assaults is greatly enhanced, resulting in improved investigations and prosecutions. The program is also intended to provide more professional services to the victim and to reduce the amount of trauma and stress caused by an investigation. It is anticipated that this program will increase the reporting of sexual assaults, as well as improve the conviction rate of offenders. The award for this grant is \$220,565.

BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The purpose of this grant is to save the lives of law enforcement officers by helping local government equip their officers with bulletproof vests. The total grant is \$4,795.80.

VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT (VOCA) GRANT

The project continues to improve the treatment of victims and witnesses, and to ensure their rights by providing assistance and services that will help them cope with the aftermath of victimization. The award for this grant is \$833,063.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) GRANT

This grant program funding is used to develop and implement more effective law enforcement and prosecution strategies to combat violence against women and enhance victim services. The award for this grant is \$67,026.

OPIOID PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE: OPERATION HELPING HAND

The project aims to combat the opioid epidemic by using law enforcement as a gateway for individuals with substance use disorder issues to enter treatment and/or be connected with appropriate recovery services. The award for this grant is \$100,000.

2023-24 OPT FOR HELP AND HOPE GRANT PROGRAM

This project establishes a standardized, prosecutor-led diversion program focused on treatment and recovery support within the Hamilton Township Municipal Court. Funding is allocated for staffing, overtime and compensatory time for law enforcement officers, essential equipment purchases, recovery support services, and the development of outreach materials and handouts to assist individuals arrested for low-level, nonviolent offenses related to substance use. The total award amount is \$333,333.

CHILD ADVOCACY DEVELOPMENT

This grant funding is to provide critically needed resources such as treatment services, technology and capital improvement to our Child Advocacy Center. The award for this grant is \$160,336.

AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READER (ALPR) INITIATIVE

This grant funding is to acquire, expand or upgrade ALPR technology for implementation in communities throughout Mercer County that demonstrate an increase in violent crime and/or auto theft. The award for this grant is \$396,000.

GUNSHOT DETECTION TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE

This grant funding is for the acquisition and/or enhancement of gunshot detection technology resources to prevent violent crimes throughout Mercer County. The award for this grant is \$567,400.

ARRIVE TOGETHER GRANT PROGRAM

The grant funding aims to ensure that all Mercer County residents who interact with law enforcement during mental or behavioral health emergencies have access to necessary treatment and support. The award for this grant is \$142,864.43

COMPREHENSIVE OPIOID, STIMULANT AND SUBSTANCE USE SITE-BASED PROGRAM

The grant funds are being used to enhance support for individuals affected by substance and opioid use disorders in Mercer County by mitigating the impact of illicit opioids, stimulants and other substances. This is achieved through expanded access to evidence-based treatment, connecting individuals and their families to support services, providing educational resources, and distributing lifesaving supplies. The total award amount is \$1,235,691.

MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL COUNTY GANG, GUN & NARCOTICS TASK FORCE

This grant provides salary reimbursement to support the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force. The total award amount is \$142,161.

FORFEITURE UNIT

Under New Jersey law, *N.J.S.A. 2C:64-1, et seq.*, police and other law enforcement agencies are empowered to seize and forfeit currency, motor vehicles, real property and other assets that are derived from criminal activities or used in furtherance of criminal activity. The goal of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Forfeiture Unit is to ensure that criminals do not profit from their crimes. Forfeiture funds are used for a wide range of law enforcement purposes, including the purchase of electronic surveillance equipment, motor vehicles, dashboard video cameras for municipal patrol cars and training.

The Forfeiture Unit continues to work closely with all law enforcement agencies in order to coordinate pre- and post-seizure planning. A majority of forfeiture cases arise from narcotics investigations initiated by law enforcement, including the municipal police departments in the county, the sheriff's office, the New Jersey State Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Mercer County Prosecutor's Special Investigations Unit. In addition to narcotics cases, forfeiture actions also arise out of crimes such as eluding, armed robbery, murder, fraud, computer crimes, child pornography, arson and domestic violence offenses.

The Forfeiture Unit continues to review all aspects of the forfeiture process to ensure compliance with evolving standards in forfeiture law, to increase both efficiency and effectiveness, to improve communications with owners, and to keep agencies and officers apprised of the law. Significant steps were taken to standardize procedures and paperwork among the various agencies involved.

In 2024, a total of 140 forfeiture actions were submitted for initial review. Ninety-three cases were approved and opened for civil action. One hundred fifteen complaints were prepared and filed with the Superior Court of New Jersey Law Division-Special Civil Part. The 140 total

seizures included 45 vehicles and \$488,751 in currency seized by law enforcement and forwarded to the Forfeiture Unit for review and civil action. Currency seizures totaling \$289,311.38 were forfeited to the state in 2024.

The Forfeiture Unit continued to review older cases on the court docket that were pending final dispositions. Eighty-four cases were closed by default judgment during 2024 that resulted in \$103,510 in currency being forfeited to the state, as well as 27 vehicles. In addition to the forfeited currency, one auction was conducted. Nineteen vehicles were sold resulting in \$33,366.74. For the calendar year 2024, \$426,188.12 in total currency was vested to the state.

The Forfeiture Unit operated in 2024 with one assistant prosecutor acting as the unit chief, as well as two assistant prosecutors and one agent. Administrative staff continued to have a significant role in the unit, assisting with the organizational tasks necessary for the policy and procedure review, and then being delegated appropriate responsibilities that were identified through that same review.

The review has also allowed other tasks that were previously handled on an ad hoc basis to be standardized and delegated in significant part to the agents. This has increased efficiency and allowed for more optimal use of the unit's resources.

In the course of the review, standardized forms and procedures have been put in place to increase the amount and ease of communication with owners of property seized for contraband. The integration of the Forfeiture Unit's documents with the database used by many other units in the office has also been completed, which has increased communication between units regarding forfeiture matters.

The unit has continued to investigate property in dispute to determine its status as contraband. This investigation extends to bank accounts used in illegal schemes that are confiscated as the proceeds of illegal activity, and automobiles purchased and maintained by drug

dealers, but registered in the name of a “straw” owner in order to avoid detection by law enforcement. The unit’s agents work with local law enforcement to uncover these concealed assets. Much of the property seized for forfeiture is connected to illegal narcotics crimes. One significant goal of the unit’s investigations into the contraband status of seized property has therefore been to determine whether the contraband was owned and used by a dealer as opposed to a “user” or a possessory only offense. Although possessory offenses are a basis for forfeiture under the New Jersey statute, the focus of the forfeiture has been primarily on property involved in distribution.

The unit chief is charged with the responsibility of reviewing cases to assess whether seized assets are forfeitable under *N.J.S.A. 2C:64-1, et seq.*, filing complaints and resolving cases by way of settlement or trial. This assistant prosecutor also assists law enforcement officers in obtaining seizure orders for various types of property, and trains officers on the policies and procedures of the civil forfeiture program. Because the prosecution of forfeiture cases is civil in nature, assistant prosecutors in this unit must be familiar with civil case law and the rules of civil procedure. This distinguishes forfeiture attorneys from other assistant prosecutors.

GRAND JURY UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Grand Jury Unit handles cases identified as suitable for grand jury preparation during municipal case screening and cases referred back for grand jury preparation from PIC. The unit compiles, analyzes, prepares and presents cases to the grand jury.

The Grand Jury Unit is comprised of a unit chief, three assistant prosecutors, one law clerk, one paralegal, detectives from the trial teams and two clerical staff who serve on a primary assignment basis.

The investigative component of the unit is responsible for accumulating and organizing all police reports, laboratory reports, criminal history records and complaints. The investigative staff is also responsible for identifying the essential witnesses and conducting any necessary additional investigation. The unit chief and assistant prosecutors, with the assistance of a law clerk and paralegal, review the cases for legal sufficiency, identify the need for additional investigation and draft indictments based on the facts of each case. The assistant prosecutors then present the evidence to the grand jury and propose an indictment. The legal staff also continues to screen out cases that, because of changed circumstances, are no longer suitable for indictable prosecution, and either administratively dismiss or downgrade those cases to municipal court or refer them to the Remand Program. The support personnel are responsible for scheduling cases for indictment, subpoenaing witnesses, typing the schedule and reporting the results, and maintaining statistics.

In 2024, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office presented cases representing a total of 1,014 defendants to the grand jury. Of those, 989 individuals were indicted and 25 were no billed.

HOMELAND SECURITY UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Homeland Security Unit remains committed to ensuring the safety and security of our communities through investigations and proactive outreach targeting critical infrastructure, houses of worship, and educational facilities. Our ongoing partnerships have led to more than 110 investigations, and our engagement efforts have resulted in significant achievements in securing federal and state grant funding for nonprofits and houses of worship across Mercer County.

The MCPO Homeland Security Unit is part of the New Jersey State Threat Assessment Team (NJSTAT) and works in coordination with federal, state and municipal partners to investigate all New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reports (NJSARS). Due to the sensitive nature of these investigations, no additional information can be provided.

In 2024, the MCPO continued its outreach initiatives, assisting numerous organizations with security assessments and Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) applications. As a result of these efforts, the office received positive feedback from the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP) regarding the Fiscal Year 2025 NSGP. Several first-time applicants successfully received awards, demonstrating the growing impact of our efforts.

Through diligent efforts, the Homeland Security Unit has helped nearly a dozen Mercer County houses of worship secure more than \$1,590,000 in federal and state grants. These funds have been allocated to enhance security infrastructure through target hardening, providing personnel training, and increasing the security posture of faith-based organizations.

The primary role of the Homeland Security Unit is to assist in ensuring the security of those living in or visiting Mercer County. The unit maintains close ties with its partners to investigate cases that could lead to violence or criminal activity.

The unit's strategic outreach has increased awareness of available resources for nonprofits and houses of worship, resulting in more security-focused facilities and a diverse range of applicants for NSGP grants. This, in turn, has strengthened the security of the county's religious institutions. Moving forward, the unit will continue to assist nonprofit organizations with security-focused initiatives.

The MCPO Homeland Security Unit extends its gratitude to OHSP, local law enforcement agencies, and community leaders for their collaboration and support in protecting our communities.

MERCER COUNTY HOMICIDE TASK FORCE

In November 2013, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Homicide Unit began operating as the Mercer County Homicide Task Force. The task force is comprised of assistant prosecutors, county detectives, municipal police department detectives, predominately from Trenton, and detectives and support staff. Presently, the administrative assistant prosecutor is designated as the unit chief, one senior assistant prosecutor is assigned in a full-time capacity, a supervising assistant prosecutor on a part-time capacity, and eight additional assistant prosecutors work in the unit in an on-call capacity. A lieutenant of county detectives is responsible for the daily supervision of two sergeants, county detectives, Trenton Police Department detectives, municipal department detectives, New Jersey State Police detectives and two law enforcement agents assigned as intelligence officers. Overall responsibility for the investigative side of the unit falls under the command of a captain of county detectives.

The task force is responsible for the vertical prosecution of all homicides, certain attempted homicides, death-by-auto cases and certain cases specially assigned by the prosecutor. Local police departments are required to notify the on-call homicide detective, who then responds to all cases that fit into the above categories. The task force also investigates police-involved shootings, suspicious deaths where the circumstances and cause of death may not be immediately apparent, drug-related deaths and unattended deaths. In addition, detectives and assistant prosecutors from the Homicide Task Force form the backbone of the Mercer County Child Abduction Response Team (CART).

There were 160 cases opened by the task force in 2024. A total of 22 investigations were determined to be homicide, with 19 of those cases being shooting-related deaths. Considerable investigative and legal resources were utilized for the lengthy and difficult preparation necessary for both the investigative and charging of these cases as well as the grand jury and trial presentation

of these cases. Having the prosecuting attorney assigned from the onset allows for the input of legal guidance at the earliest possible stages. This cooperation between legal and investigative personnel from the inception of the case has resulted in an extraordinarily high conviction rate of indicted defendants.

SIGNIFICANT CASES

STATE V. TYZIR HAMILTON AND TREIZON THOMPSON

Treizon Thompson, 23, and Tyzir Hamilton, 22, were sentenced by Mercer County Superior Judge Peter E. Warshaw in separate appearances on January 4, 2024. Both men were sentenced to two 30-year sentences with a mandatory 30-year period of parole ineligibility. Warshaw granted the state's request to run the sentences consecutively for a total of 60 years in state prison.

At their respective trials in December 2022 and September 2023, Thompson and Hamilton were found guilty by Mercer County juries on all counts of the indictment, including two counts of murder, conspiracy to commit murder, possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose and unlawful possession of a handgun.

On August 9, 2020, at approximately 7:30 a.m., patrol officers with the Trenton Police Department responded to the area of 300 Centre Street for a shooting in progress. Upon arrival, officers located the first victim, William Irizarry, 18, lying on the street in the area of 339 Centre Street. He had sustained multiple gunshot wounds and was pronounced dead at the scene. The second victim, Julius Vargas, 18, was located inside a corner market with a gunshot wound. Vargas was transported to the hospital for treatment, however, succumbed to his injuries a short time later. HTF detectives were able to locate a witness and numerous cameras in the area of the shooting. A suspect vehicle was identified as a black Chrysler 300 with PA plates, along with two shooters, described as two Black males wearing all black clothing and black ski masks.

The black Chrysler 300 was seen circling the area before the shooting, then parking and watching the victims for several minutes as they stood on the corner with others. When the suspect vehicle drove up to the corner and stopped, two shooters, later identified as Thompson and Tyzir Hamilton, exited. Both ran toward the victims, firing multiple gunshots. The driver, later identified as Darnell Davis, remained in the car. Hamilton and Thompson then chased after Irizarry as he ran into the street, continuing to shoot at him. When Irizarry fell to the ground after suffering a gunshot wound, they both continued to shoot at him as he lay on the ground.

Afterward, Hamilton and Thompson returned to the suspect vehicle, which fled the area. Further investigation revealed that a black Chrysler 300 was stolen out of Bensalem, Pennsylvania, on August 3, 2020, and seen on an automated license plate reader camera in the area of Pennington Avenue and Reservoir Street in Trenton on August 4. Detectives were able to partially match the license plate of the suspect vehicle to that of the stolen vehicle out of Bensalem. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Computer Crimes Unit conducted a physical search and forensic examination of Irizarry's cell phone, pursuant to a search warrant, and a photo was found that Irizarry posted on his Facebook page disrespecting the H-Block gang. Detectives continued to monitor multiple public social media posts throughout the month of August of numerous H-Block gang members talking about the murders of Irizarry and Vargas, taunting and threatening friends and family of the victims. They also referenced Irizarry disrespecting the H-Block gang prior to being murdered. On September 1, 2020, while on surveillance during another investigation, HTF detectives observed the black Chrysler 300 with Pennsylvania plates driving in the area of Perry and Southard streets in Trenton. While detectives were attempting to identify the occupants, the vehicle took off at a high rate of speed and a pursuit ensued.

The pursuit came to an end on Reservoir Street near Frazier Street, where the vehicle crashed into a telephone pole and the occupants subsequently escaped on foot. Area surveillance

footage shows the vehicle crash into the pole. Two Black males exited the vehicle through the front passenger door, both wearing all black with their hoods up. The two men fled on Reservoir Street toward Frazier Street and subsequently made a right onto Frazier Street toward Pennington Avenue, then out of sight.

A search warrant was obtained for the vehicle and detectives located a fully-loaded, 9mm Taurus handgun under the driver's seat. The handgun was submitted to the New Jersey State Police Laboratory and identified as one of the guns used in the murders of Irizarry and Vargas. Further investigation revealed another witness who was able to identify Davis, Hamilton and Thompson as being responsible for the deaths of Irizarry and Vargas.

STATE V. AARON ADAMS

Aaron Adams, 41, was sentenced to 45 years by Mercer County Superior Court Peter E. Warshaw on February 1, 2024. A jury found Adams guilty of murder and possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose in November 2023 following a three-week trial.

At approximately 6:30 p.m. on June 1, 2020, Ewing police were alerted to a deceased female in a home on Glen Stewart Drive. Upon arrival, they located the victim, identified as Ashley Davis, 32, of Levittown, Pennsylvania, in the basement. There were visible wounds to Ms. Davis' body and she was pronounced dead at the scene.

During the execution of a search warrant at the home, two air rifles and a handheld BB gun were located in the same room as the victim's body. Numerous used bags of suspected heroin with various stamps were also discovered during the search. The victim's boyfriend, Aaron Adams, resided at the Glen Stewart home, and was charged with a weapons offense. Following an autopsy, Ms. Davis' death was ruled a homicide. Investigation revealed she suffered a gunshot wound by a metal air gun pellet that struck internal organs and caused massive internal bleeding.

STATE V. HENRY HUTCHINSON

On September 25, 2024, Henry Hutchinson, 40, was convicted by a jury on all counts of the indictment, charging him with first-degree attempted murder, possession of a firearm for an unlawful purpose, unlawful possession of a handgun and certain persons not to possess a firearm. On December 4, 2024, Hutchinson was sentenced to 50 years in New Jersey State Prison.

At approximately 11 p.m. on July 16, 2022, while in the 100 block of Chambers Street in Trenton, Hutchinson shot the victim twice with a handgun. After the victim fell to the ground, Hutchinson stood over him and shot him a third time. The victim was rendered a paraplegic as a result of the shooting. Trenton police arrested Hutchinson on July 18, 2022, and recovered the Smith & Wesson .38 caliber revolver used in the shooting.

IDENTIFICATION UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Identification Unit provides photographic and identification services to the legal and investigative staff of the office, as well as all local police agencies within Mercer County. Utilizing a central computerized criminal history terminal, the unit provides updated criminal history records on all defendants and, when necessary, current addresses and photographs. These items are forwarded to various units within the office. The unit is responsible for the monthly National Incident-Based Reporting (NIBRS). This is an incident-based reporting system used by law enforcement agencies in the United States for the collection of crime statistics.

In addition, the Identification Unit assists in confirming the true identity of inmates in question that are in our jurisdiction. Members of this unit produce affidavits of identification for defendants using aliases. It also assists in the collection of DNA samples that are necessary for state and national DNA databases. The unit continues to work with the state to fingerprint defendants that have not been printed for charges being heard in Superior Court.

During the trial preparation phase of cases, the unit's staff is available for any additional photography requested by the assistant prosecutor and also prepares demonstrative trial aids and exhibits. In addition, several detectives have been trained in evidence collection and photography to assist the unit when necessary.

The unit works closely with the Combined DNA Index System, the New Jersey State Police Criminal Records Integrity Compliance Unit, and all of Mercer County's municipal police departments to maintain compliance. The Identification Unit continues to work closely with the courts to ensure Electronic Court Disposition Reporting compliance, the linking of DNA and fingerprints, and the overall accuracy of a defendant's Public Safety Assessment.

In addition to these responsibilities, the unit also assists with expungements, background checks and the training of personnel. Often the unit researches the disposition of cases for gun applicants nationwide. Finally, the unit conducts criminal history checks and fingerprinting assisting individuals who have been victims of identity theft.

INSURANCE FRAUD UNIT

The Insurance Fraud Unit is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of a variety of crimes that involve, or are related to, insurance fraud. The unit is funded, in part, by a grant awarded to the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office by the New Jersey Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor. Insurance fraud involves one or more misrepresentations to an insurance carrier concerning insurance coverage by someone for personal gain, and harms both insurance companies directly and the public through higher insurance premiums. The unit is comprised of one assistant prosecutor who serves as chief, one assistance prosecutor who handles insurance fraud as a secondary assignment, a detective, a sergeant of detectives and a secretary.

The unit seeks to promote a collaborative effort among law enforcement, the community, insurance carriers and the state Insurance Fraud prosecutor to combat insurance fraud. In 2024, the Insurance Fraud Unit continued to work jointly with the Economic Crime Unit on matters involving mutual concern.

The unit receives referrals from the state Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, directly from insurance companies, from police departments and other public agencies. It also initiates its own investigations - often from matters that first arose as economic crimes.

The Insurance Fraud Unit is limited to criminal prosecutions. Should an investigation reveal that a particular matter may not be criminal but nonetheless demonstrates a failure to meet professional standards in a regulated area, the unit refers the matter to the state Insurance Fraud prosecutor for civil action, or to the appropriate regulatory authority.

In 2024, the unit received 40 referrals from the state Insurance Fraud prosecutor and closed 113 investigations. Eleven prosecutions were resolved pre-indictment by accusation, with eight defendants being admitted to the Pretrial Intervention program. Presentations to the grand jury resulted in 11 indictments.

INTAKE SCREENING UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Intake Screening Unit is comprised of nine assistant prosecutors from various primary assignments and three support personnel. The assistant prosecutors are responsible for the screening of all complaints. The support staff is responsible for preparation of the manual files, entering the data into the Promis/Gavel and InfoShare databases, and scanning all documents into electronic folders for computer access.

The purpose of the intake and screening components of the office is to ensure that those cases with indictable charges are appropriate for prosecution at the Superior Court level. In order to accomplish this, the unit screens or diverts cases that can be more quickly and appropriately resolved at the municipal court level. The nature of the offense, surrounding circumstances, quality of the evidence and character of the defendant are considered in making the screening decision. The assistant prosecutors performing this important screening function can administratively dismiss the charges, downgrade the charges to non-indictable offenses or downgrade the charges and refer the case to the Remand Program. This program, which was established in late 1998, involves the retention of prosecutorial jurisdiction by this office of downgraded matters. By performing this type of early case screening, cases can be appropriately diverted before they are physically referred to the prosecutor's office, thereby avoiding the waste of time, energy and precious resources. Cases that are not diverted in this manner are further screened as being either suitable for the PIC program, appropriate for assignment to one of the specialized prosecution units within the office or ready for grand jury preparation.

This office electronically reviews all indictable cases through the InfoShare system. The program has been a tremendous success. Typically, more than 90 percent of all indictable cases are electronically reviewed within two business days. The benefit of the program has been a conservation of prosecutorial resources and a significant reduction in the time it takes to review a

case. From a municipal court perspective, the pilot program has also conserved court resources and improved case disposition time frames.

The Remand Program continues to be a valuable case screening option. When a decision is made to downgrade an indictable charge, a determination is made whether this office will retain prosecutorial jurisdiction in municipal court or whether the matter will be referred to municipal prosecutors. Cases that are selected for this program are those that may not lend themselves to prosecution in the Superior Court, but are of significant importance so that the full resources of the county prosecutor's office are brought to bear on the municipal court prosecution.

PIC (PRE-INDICTMENT CONFERENCE)

PIC cases are generally those in which the defendant has a minor record or no record, and has committed a third- or fourth-degree crime. The goal is early disposition, either through a diversion into Pretrial Intervention (PTI) or a negotiated sentence after a guilty plea to an accusation. Also, in accordance with the *Brimage* guidelines of the New Jersey attorney general, all school zone drug cases are calendared for PIC when it is appropriate to extend a pre-indictment plea offer. The early resolution of cases through PIC is essential to controlling both pre-indictment and post-indictment backlog of cases.

PIC court is normally held every Wednesday and Thursday. Prior to the actual court appearance, a pre-indictment plea offer is communicated to the PIC coordinator of the Criminal Case Manager's Office, who in turn relays the offer to the public defender or private counsel representing the defendant. Those defendants who indicate an intent to accept the plea offer are scheduled to appear in the PIC court the same week to enter their pleas. The cases of those defendants who reject the plea offers or who do not appear at a scheduled PIC hearing are immediately referred to the Grand Jury Unit for preparation.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Intake Screening Unit reviewed a total of 5,439 cases in 2024. Of those matters, 2,088 defendants were administratively downgraded to disorderly persons offenses and referred to municipal court or the Remand Program for prosecution. Another 399 defendants had their cases administratively dismissed, while 334 defendants were referred to Family Court. There were nine defendants whose charges were referred to a different venue. Finally, there were 463 accusations filed by this office and the cases of 1,002 defendants with indictable charges were approved for presentation to the grand jury, with 987 being indicted.

INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN (ICAC) UNIT

The Mercer County Internet Crimes Against Children Unit (ICAC) is under the umbrella of the New Jersey State Police Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. The unit is responsible for all cases involving online sexual exploitation of children that are referred to the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office for investigation and prosecution. The unit is both reactive and proactive in nature. In the reactive sense, detectives receive tips from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) as well as municipal police departments, and they conduct follow up investigations on the tips to determine (1) whether the materials uploaded and/or exchanged on various internet service provider sites are child sexual abuse material and (2) who is involved in committing the crime. In the proactive sense, detectives will assume undercover identities in order to identify individuals involved in online child exploitation by way of the attempt or actual communication with children online for sexual purposes and/or the possession, distribution and manufacturing of child sexual abuse material.

The ICAC Unit's mission is to (1) effectively investigate and prosecute individuals preying on our most innocent members of society, our children, and (2) educate the community about online safety and the prevention and prosecution of these cases. The unit does not discriminate against any victim because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, ancestry, or mental or physical handicap.

The ICAC unit became a full-time unit in September 2020. Prior to September 2020, ICAC cases were prosecuted by members of the Special Victims Unit (SVU). Although ICAC is now a separate unit, SVU and ICAC often come together to pursue their cases as oftentimes individuals charged with SVU offenses have also committed ICAC offenses and vice versa.

During 2024, the unit consisted of one full-time assistant prosecutor, the chief of the unit, and three part-time assistant prosecutors, as well as four full-time detectives and one task force

officer from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The investigative function of the unit was overseen by a sergeant, a lieutenant and a captain.

In 2024, more than 166 cases were referred to the Mercer County ICAC Unit, with all 166 cases investigated. Of those cases, 40 resulted in an arrest being made and charges being lodged. Detectives determined that the remaining cases could not be pursued due to images being age questionable and/or the inability to identify suspects. Of the cases investigated, 35 involved judicially authorized searches of a structure and 39 cases (a mixture of charged and uncharged cases) resulted in suspects being interviewed by a detective from the ICAC Unit. While ICAC is not considered to be an on-call unit, the detectives and one full-time assistant prosecutor are available and operate on a 24-hour-a-day basis. There are occasions when the unit receives emergent ICAC referrals after regular business hours; in those instances, the full-time members of the unit respond for investigation.

ICAC investigations include open source and law enforcement lookups, search warrant and communications data warrant applications, as well as evidence collection, digital/electronic evidence analysis, and interviews of victims, witnesses and suspects.

The ICAC Unit employs a vertical prosecution method. Once an investigation gives way to sufficient evidence to charge, an assistant prosecutor in the unit reviews the evidence and makes a charging decision. If charged, an assistant prosecutor will pursue prosecution of the file, including reviewing the file for central judicial processing, arguing for detention or release conditions and indicting the file, as well as ultimately trying the file if necessary. If a victim is identified in the process of an investigation or during a case's prosecution, the detectives and assistant prosecutors utilize victim witness advocates to assist with ensuring that any/all needs of the victim, whether emotional, physical or mental, are met throughout the criminal justice process. In instances where a victim is identified, they are consulted throughout the prosecution process.

MEGAN'S LAW UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Megan's Law Unit is responsible for all aspects of the effective implementation of Megan's Law in Mercer County. The unit is comprised of a chief assistant prosecutor, one agent and an administrative assistant who serve on a primary assignment basis. An additional assistant prosecutor is delegated as a secondary assignment.

In the wake of the tragic murder of 7-year-old Megan Kanka of Hamilton Township by a convicted sex offender, the governor and legislature responded with the passage of the Registration and Community Notification Laws, *N.J.S.A. 2C: 7-1 et. seq.*, more commonly known as Megan's Law. Megan's Law creates a sex offender registry and establishes a community notification procedure that requires county prosecutors to rank offenders according to their risk of re-offense. The purpose of this legislation is to provide pertinent information to law enforcement and, in appropriate circumstances, to neighbors, parents and children, as well as community organizations that care for or supervise women or children. It is hoped that, armed with knowledge of the description and whereabouts of sex offenders, community members will be in the best possible position to protect their children and themselves. To facilitate this process, various state agencies have been charged with the responsibility of informing county prosecutors about the imminent release of such offenders. In turn, the prosecutors have been charged with the responsibility of determining the risk of re-offense, placing the offender in a "tier" based upon that determination, overseeing the dissemination of the appropriate notification required in each case, and tracking all sex offenders living within their respective counties.

Those required to register under Megan's Law include persons convicted, adjudicated delinquent or acquitted by reason of insanity of certain enumerated crimes who are released from custody after the October 31, 1994 effective date of this statute; offenders who are on parole or probation on or after the effective date of the statute; and those offenders who have been found to

be repetitive and compulsive by the court regardless of the date of conviction or adjudication.

The Registrant Risk Assessment Scale (RRAS) is a 13-factor scale employed by prosecutor's offices statewide to objectively and uniformly determine an offender's risk of re-offense. The 13 factors are assigned to four categories: seriousness of the offense, offense history, characteristics of the offender and community support. Each category is weighted in accordance with its predictive value. The prosecutor reviews the registrant's criminal file and other relevant information and applies the facts of the underlying case to the categories in the RRAS.

The registrant's tier classification determines the scope of notification. When it is determined that a registrant falls within Tier I, a tier notification flyer is given only to the local law enforcement agencies that are likely to encounter the offender. When it is determined that a registrant falls within Tier II, a tier notification flyer is provided to the local law enforcement agencies as well as to schools and licensed day care centers and summer camps likely to encounter the offender. Notification will also be given to registered community organizations that have direct supervision over children and/or women. Tier II registrants also appear on the New Jersey State Police's Internet Registry, with exceptions. When it is determined that a registrant falls within Tier III, the prosecutor will also distribute tier notification flyers to members of the public likely to encounter the offender, as well as to law enforcement agencies, schools, licensed day cares and summer camps, and registered community organizations. All Tier III registrants appear on the internet.

Prior to a Tier II or Tier III classification, the prosecutor personally serves the registrant with written notice, informing them that they have the right to object. Registrants then have 14 days in which to object. If a registrant objects to his or her tier classification, and/or scope or manner of notification, the court schedules a Megan's Law hearing. The Megan's Law hearing is a closed proceeding that provides the registrant an opportunity to challenge the state's numerical

scale score and intended scope of notification. The state often must utilize expert testimony to prove a registrant's risk of re-offense, as the state's burden of proof is by clear and convincing evidence in this quasi-criminal proceeding. If the state and the offender cannot agree, the court makes the final decision and signs an order. Notification cannot be effectuated until two days after the order is signed. The entire process is to be completed within 45 days of the date of service. By mandate of the Office of the Attorney General, registrants are re-tiered (and personally served, thus beginning the objection and hearing process again) every time they change residences, commit another crime, or for any other reason that causes the prosecutor concern.

The scope of notification in Mercer County is contingent upon whether the municipality is urban, suburban or rural as defined by the New Jersey State Police Uniform Crime Report. This report defines the only urban municipality in Mercer County as Trenton. The suburban municipalities in Mercer County are: East Windsor Township, Ewing Township, Hamilton Township, Lawrence Township, Pennington Borough, Princeton and West Windsor Township. The rural municipalities in Mercer County are defined as: Hightstown Borough, Hopewell Borough, Hopewell Township and Robbinsville Township.

In the case of a Tier III notification in an urban area, all residences, businesses, schools, licensed day cares and religious institutions located within a quarter mile of the registrant's home and workplace are notified. Additionally, schools (administrative personnel as well as students), licensed day care centers and community organizations within a one-mile radius of the registrant's home or workplace also receive notification flyers.

In the case of a Tier III notification in a suburban area, all residences, businesses, schools, licensed day cares and religious institutions located within a one-mile radius of the registrant's residence or workplace receive notice. Additionally, schools (administrative personnel as well as students), licensed day care centers and community organizations within a two-mile radius of the

offender's home or workplace also receive notification flyers.

In the case of a Tier III notification in a rural area, all residences, businesses, schools, licensed day cares, religious institutions and private residences within a two-mile radius of the registrant's residence or workplace receive notice. Additionally, schools (administrative personnel as well as students), licensed day care centers and community organizations within a three-mile radius of the registrant's home or workplace also receive notification flyers.

The law further mandates that residents living within the scope of notification must be notified by personal service with notices containing the offender's name and address, recent photograph, physical description, underlying sex offense, vehicle description and license plate number. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Notification Operation Plan divides notification areas into quadrants in which teams of members of law enforcement personally serve flyers. This plan is carried out by a task force of municipal police officers from all of the municipalities in Mercer County, prosecutor's detectives and sheriff's officers. This task force was formed by the prosecutor so that the onerous task of Tier III notification does not fall entirely on one police department or the prosecutor's office. If the residents are home, the officers explain to them that they are receiving information regarding a convicted sex offender pursuant to Megan's Law and that they are permitted to share that information only within their immediate household. The residents are also cautioned that the information is not to be released to the press. The resident must sign a receipt acknowledging receipt of the flyer and the rules against improper dissemination that is returned to the prosecutor's office and stored by the Megan's Law Unit. If residents have additional questions, the officers instruct them to contact the prosecutor's Megan's Law Unit.

If a resident, or someone over the age of 18, is not home when the officers attempt to effectuate service, the officers must leave a notice informing the resident that they must contact the prosecutor's office or report to the courthouse at one of the listed dates and times with positive

identification to receive important information. The prosecutor's office arranges to have the courthouse available one or two evenings to accommodate the residents. The Megan's Law Unit staff, along with other prosecutor's detectives, then serves the residents with the notification flyers.

On July 25, 2001, the New Jersey Internet Sex Offender Registry was signed into law by the legislature. The law mandates the internet posting of all Tier III (high risk) offenders and Tier II (moderate risk) offenders subject to certain exceptions. Tier I (low risk) sex offenders do not appear on the website. The New Jersey State Police maintains a website with the name, home address, county, photograph and description of offenses of each Tier II (with exceptions) and Tier III registrants.

In September 2001, the Megan's Law Unit began to review and re-serve all of the registered sex offenders in Mercer County where traditional Megan's Law notification had already been effectuated. All registrants are entitled to a hearing prior to having their photographs and personal information posted on the internet.

The internet law provides some exceptions for posting Tier II offenders. The law specifies that under certain circumstances, any juvenile offender, statutory rapist or incest offender (someone who committed the offense within their own household) is exempt from internet posting because of the nature of the crimes and the offenders. It has been determined by the legislature that these classes of offenders do not pose a sufficient risk to the community to overcome their presumption of privacy and therefore should not require any internet posting.

As of December 2024, approximately 1,705 sex offenders have registered in Mercer County as first-time registrants since the passage of Megan's Law. This number includes 55 new registrants living in the county. An estimated 208 individuals currently residing in Mercer County are Tier I sex offenders; approximately 329 are Tier II sex offenders; and none are Tier III sex offenders. Forty-three sex offenders are pending tier hearings.

State-of-the-art equipment is crucial to the success of the Megan's Law Unit. Computer equipment, including a color scanner, color printer, color copier, mapping software and database software, and a Global Positioning System, was purchased to create the color flyers necessary to provide the required notifications. The equipment is also used to accurately determine and plot the appropriate scope of notification surrounding a registrant's home and workplace, to track the whereabouts of each registrant, and to maintain a ready source of information regarding many aspects of each registrant.

Training and community outreach activities are an integral part of the unit's responsibilities. The chief assistant prosecutor routinely provides training for all public, private and parochial schools, as well as licensed day care centers, within each of the 12 municipalities. The training provides superintendents, principals, teachers and caregivers with instructions on how to properly effectuate Tier II and Tier III notifications and provides materials to ensure that notifications comply with the mandates of the statute.

The chief assistant prosecutor also provides semi-annual training to the Megan's Law liaison officers from each municipality, parole officers and probation officers regarding any changes in the law and apprising them of their new and changing responsibilities. To date, the unit has conducted more than 200 training sessions.

Based on the onerous requirements of effectuating a Tier III community notification, the prosecutor, in conjunction with the Mercer County Chiefs of Police Association, created the Megan's Law Task Force. The task force is comprised of the Megan's Law liaison officers from each of the 12 municipalities. In 2024, there were no Tier III notifications.

Finally, the unit has the responsibility of prosecuting sex offenders who fail to comply with Megan's Law registration requirements. During 2024, approximately 20 registrants were charged with third-degree failure to register as a convicted sex offender pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 2C:7-2*. The

Megan's Law Unit also works closely with the probation and parole officers who supervise Megan's Law registrants who have been sentenced to community or parole supervision for life, pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 2C:43-6.4*. In 2024, approximately 35 registrants were charged with a violation of a special sentence of community supervision for life, a third-degree offense. The unit is also responsible for prosecuting charges under legislation comprised of failure to comply with monitoring requirements pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 30:4-123.85* and interference with a monitoring device pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 30:4-123.86*, both third-degree charges. The unit resolved 28 of these cases by way of plea.

MUNICIPAL COURT UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Municipal Court Unit is made up of one assistant prosecutor who serves as a liaison between the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and the attorneys who serve the 12 municipalities as municipal court prosecutors. The assistant prosecutor assigned to the unit oversees municipal court appeals handled by this office, and provides training sessions and technical assistance to the municipal prosecutors. The assistant prosecutor also answers inquiries from the municipal prosecutors, municipal court administrators and the presiding judge of the Mercer County Municipal Court Vicinage.

The municipal court liaison meets on a regular basis with the state Division of Criminal Justice's Prosecutors Supervision and Coordination Bureau. The information provided at these sessions is then presented to the municipal court prosecutors. This information includes updates of relevant case law, particularly in the area of drunk driving, changes to existing laws, and the creation of new law that is applicable to the municipal courts. Updated training and materials continue to be provided to the municipal prosecutors regarding these new issues and defenses being presented by the defense bar.

The unit continues to provide opportunities for assistant prosecutors to cover municipal court sessions and to gain valuable experience in this area. The Municipal Court Coverage Team continues to provide a ready group of assistant prosecutors to train and dispatch to the county's municipal courts when needed. The unit has assisted the municipal prosecutors in providing more timely access to one another to provide court coverage for their respective municipalities. The unit continues to address the issue of the proper handling of motor vehicle tickets that are part of indictable criminal charges.

OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office of Information Technology plays a critical role in managing, planning, implementing and supporting a wide range of computer and technology projects, both new and ongoing. The primary responsibility of this office is to ensure the security, reliability and performance of all current and future computer systems. This includes overseeing the daily operations of office technology, such as hardware, software and network infrastructure, to ensure seamless and secure operations across the organization. The office is tasked with maintaining and managing a complex network of technology, which includes servers, tablets, smartphones, scanners, smartboards, numerous attached peripherals and more than 300 client computers and laptops. These devices support a variety of essential software applications used by the Prosecutor's Office, local law enforcement, and other allied agencies. These systems are distributed across a range of locations, from the office's five primary buildings to courtroom systems at the Mercer County Courthouse, as well as numerous additional devices and systems installed throughout municipal locations. These technologies are also configured to support remote work, enhancing flexibility for staff.

In addition to the day-to-day management of these critical systems, the Office of Information Technology is responsible for handling digital media needs, such as processing requests for digital media discovery and managing body-worn camera footage. OIT also oversees the security and management of physical access systems, including server management, door security access, alarm communication systems and video surveillance infrastructure, located at the main office and evidence storage facilities.

The year 2024 saw the completion of several significant upgrades and projects that enhanced the infrastructure and capabilities of the office. Among these was the extensive upgrading of server rooms, which involved the installation of new Uninterruptible Power Supply

(UPS) batteries to help ensure more reliable uptime for end users. Additionally, new interconnect cables were installed to improve the overall reliability and performance of the office's network infrastructure. Many of the servers running older operating systems were updated to modern versions, resulting in smoother performance and better integration with the entire Active Directory system, which controls user access and network resources.

As part of efforts to bolster cybersecurity and enhance operational security, the office upgraded its end-user password policies, aligning them with industry standards by introducing more complex password requirements and random time intervals for mandatory password changes. Similarly, print services were upgraded across the office, resulting in improved printer uptime, faster printing speeds, and a more streamlined workflow.

A key project during 2024 was the gradual transition from tablet devices used by assistant prosecutors in court sessions to new laptops, offering enhanced performance, increased storage, better speed and greater security. This upgrade was initiated in 2024, with plans to distribute all laptops by 2025, subject to budget and time constraints.

The Office of Information Technology also played a significant role in enhancing software applications used in the office's case management system. These enhancements included the planning, setup and implementation of a specialized high-tech crimes software application, as well as improvements to existing software applications for personnel management and asset forfeiture tracking. These upgrades allow the office to streamline operations and improve the overall effectiveness of law enforcement in Mercer County.

Preparation for the implementation of body-worn cameras was another key initiative in 2024. To support this project, additional cabling was installed at one office location to improve bandwidth capacity. Circuits were upgraded to handle the increased demand, and several pieces of infrastructure equipment were programmed at two office locations to ensure compatibility with

the body-worn cameras. Essential accessories such as camera mounts, docking stations and peripheral equipment were purchased and configured for use by the investigative staff.

Beyond project work, the office continued its efforts to maintain and optimize computer systems and technology infrastructure. This included replacing and upgrading outdated devices, such as desktop computers, network printers and OCR document scanners. New laptops were purchased and configured for support staff and the Special Investigations Unit, ensuring that staff had the appropriate tools for both in-office and remote work. The IT team also conducted a thorough review of the office's Virtual Private Network (VPN) and Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) systems. Staff who had left the office were removed from the VPN and 2FA systems, resulting in cost savings. Furthermore, the office made the transition to a non-dongle version of the Duo 2FA system, which allows end-users to authenticate via their smartphones rather than relying on physical hardware tokens. This change improved user convenience and eliminated the ongoing costs and challenges associated with lost, damaged or non-functional dongles, streamlining the system and improving the efficiency of VPN access.

In response to ongoing needs for secure digital evidence review, the office procured external hard drives for legal and investigative staff to facilitate the portable review of digital media. In addition, outdated Livescan equipment used for fingerprint processing was replaced with newer technology at one of the office locations, ensuring more reliable and efficient fingerprinting capabilities. Finally, the office upgraded both domain and file servers at one location to replace aging infrastructure that had reached its end of life, further enhancing the overall performance and reliability of the office's technology systems.

Through these various upgrades, improvements and initiatives, the Office of Information Technology has significantly enhanced its ability to support the work of the Prosecutor's Office,

local law enforcement and other agencies, ensuring that the technology infrastructure continues to meet the evolving needs of the justice system in Mercer County.

OFFICE OF VICTIM WITNESS ADVOCACY

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office of Victim Witness Advocacy strives to ensure that services of the highest quality are provided to the greatest number of victims. Our mission is to abide by the Creed of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office of Victim Witness Advocacy while continuing to identify areas where services for crime victims can be enhanced. The purpose of this office is to provide comprehensive services to meet the needs of crime victims, beginning at the point of victimization and continuing throughout their involvement in the criminal justice system and beyond.

The Victim Witness Advocacy staff consists of six victim witness advocates overseen by a victim witness coordinator. These staff positions are funded by the Victims of Crime Act Grant. Two advocates are assigned to the Homicide Unit. One advocate is assigned to the Special Victims Unit, which is located in the Child Advocacy Center portion of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office. Victims have direct access to services within the Child Advocacy Center. An advocate is assigned to the Domestic Violence Unit and is responsible for working with victims of all indictable cases. Another advocate assists victims with all other indictable cases, such as burglary, aggravated assault, terroristic threats, robbery, theft, and Serious Collision Response Team cases. There is one advocate assigned to the Family Court/Juvenile Unit located in the Mercer County Civil Courthouse. This advocate is responsible for assisting victims of crimes committed by juveniles, as well as adult, non-indictable domestic violence cases. The office has one support staff person that performs administrative tasks.

The Office of Victim Witness Advocacy is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of services pursuant to the Attorney General's Standards to Ensure the Rights of Crime Victims. It is the responsibility of the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy to keep all victims and witnesses

advised of upcoming court dates and case status. This is primarily done through phone calls and letters that are generated daily through the InfoShare program and mailed to victims and witnesses.

An essential role of the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy is to ensure that the rights of victims and witnesses are being upheld within the criminal justice system. Every effort is made by the staff to ensure that the voices of victims are heard that the criminal justice system continues to be victim-sensitive and that the victim is not victimized a second time as they proceed through the criminal justice system. The staff acts as a liaison for the victims as they interact with assistant prosecutors, investigative staff and court personnel. Advocates provide counseling referrals, crisis intervention, needs assessment, court accompaniment, necessary restitution information, social service referrals, restitution requests and help with filing applications with the New Jersey Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO). This support is designed to ease the burden associated with participation in the criminal system.

One of the most important and basic rights of victims during prosecution is the right to participate. Advocates ensure that victims are afforded this right by providing guidance and support, as well as encouraging them to exercise their rights by presenting victim impact statements at sentencing and at other critical stages of prosecutions. Victim witness advocates notify victims of inmate releases, parole eligibility and sentence expirations so that victims can take appropriate steps to object to or prepare for the inmate's release.

In addition to these direct victim services, the office continues to establish strong partnerships with allied professionals, other victim service providers, and leaders in the community. Advocates attended monthly meetings in the Mercer County community addressing various issues that impact victims. Making connections with other community agencies and professionals help make services more readily available to those we serve.

The Office of Victim Witness Advocacy participates in community events that both

educate and support Mercer County residents. Victim Witness staff also attend conferences and trainings that enhance their knowledge in dealing with crime victims and the impact their victimization can have on their mental and physical health.

The Office of Victim Witness Advocacy participated in National Night Out events throughout Mercer County, providing information and support to the residents they serve. The victim witness coordinator instructed at the Mercer County Police Academy and educated incoming law enforcement officers on victims' rights, the impact of victimization, and the services of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office of Victim Witness Advocacy.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS UNIT

Pursuant to the Attorney General's Guidelines for Internal Affairs Policy and Procedures, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office is responsible for any investigation of alleged misconduct by a county or local law enforcement officer that could potentially constitute a criminal offense. By policy promulgated by the Mercer County Prosecutor, potential criminal misconduct by county corrections officers also must be reported to and investigated under the authority of this office. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Professional Standards Unit, consisting of the first assistant prosecutor, two deputy first assistant prosecutors, one assistant prosecutor, four superior officers, and one detective, supervises all of these investigations, becoming actively involved when particular circumstances require.

Mercer County law enforcement and correction agencies are obligated to advise the Internal Affairs Unit as soon as information regarding potential criminality of an officer's actions is brought to their attention. At that point, unit personnel determine the nature and scope of the investigation to be conducted, provides legal and investigative advice, and determines whether the investigation should be conducted by agency personnel alone, by this office alone or jointly. At the conclusion of an investigation, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office decides whether to prosecute, decline prosecution and/or refer the matter back to the agency for appropriate administrative or disciplinary action.

In 2024, there were 86 formal internal affairs investigations opened by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office. This total does not include agency contacts when an immediate decision is made by this office to permit the matter to be handled administratively or contacts in which the agency merely seeks legal or investigative advice. Of those investigations, 63 were closed by the end of 2024.

The 2024 investigations included various allegations of official misconduct, including excessive force, racial profiling, domestic violence, theft, drug distribution, drug use, harassment, false arrest, improper searches, tampering with records, improper computer access and corruption.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

The Public Information Office acts as the central point of contact for all media inquiries and information requests. It is staffed by one full-time agent who is available to the media 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This system gives the media one dedicated source from which they can obtain news and updates, and relieves on-scene investigators and legal personnel from that responsibility. Several assistant prosecutors are also assigned to the office as a secondary duty.

The office works closely with the legal and investigative staff in obtaining information and releasing it to the public within the guidelines of state Executive Order #69. It is responsible for answering daily media inquiries, writing and distributing press releases, and arranging press conferences for high-profile cases and significant issues determined by the prosecutor. The office has established contacts with national, regional and local media organizations, including television, radio and print, and provides information on current crimes, arrests, court activity and any other topic requested by the media source.

All information released by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office is authorized by the prosecutor and disseminated through the Public Information Office. The office supports local police agencies when major news events occur in their municipalities and advises them on releasing information in accordance with the law. In addition, the office assists with requests for information made under the Open Public Records Act.

The office released approximately 43 written press releases in 2024. Several high-profile events in the county created a great need for information from the office this year, including multiple investigations by the Internet Crimes Against Children Unit, the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force and Homicide Task Force, the continued efforts of law enforcement to battle the

national epidemic of opioid addiction, and the introduction of the Body Worn Camera (BWC) Wins program.

In addition to day-to-day media responsibilities, the Public Information Office assists with the annual report and other printed projects, participates in various community outreach activities, and develops strategic communications plans with the prosecutor and senior staff. It is also responsible for maintaining the office website and social media accounts. The staff also instructs media relations at the Mercer County Police Academy.

SERIOUS COLLISION RESPONSE TEAM

The Serious Collision Response Team (SCRT) was created in October 1999 as a result of a grant from the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety and is made up of one assistant prosecutor and six detectives. The assistant prosecutor leads the unit as a secondary assignment. Six detectives serve the unit as secondary assignments. The clerical duties, including correspondence and discovery, are handled full time by a member of the support staff.

The SCRT is responsible for investigating, jointly and in conjunction with the local police department or state police, all fatal and serious injury collisions that occur within Mercer County. It is also responsible for investigating police motor vehicle pursuits that end in injuries to civilians. In addition, the SCRT, with the assistance of the Trial Unit, prosecutes all indictable criminal charges arising out of these investigations.

The SCRT conducts both formal and informal training in the field of collision investigation. The assistant prosecutor and SCRT detectives also provide legal and investigatory guidance to local and state police.

In addition, the SCRT provides technical support to other units, such as homicide, by measuring scenes and providing crime scene drawings.

The investigation of motor vehicle collisions relies upon both physical evidence and witnesses. Criminal charges may or may not be filed as a result of these investigations. The SCRT has the responsibility of determining if there is proof that constitutes a criminal act and whether a driver will be charged criminally. In instances where there is no proof of criminal conduct, the case is referred back to the municipality for disposition of any motor vehicle summons or non-indictable charges that may have been filed.

During 2024, the unit was responsible for a total workload of 153 original investigations, including 91 new investigations. Of these investigations, 79 were completed with 28 cases resulting in criminal charges.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

The primary goal of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) is to investigate, arrest and prosecute persons who are involved in the sale of controlled dangerous substances. Detectives assigned to the SIU engage in a host of investigative activities ranging from traditional undercover police work such as buy/bust operations, reversal, and courier interdictions to highly sophisticated wiretap investigations. The scope of these investigations includes everything from simple street level dealing to complex distribution conspiracies, and may focus on specific individuals, residences or areas within the county that have been identified through the collection of intelligence information.

Often, when suspected drug activity spans more than one community or crosses county lines, SIU detectives participate in a task force comprised of all law enforcement agencies within the affected area. Because of the large number of cases generated by SIU investigations, unit detectives are often called to testify in court. The designated detectives, by virtue of their extensive training and experience, have been qualified by the court to testify as experts in the field of narcotics and narcotics distribution activities.

The assistant prosecutors in the unit are responsible for prosecuting the cases resulting from the unit's investigations. Equally as important, to ensure the quality of these investigations, they also provide legal guidance, both within the unit and to outside law enforcement agencies. Moreover, they assist in the preparation and review of all search warrants, applications for consensual interceptions, communication data warrants and electronic surveillance applications.

In addition to the routine work conducted by the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force, between the months of June and October 2024, members of the Special Investigations Unit supervised a summer initiative program in which detectives from the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and members Trenton Police Department conducted surveillance-based investigations in

the city of Trenton for various street level quality of life violations. During the operation, Mercer County detectives worked alongside officers from the Trenton Police Department and conducted coordinated surveillance operations. The assistant prosecutors from SIU provided legal support for the operation and were on call during the dates the operation was conducted. The initiative resulted in the arrest of sixty-three individuals for narcotics and quality of life violations.

Finally, in addition to investigating and prosecuting cases, the unit plays an important role in combating illegal drug activity by providing training, technical assistance and equipment to police departments throughout Mercer County. Unit members also assist local schools with delivering the important anti-drug message to our youth. Attorneys from the unit instruct Mercer County law enforcement personnel in search and seizure law.

ORGANIZATION

The Special Investigations Unit is presently staffed by two attorneys, one of whom is designated as chief of the unit, one lieutenant, three sergeants, eight MCPO detectives and one administrative assistant. In September 2013, the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force (MCNTF) was formed. The Mercer County Narcotics Task Force is a multi-jurisdictional task force, under the leadership of the Special Investigations Unit, aimed at addressing illegal drug activity in Mercer County. Task force members supplement the unit with detectives provided by the Trenton Police Department, the Hamilton Police Division, the Ewing Police Department and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The unit also works cooperatively with Homeland Security Investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Attorney's Office, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the United States Postal Service, the New Jersey State Police, and other police departments throughout the state and in Pennsylvania. Currently, there are six task force officers from outside agencies assigned to the MCNTF.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT IN 2024

During 2024, the Special Investigations Unit executed 145 search warrants and/or arrest/consent searches, arrested a total of 109 individuals, and seized \$1,683,712.17 in U.S. currency and approximately \$13,090,580 worth of controlled dangerous substances. The unit also confiscated 30 firearms and seven vehicles. In 2024, the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force began the practice of initiating joint investigations with the New Jersey Department of Taxation. Additionally, the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force was recognized as the 2024 Narcotics Unit of the Year – Central by the New Jersey Narcotic Enforcement Officers Association.

SIGNIFICANT CASES

STATE V. TERRANCE YOUNG

On January 30, 2024, members of the Mercer County Narcotics Task Force concluded a two-month investigation into the distribution of cocaine in Ewing Township, New Jersey, by an individual identified as Terrance Young. A detective was assigned as primary for the narcotics investigation and a second detective was directed to conduct a parallel financial investigation into Young. The investigation revealed that Young was distributing cocaine in Hamilton Township and the surrounding areas, and that he was accessing a storage facility in Hamilton Township. The financial investigation into Young established his connection to the Hamilton Township storage unit as well as another storage unit in Ewing Township.

On January 27, 2024, detectives executed search warrants for Young, his Ewing Township residence, a 2019 Honda Pilot and the storage facility in Hamilton. During the search of Young's residence, detectives located currency in the second-floor master bedroom, paraphernalia in the basement, financial documents, documents tying Young to two storage units, and a debit card in Young's name that was used to pay for the storage units. In the Hamilton Township storage unit, detectives recovered approximately 790 grams of cocaine, 110 grams of raw heroin, 50 bricks of

packaged heroin, 50 grams of fentanyl, paraphernalia used to package heroin, and a hydraulic press. Subsequently, detectives executed a search warrant at the storage unit in Ewing and located approximately 1,200 grams of suspected heroin, approximately 400 grams of suspected cocaine, approximately 50 grams of methamphetamine, approximately 50 grams of fentanyl, approximately 28 ecstasy pills, four handguns, an assault weapon, six high-capacity magazines, a hydraulic press and narcotics packaging materials.

On March 18, 2024, a Mercer County grand jury returned an indictment charging Young with four counts of third-degree possession of a controlled dangerous substance, two counts of first-degree possession of a controlled dangerous substance with the intent to distribute, two counts of second-degree possession of a controlled dangerous substance with the intent to distribute, two counts of first-degree maintaining/operating a controlled dangerous substance production facility, five counts of second-degree possession of a firearm while committing a controlled dangerous substance offense, five counts of second-degree unlawful possession of a firearm, one count of fourth-degree possession of a large capacity ammunition magazine, one count of fourth-degree possession of hollow nose bullets, one count of fourth-degree possession of a defaced firearm, one count of third-degree money laundering and seven counts of second-degree certain persons not to possess a firearm. The charges are currently pending before the Mercer County Superior Court.

STATE V. WILLIAM ADROVER-RODRIGUEZ, MANUEL CASTRO-VELAZQUEZ, JAMIE ACEVEDO-CORREA & ELVIN PEREZ-MEDINA

During the month of March 2024, members of the MCNTF received information from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) regarding the illegal distribution of cocaine in Mercer County. Detectives learned that an individual identified as William Adrover was in possession of several kilograms of cocaine and seeking a buyer.

On March 21, 2024, officers with the MCNTF and the DEA established surveillance of a meet location. During that surveillance, detectives observed Adrover retrieved a large duffle bag from a Ford Expedition that was parked at a motel in Lawrenceville, NJ, and check into room 136. Officers then observed two individuals, later identified as Elvin Perez-Medina and Jamie Acevedo-Correa, enter the Ford Expedition and drive out of the area. Detectives then observed another individual, later identified as Manuel Castro-Velazquez, arrive and park a gray Honda in front of room 136.

As a result of the investigation, detectives applied for search warrants for William Adrover and the motel room. Detectives executed the search warrants and located Adrover and five kilograms of cocaine inside the room. Assisting agents from the DEA simultaneously conducted a stop of Perez-Medina and Castro-Velazquez and took them into custody.

On June 4, 2024, a Mercer County grand jury returned an indictment charging all four defendants with one count of third-degree possession of a controlled dangerous substance, one count of first-degree possession of a controlled dangerous substance with the intent to distribute and one count of second-degree conspiracy. On December 16, 2024, Adrover pleaded guilty to a charge of first-degree possession of a controlled dangerous substance. On March 18, 2025, Adrover was sentenced to 10 years of incarceration. On March 31, 2025, Acevedo-Correa, Perez-Medina and Castro-Velazquez each pleaded guilty to a charge of third-degree conspiracy to distribute a controlled dangerous substance. They are awaiting sentencing.

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

The Special Victims Unit (SVU) is responsible for all cases involving the physical abuse of children and the sexual assault of both children and adults referred to the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office for investigation and prosecution. Detectives in this unit conduct any necessary follow-up investigation on cases referred by local police departments or social agencies, as well as initiate their own investigations. Assistant prosecutors assigned to the unit screen, indict and prosecute all referred and original investigations.

The SVU's mission is three-fold: (1) to promote the effective investigation and successful prosecution of child physical abuse, and child and adult sexual assault cases; (2) to provide victims and their families with guidance and support throughout the investigation and prosecution of their cases; and (3) to educate the community about the prevention and prosecution of child abuse and sexual assault crimes. The unit does not discriminate against any victim because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, ancestry, or mental or physical handicap.

During 2024, the unit consisted of three assistant prosecutors whose primary assignment was SVU, including the unit chief; five additional assistant prosecutors assigned to the unit part time and assist with the on-call rotation; and six full-time detectives. The investigative function of the unit was overseen by one sergeant, a lieutenant and a captain.

The SVU is located in the Child Advocacy Center, which is a safe, comfortable place, apart from the courthouse and the rest of the prosecutor's office, where children who have been sexually or physically abused can be interviewed in a child-friendly atmosphere. A safe, comfortable area for adult sexual assault victims is provided in the center as well. Interviews are conducted by law enforcement officers specially trained to interview children and adult victims of sexual assault. All interviews of sexual and physical abuse victims under the age of 12 are videotaped, eliminating

the need for repeated interviews by other agencies involved in the case. Such investigations are joint efforts among the prosecutor's office, the municipal police departments and the state Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P), and are conducted in a manner that is also sensitive to the non-investigative needs of these cases. Often, the child and the non-offending parent or guardians are referred to crisis intervention, medical services, mental health services and victim advocacy.

The Child Advocacy Center also houses the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) coordinator. The Mercer County MDT was established as an investigatory and case management team to process criminal child sexual abuse and child physical abuse cases. The goal of the MDT is to improve the rate of prosecution, limit the number of victim interviews and provide necessary services to victims of child sexual assault and abuse. The primary function of the MDT is to provide case supervision from initiation of a criminal or civil investigation through evaluation and treatment of the child and family, and final disposition of the case. Team members are drawn from professionals in the fields of law enforcement, child protective services, mental health, victim services and medicine. The MDT coordinator ensures that appropriate team members are assembled for each case scheduled for review.

Investigations are conducted jointly between law enforcement and child protective services as set forth in a joint investigative protocol entered into by the prosecutor and DCP&P, and issued by the prosecutor. These investigations are later examined by the MDT through initial and periodic reviews to identify and resolve issues concerning not only investigation and prosecution case needs, but also child protection requirements, including treatment and support for the victims and their families.

Moreover, the MDT coordinator and members of the MDT continued to provide formal training for members of law enforcement, child protective services, school personnel and other

social agencies about the MDT process and uses. Since the SVU is involved in a highly sensitive and specialized area that requires its assigned personnel to be well-trained and motivated, members must continually update themselves on changes in case law, new investigative techniques and procedures, and the latest developments in the psychological aspects of dealing with victims.

In order to ensure that child abuse and sexual assault cases are handled properly, the SVU operates on a 24-hour-a-day basis, with an assistant prosecutor and detective on call at all times. Whenever a sexual assault is reported to one of the municipal police departments or to the state police in Mercer County, the on-call detective is notified. The on-call detective assists the municipal police in the initial investigation of all first- and second-degree crimes and may assist on third- and fourth-degree crimes. Follow-up investigations, which can include taking statements from witnesses, compiling physical and photographic line-ups, and the collection of additional physical evidence of the crime, are handled jointly by the local agency and the unit detective. An assistant prosecutor is available 24 hours a day for legal advice.

On July 15, 2002, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner/Sexual Assault Response Team (SANE/SART) Program was implemented in Mercer County. The Sexual Assault Response Team is made up of three professionals who work together at the victim's request to assist the victim through the aftermath of a sexual assault. The victim may choose to go to any of the four SART hospitals in Mercer County: Capital Health – East Trenton, Capital Health Regional Medical Center (Trenton), Capital Health Medical Center – Hopewell or Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton. The members of the SART include a rape care advocate from Younity (formerly Womanspace), a sexual assault nurse examiner and a law enforcement officer. SART members provide emotional support, medical treatment, evidence collection and investigation of the incident. SART services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In 2024, there were 122 activations with 103 of those activations requiring a response.

The SVU employs a vertical prosecution method. Cases are assigned to a designated assistant prosecutor during the initial investigation. The assistant prosecutor attempts to meet with the victim and their guardian if the victim is a minor, prior to grand jury presentation, personally handles the case presentation to the grand jury and remains assigned throughout all stages of prosecution. The assistant prosecutor consults with the victim and their guardian if the victim is a minor, prior to any plea offer or final disposition in the case, as required by statute.

In order to ensure that a victim's emotional needs are met throughout the criminal justice process, the SVU cooperates with Younity and PEI Kids, which offer both counseling and support to sexual assault victims and their families. Additional counseling referrals are arranged through the victim witness advocate assigned to the unit.

In 2024, the unit opened 534 investigations and continued 83 investigations carried over from 2023. Of this number, 284 investigations were completed in 2024. In investigations resulting in charges, final dispositions were achieved in approximately 126 cases, including 51 guilty pleas, 36 administrative dismissals/downgrades, 24 indictments and 39 defendants admitted into the Pretrial Intervention Program.

SIGNIFICANT CASE

STATE V. B.C.

In September 2023, Hamilton police received a report that a 13-year-old girl had been sexually assaulted in her living room by her 21-year-old cousin and his 20-year-old friend, B.C. During a forensic interview at the Mercer County Child Advocacy Center, the victim disclosed that she was playing videogames in her living room when her cousin and B.C. entered the room. A short time later, both men began touching her breasts and buttocks area and then removed the victim's pants and took turns having vaginal sex with the victim as the other watched. The victim was also forced to perform oral sex during the assault. In an interview with detectives, the cousin

confessed that he had the victim perform oral sex on him and that B.C. had vaginal sex with the victim. B.C. pleaded guilty to second-degree sexual assault and was sentenced to five years in prison subject to the No Early Release Act, Megan's Law and parole supervision for life. The victim's cousin recently pleaded guilty to the same offense for the same sentence and is pending sentencing.

TRAINING UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office recognizes the importance of providing useful, quality training opportunities for the investigative, legal, support, professional and technical staffs. The office also recognizes it has a responsibility and is in a position to extend training opportunities to other law enforcement agencies throughout the county.

The Training Unit manages, plans and implements training for all members of the office. The unit also maintains a database of the training records for the entire office staff.

During 2024, Mercer County Prosecutor's Office investigative staff completed the semi-annual firearms qualification and requalification. Members of the investigative staff attended the following seminars, conferences and workshops: GLOCK workshop, rapid response, firearms instructor, defensive tactics, interviewing techniques, money laundering, crash investigations, animal welfare, digital forensics, leadership institutes, human trafficking, Finding Words/Child First, Top Gun, Child Abduction Response Team, 2024 Narcotic Investigation Conference, 2024 Advanced Homicide Investigation Conference, 2024 New Jersey Women in Law Enforcement Conference and the 26th Annual Sex Crimes Information Sharing Conference.

During 2024, members of the legal staff attended various courses, conferences and seminars, including the 2024 County Prosecutors Association of New Jersey Annual College, 2024 New Jersey Women in Law Enforcement Conference, 26th Annual Sex Crimes Information Sharing Conference, New Jersey Juvenile Officers' Association Annual Conference, New Jersey State Bar Annual Meeting and Convention, human trafficking and Open Public Records Act training.

Members of the support, professional and technical staffs attended various seminars and in-service meetings held throughout New Jersey. The courses include but are not limited to social

media subjects and professional office management training. Members of the support staff attended the Prosecutor's Office Management Association (POMA) Annual Conference, Civil Service Commission human resources training, victim services and VINE Awareness.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office continues to supply instructors to the Mercer County Police Academy for the Basic Course for Police Officer training. Instruction topics include but are not limited to criminal law, juvenile law, domestic violence, homicide, narcotics, bias crimes, emergency vehicle operations, physical training, defensive tactics, firearms and courtroom testimony. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office also supplied role players to assist with practical training exercises at the Mercer County Police Academy.

TRIAL UNIT

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Trial Unit works with each of the criminal courts to ensure a smooth flowing schedule of cases for status conferences, dispositions and trials. To that end, each court is assigned an assistant prosecutor as a trial team leader who supervises and coordinates the trial schedule of the team, which is generally comprised of one or two additional assistant prosecutors and detectives. Although cases prosecuted by specialized units are also assigned to each of the criminal courts, it is the trial teams that do the bulk of the trial work before each judge.

The Trial Unit is comprised of the executive assistant prosecutor, four trial team leaders and four additional assistant prosecutors whose primary assignment is the Trial Unit. Additionally, a lieutenant, a sergeant and approximately eight detectives are assigned full time to the unit.

In 2024, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Trial Unit brought two cases to trial, both resulting in guilty verdicts. Overall, the trial teams resolved approximately 1,120 cases by trial, negotiated plea or other disposition. Many of these resolutions came only after extensive pre-trial preparation and investigation, and motion practice. On rare occasions, guilty pleas were entered on the eve of trial or during some stage of the trial itself.



**Mercer County Prosecutor's Office
2024 Annual Report**