



SUSSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE 2025 Annual Report

Daniel M. Perez
Sussex County Prosecutor

19-21 High Street, Newton, New Jersey 07860
Phone: 973-383-1570 Fax: 973-383-4929
Website: <https://sussexprosecutornj.org/>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTY PROSECUTOR	3
MISSION STATEMENT & CORE VALUES	4
SUSSEX COUNTY OVERVIEW	5
SUSSEX COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT	6
GENERAL ORGANIZATION	7
UNIT OVERVIEWS	8
 <u>UNIT OVERVIEWS</u>	
MAJOR CRIMES	9
Homeland Security/Suspicious Activity Reports	9
GUNS, GANGS, & NARCOTICS TASK FORCE	12
GRAND JURY UNIT	16
Animal Cruelty	17
Diversionary Unit	17
SPECIAL VICTIMS	19
Sex Crimes/Child Abuse	19
Domestic Violence, Family Court & ERPOs	21
High-Tech Crimes	22
Megan's Law	23
Juvenile	24
Human Trafficking	24
Clergy Abuse Task Force	25
INTERNAL AFFAIRS	26
Police Licensing	27
APPELLATE & ADMINISTRATIVE	28
Bias Unit	28
Fugitive Unit	29
Open Public Records Act	29
OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCACY	32
SCPO INITIATIVES	34
COMMUNITY INITIATIVES	36

MESSAGE FROM THE SUSSEX COUNTY PROSECUTOR



Daniel M. Perez began his term as Sussex County Prosecutor on February 2, 2026, after being nominated by the governor and unanimously confirmed by the New Jersey State Senate. Previously, Prosecutor Perez was a criminal defense attorney in Newton, New Jersey. He served as the president of the Sussex County Bar Association, was a member of the New Jersey Committee on Character (Part III), and received the 2021 Professional Lawyer of the Year Award. Prosecutor Perez has practiced criminal law for over 30 years in New Jersey, New York, and federal courts at the trial and appellate levels.

On behalf of the people serving in the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office (SCPO), Prosecutor Perez welcomes you to the SCPO's 2025 Annual Report. This year, we are posting the Annual Report on our website so that the public can learn about the many responsibilities of a County Prosecutor's office. The accomplishments reflected in this report would not have been possible without the efforts of the employees of the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office; our local, county and state law enforcement partners; our community partners; and the Sussex County Board of Commissioners.

At all times, the SCPO strives for fairness and justice, to obtain criminal convictions ethically and with integrity, to hear and honor victims' voices, and to protect the residents, businesses, and visitors of Sussex County. We hope you will find the 2025 Annual Report enlightening and informative.

MISSION STATEMENT & CORE VALUES

The statutory mission of the SCPO is to use all reasonable and lawful diligence for the detection, arrest, indictment, and conviction of offenders against the criminal laws of New Jersey. As a constitutionally established officer and the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for Sussex County, Prosecutor Perez provides leadership and supervision over the state, county and local law enforcement officers and municipal prosecutors serving within Sussex County, with a view toward ensuring the effective, efficient, and uniform enforcement of the criminal laws and the administration of criminal justice throughout the County. The SCPO is committed to fulfilling these constitutional and statutory mandates as well as:

- Strengthening law enforcement's relations with the public;
- Enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of Sussex County;
- Ensuring the rights of crime victims to be treated with fairness, compassion, and respect; and
- Pursuing justice for all.

Our core values are Honor, Fidelity, Justice, and Integrity.

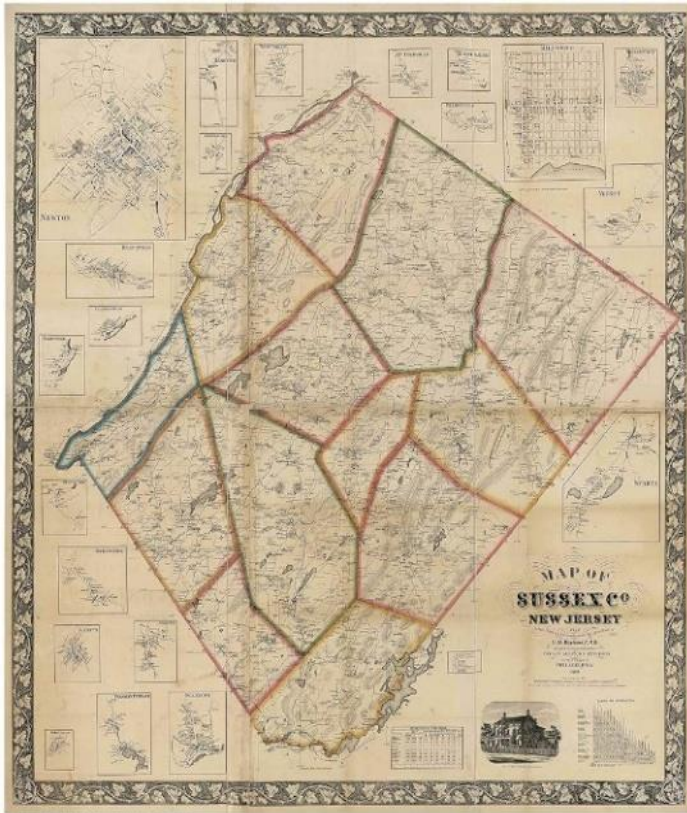


Photo of the Sussex County Historic Courthouse by Shaina Brenner



SUSSEX COUNTY OVERVIEW

Sussex County is located in the northwest corner of New Jersey. The county is bordered to the west by the Delaware River and Pennsylvania; to the north by Orange County, New York; to the east and southeast by Passaic and Morris Counties, respectively; and to the southwest by Warren County. Sussex County is approximately 336,000 acres, or 525 square miles, in area.



Sussex County Map, Library of Congress:
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2012593681/>

Agriculture, government, service-related businesses, and small businesses are the major employers in the area. Due to its topography, Sussex County has remained relatively rural and forested.

The county is comprised of 24 municipalities. The County Seat is located in Newton, New Jersey. The Sussex County Historic Courthouse, the Sussex County Judicial Center, the Sussex County Sheriff's Office, and Sussex County Prosecutor's Office are also located in Newton.

Sussex County is served by eleven municipal police departments as well as the New Jersey State Police – Sussex Station and the Sussex County Sheriff's Office.

SUSSEX COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT

Daniel M. Perez, Sussex County Prosecutor

Nicholas T. Elmo, Chief of Detectives

<u>POLICE DEPARTMENTS</u>	
Andover Township Police Department	Chief Eric Danielson
Byram Township Police Department	Chief Thomas A. Dellicker
Franklin Borough Police Department	Chief Gregory Cugliari
Hamburg Borough Police Department	Chief Jason Tangorra
Hardyston Township Police Department	Chief Scott Lobban
Hopatcong Police Department	Chief Meghan McCluskey
Newton Township Police Department	Chief Daniel Finkle
Ogdensburg Borough Police Department	Chief Joseph V. Sanfilippo
Sparta Township Police Department	Chief Jeffrey McCarrick
Stanhope Borough Police Department	Chief Joseph Johnson
Vernon Township Police Department	Chief Daniel B. Young
Sussex County Sheriff's Office	Sheriff Michael F. Strada
New Jersey State Police – Sussex Station	Station Commander – Lt. Gregory Redden

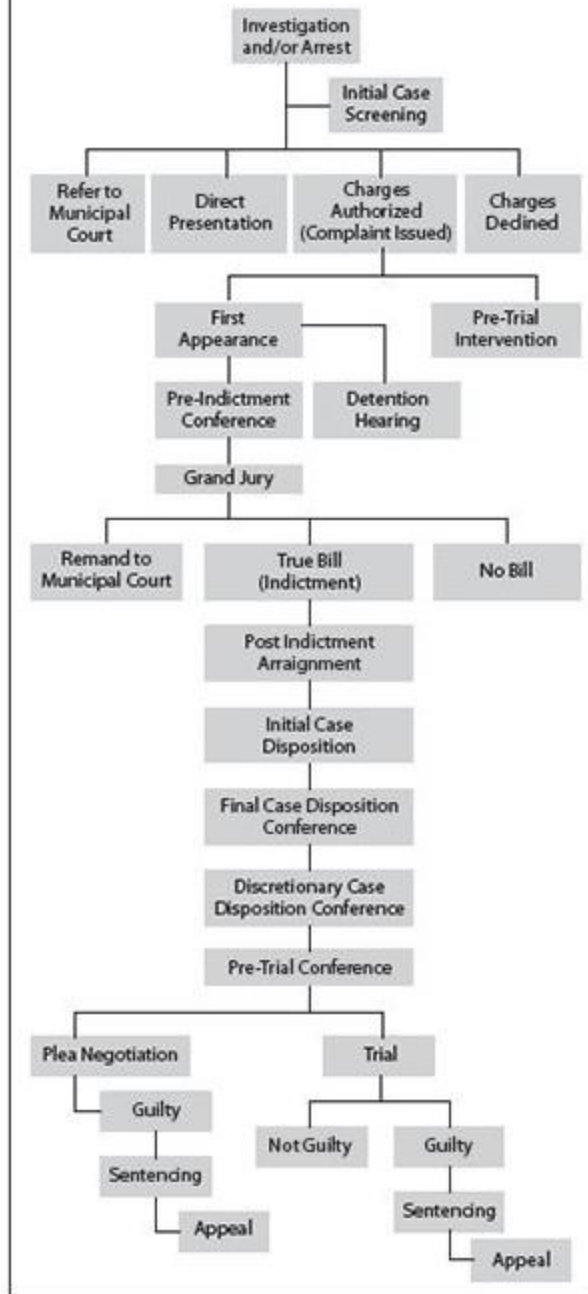


SCPO GENERAL ORGANIZATION

The Sussex County Prosecutor's Office has approximately 50 employees who are organized into various specialized units that carry out all prosecutorial, investigative, administrative, and civil responsibilities of the office. To perform these responsibilities, the office employs lawyers (APs), investigative personnel (detectives and agents), clerical and support staff, and a victim-witness unit. Due to the relatively small staff and variety of duties required, SCPO staff is cross-trained and sufficiently flexible to move from unit to unit to meet operational needs.

The command hierarchy and structure in the SCPO is similar to other County Prosecutor's offices. First Assistant Prosecutor Shaina Brenner and Deputy First Assistant Prosecutor Jerome P. Neidhardt exercise oversight over all prosecutorial functions. Chief of Detectives Nicholas T. Elmo and Lieutenant Kyle Phlegar lead the investigative personnel. The clerical and support staff are managed by the Office Manager. The victim-witness unit is led by the Victim-Witness Coordinator. The First Assistant Prosecutor, Deputy First Assistant Prosecutor, Chief of Detectives, Office Manager, and Victim-Witness Coordinator report directly to the Prosecutor.

The Criminal Case Process



UNIT OVERVIEWS

The SCPO is comprised of the following primary units: 1) Major Crimes, 2) Gangs, Guns, & Narcotics Taskforce, 3) Grand Jury/Trial Team; 4) Special Victims; 5) Internal Affairs; and 6) Appellate and Administrative.

Most Assistant Prosecutors (APs) serve in multiple units and all APs are tasked with a variety of responsibilities. Supervising Assistant Prosecutors and Detective Sergeants lead each of the primary units and are responsible for training and supervising staff under their command.

Although Supervising Assistant Prosecutors have authority to resolve third- and fourth-degree crimes prior to trial with certain exceptions, plea offers in all first- and second-degree cases are authorized by the County Prosecutor personally.

MAJOR CRIMES

The Major Crimes Unit investigates and prosecutes the following specific crimes: homicides, aggravated assaults, police and health care worker assaults, vehicular assaults, arsons (suspicious and fatal fires), kidnappings, robberies, home invasion burglaries, and missing persons cases. All suspicious deaths are reviewed by the Unit and require approval of the Prosecutor prior to closing the investigation without criminal charges. The Unit also investigates Suspicious Activity Reports. The Unit is led by Deputy First Assistant Prosecutor (DFAP) Jerome P. Neidhardt and Detective Sergeant First Class Jason Garrigan.

In 2025, Major Crimes Unit investigators responded to 93 incidents including 42 suspicious deaths: 15 overdoses, 10 suicides, two children, four motor vehicle accident fatalities, one drowning, two unspecified accidents (one fall and one crushed by car), and eight natural/medical. The Unit also responded to 11 suspicious fire investigations, one stabbing, and one drive-by shooting.

Prosecutors in the Major Crimes Unit initiated one murder case, 70 non-domestic aggravated assault cases, 10 vehicular assault cases, one aggravated arson case, and one robbery case in 2025. No kidnapping cases were brought in 2025. Notably, 30 prosecutions were initiated for aggravated assaults on law enforcement officers (down from 38 in 2024), and four for aggravated assaults on health care workers (identical to 2024).

HOMELAND SECURITY/SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTS

Local agencies are required to make notification to the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) and the SCPO Major Crimes Unit when there is suspicious

activity with a known nexus to terrorism or threats against a group or specific facility. Reports are also made when a threat is made to the student body of a school.

The SCPO Counter Threat Coordinator (CTC) is responsible for receiving, reporting, and investigating threats that possibly involve a nexus to terrorism or extremist ideologies. The Coordinator is responsible for collecting all Suspicious Activity Reports (SAR) that occur in Sussex County and ensuring that they are properly investigated to completion. The Coordinator investigates any threat that has the potential to create mass casualty events or disruption to critical infrastructure. The Coordinator is also tasked with assisting in the pre-planning of large events and gatherings to ensure that proper threat mitigation measures are in place and that additional resources are available.

In 2025, Sussex County experienced a decrease in SAR notifications. In total, there were 16 SARs reported to the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) in 2025. This was down from 33 in 2024. Most of the SARs focused on the education/schools sector and involved an expressed or implied threat.

2025 NOTABLE CASES

State v. Sabrina A. Pomales and Elizabeth F. Palacios-Gotay

Both individuals pled guilty to first-degree Aggravated Manslaughter for recklessly causing a motor vehicle crash that took the life of a 22-year-old cyclist in Sandyston, New Jersey. On May 30, 2025, the defendants were sentenced to six years in New Jersey State Prison with an 85% period of parole ineligibility.

State v. Joseph Grieco

In January, Joseph Grieco was found guilty after a jury trial of first-degree aggravated manslaughter for the fatal shooting of his husband in Vernon, New Jersey. He was sentenced in April to serve 11 years in State Prison. This sentence was later commuted in January 2026 by Governor Philip D. Murphy to four years and six days, with a four-year and six-day parole disqualifier. Notwithstanding the governor's sentencing commutation, the Appellate Division affirmed Grieco's conviction and sentence in August of 2026.

GUNS, GANGS, & NARCOTICS TASK FORCE UNIT

The Sussex County Prosecutor's Office Guns, Gangs, and Narcotics Task Force (“Task Force”) was created in October of 1987 pursuant to the Attorney General’s Statewide Action Plan for narcotics enforcement (SNAP). The unit is responsible for investigations leading to the arrest and conviction of persons who violate New Jersey’s drug laws by distributing dangerous drugs in our community, and New Jersey’s gun laws by possessing, using, transporting, or selling guns unlawfully. The Task Force is also tasked with identifying and disrupting criminal gang activity in Sussex County. Historically, New Jersey State Troopers, local law enforcement officers, and sheriff’s officers have been assigned to the Task Force on a rotating basis. The Task Force is led by DFAP Jerome P. Neidhardt and Detective Sergeant Aldo Leone.

The Task Force provides tactical and prosecutorial assistance to state and municipal police officers and other agencies throughout Sussex County. The Task Force acts as a force multiplier to initiate and follow up on drug and firearms investigations on a regular basis. Narcotics and firearm investigations are initiated through information received from local and state law enforcement agencies, an anonymous tip line, confidential informants, citizen complaints and arrested individuals. The unit is on standby twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week.

The Task Force also provides drug education training programs to schools and civic groups and promotes anti-drug behavior throughout Sussex County. Members of the Task Force work closely with the Sussex County Coalition for Safe and Healthy Families to provide continuous drug awareness education.

Members of the Task Force receive regular refresher training on the latest trends in drug use and abuse, investigative and surveillance techniques, and the laws of search and seizure. Task Force members also provide training for local officers covering topics such as drug identification,

investigative interviews, surveillance techniques, search warrant preparation and execution, as well as other topics. Through coordination by the Task Force, local law enforcement officers attend statewide programs sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Statewide Narcotics Task Force and County Narcotics Task Force Commanders Association.

Fentanyl continues to be the most prevalent and dangerous controlled dangerous substance (CDS) in Sussex County for both possessory and distribution offenses. Heroin has largely disappeared, as nearly every suspected heroin fold has tested positive as straight fentanyl for the past several years. Cocaine, in both powder and cooked forms, likewise consistently tests positive for fentanyl.

Fortunately, due to the widespread availability and use of Narcan, and the tireless efforts of the recovery and prevention community, fatal overdoses in Sussex County have been on a downward trend, from 27 in 2023, to 21 in 2024, to 15 in 2025. Three of the fatal overdoses in 2025 were determined to be suicides rather than accidental deaths.

In 2025, the Task Force also continued its partnership with the Community Law Enforcement Addiction Recovery (C.L.E.A.R.) program and Operation Helping Hand which, using grant funds, conducts door-to-door visits with known drug users to encourage participation in drug treatment. Task Force personnel also visited municipal courts with C.L.E.A.R. counselors to facilitate persons getting involved in drug treatment via Operation Helping Hand.

In 2025, the Task Force engaged in eight major investigations. One was particularly noteworthy, a months-long investigation undertaken in partnership with the Sparta Township Police Department involving unlawful retail sales of marijuana. Over 20 pounds of raw marijuana were seized, along with drug manufacturing equipment, a handgun, a luxury SUV, and over \$250,000 in United States Currency. The case remains pending as of the date of this report.

2025 NOTABLE CASES

State v. Keanu Alicea

On January 31, 2025, Keanu Alicea was sentenced to five years state prison with a 42-month mandatory period of parole ineligibility after pleading guilty to second-degree possession of a firearm with the purpose to use it unlawfully against the person or property of another. The charges arose from a joint investigation by Orange County, New York law enforcement agencies and the Sussex County Guns, Gangs and Narcotics Task Force into illegal drug distribution in the area of Orange County, New York. When police searched Mr. Alicea's residence in Montague Township, New Jersey, they found a handgun along with controlled dangerous substances. Mr. Alicea also pled guilty to illegal drug distribution in Orange County, New York.

State v. Jason Hetzel

On June 13, 2025, Jason Hetzel was sentenced to an aggregate sentence of seven years state prison with a 42-month mandatory period of parole ineligibility after pleading guilty to second-degree possession of a firearm with the purpose to use it unlawfully against the person or property of another, second-degree possession of CDS marijuana with the intent to distribute, third-degree animal cruelty, second-degree criminal facilitation/money laundering, third-degree criminal mischief and third-degree hindering his own apprehension. These charges arose from a New Jersey State Police investigation initiated on March 8, 2024 in Hampton Township. On that date, numerous State Police troopers and detectives, along with investigators from the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office, responded to an initial call of three dead puppies that had been recently shot. Following an eight-hour long standoff, the lone resident on the property, Jason Hetzel, surrendered himself to the State Police. Subsequent investigation revealed that Mr. Hetzel had engaged in growing and distributing large quantities of marijuana products from the residence

and that he possessed firearms unlawfully and discharged those firearms in an unlawful manner, causing property damage in excess of \$2,000 and killing two young canines. During the standoff with police, Mr. Hetzel hindered his apprehension and destroyed evidence by burning controlled dangerous substances and ammunition in the fireplace. During his plea hearing on April 24, 2025, Mr. Hetzel also admitted to killing another young canine by blunt force trauma.

GRAND JURY/TRIAL TEAM UNIT

The Grand Jury and Trial Team Unit handles the investigation and prosecution of a wide variety of cases. The Unit screens cases for potential early downgrades to municipal court, presents cases to the grand jury, and generally prosecutes crimes of the third- and fourth-degrees such as assaults, burglaries, eluding, thefts, shoplifting, fraud, forgery, drug possession, elder abuse, terroristic threats, and animal abuse. The Unit also reviews all private citizen complaints charging indictable offenses and oversees the Krol docket, handling individuals found not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI). The Unit is led by Supervising Assistant Prosecutor Karen Lodeserto and Detective Sergeant Anne Beverley.

In 2025, 382 cases were screened by the Unit (down from 469 in 2024), with 304 cases resolved by way of an accusation or indictment (compared with 380 in 2024). Many of these cases resulted in State Prison or jail sentences, including eluding offenses where the actions of the defendant created a risk of death or injury to others on the roadway, burglary offenses, and aggravated assaults.

There remains a high level of shoplifting and theft cases in Sussex County. Many of those cases are downgraded to disorderly persons offenses where the amount of loss does not warrant the case being brought in the Superior Court. However, each case is reviewed based on not only the nature and circumstances of the offense, but also the history and characteristics of the offender. The Unit also continues to see strong numbers of stolen, altered and forged checks, and automobile accidents while driving under the influence resulting in physical injuries, which are prosecuted in Superior Court.

One of the most prevalent crimes last year was theft, specifically theft cases involving scammers. In these cases, scammers call unsuspecting victims, convince them they had fraudulent activity on their bank accounts, offer to assist them in recouping their funds, and ultimately drain their accounts. In prosecuting these crimes, the Unit was able to secure restitution as part of the sentence for the victims. Similarly, in prosecuting check fraud/check washing cases, the Unit was able to successfully secure lost funds for victims.

ANIMAL CRUELTY:

The SCPO has two Humane Law Enforcement Officers (HLEOs) assigned to the Animal Cruelty Unit whose responsibilities include enforcing the New Jersey animal cruelty and welfare laws; investigating complaints of animal abuse or neglect; signing criminal complaints; and making arrests for animal cruelty offenses under the authority of the Supervising Assistant Prosecutor.

DIVERSIONARY UNIT

The Grand Jury/Trial Team Unit also manages the Recovery Court, Mental Health Court, and Veterans' Diversionary Program dockets. This sub-unit is supervised by First Assistant Prosecutor Shaina Brenner.

The mission of Recovery Court (formerly "Drug Court") is to stop the abuse of drugs and related criminal activity. It allows certain individuals who are charged with non-violent offenses to serve a sentence of intensive probation rather than a jail or prison term.

The Veteran's Diversion Program is focused on helping veterans of the armed services navigate the criminal justice system. Offenders are provided the opportunity for assistive services and a potential for dismissal of their charges upon successful completion of the program.

The Mental Health/Wellness Unit screens cases for indicators of mental illness contributing to the offending behavior. If an offender is a suitable candidate, treatment and supervision is provided through the Court system to attempt to minimize the risk of re-offense.

As is the case in other New Jersey counties, there is a strong correlation between criminal behavior and substance abuse and mental health issues. The focus on diversionary programs (Recovery Court, Mental Health Court and the Veterans' Diversionary Program) to address these catalysts for criminal conduct is designed to reduce crime rates in Sussex County and provide offenders with a clearer path to becoming productive, law abiding members of the community.

In 2025, there were eight recovery court graduations. In addition, there were 13 mental health court admissions and one mental health court graduation.

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

The Special Victims Unit (SVU) is dedicated to helping protect and obtain justice for society's most vulnerable individuals. The SVU was created in the fall of 2022 to combine the following units: Sex Crimes/Child Abuse; Domestic Violence (Family and Superior Court); Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO); High-Tech Crimes; Megan's Law; and Juvenile. The Unit is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of cases involving crimes against and/or involving children and families, as well as handling the registration and supervision of sexual offenders within Sussex County.

The Unit is led by Supervising Assistant Prosecutor Vanessa Henderson, Detective Sergeant First Class Jason Garrigan, Detective Sergeant Dianne Rude, and Detective Sergeant Anne Beverley.

Each division of the SVU has its own unique characteristics and programs.

SEX CRIMES/CHILD ABUSE

The Sex Crimes/Child Abuse Unit is responsible for all sexual assault and child abuse investigations in the County. The Unit is committed to providing a trauma-informed response for all victims. Through collaboration with law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, medical providers, victim advocates, and community partners, the Unit provides a coordinated and professional response to some of the most sensitive investigations. The Unit is focused on protecting vulnerable victims, ensuring investigative consistency, maintaining statutory compliance, and pursuing accountability through comprehensive investigations.

The New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) is required to report to the County Prosecutor cases of alleged abuse and/or neglect that involve suspected criminal activity by a child's parent, caregiver, or any other person. The SVU receives over 100

referrals a year. Whether a case is received via DCP&P referral or through local law enforcement, the Unit is responsible for coordinating a forensic interview and ensuring that any potential evidence is promptly secured.

Upon notification, the SVU ensures that a proper Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) activation is made. This includes referring the victim to the hospital to have a Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence (SAFE) kit completed by a forensic nurse (if appropriate and with victim consent), ensuring that a member from law enforcement is in the hospital so the victim feels safe. SART activation also includes offering victims a sexual assault advocate to be present for the exam and/or interview by law enforcement should they choose to have one. This collaborative participation as a member (SART) is designed to improve the response to sexual assault investigations and support services available to victims. Unit members attend quarterly SART meetings to promote communication, coordination, and collaboration among law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, medical providers, victim advocates, and other involved partners.

SVU detectives are responsible for conducting all forensic interviews on children age 12 and under for Sussex County. The detectives receive specialized 40-hour training in Finding Words/Child First NJ and have continued their education in expanded forensic interview training. The forensic interviews are conducted at Ginnie's House, the Child Advocacy Center located in Newton, New Jersey, to obtain accurate information from children in a structured environment while reducing additional trauma and ensuring the integrity of the investigation. The Unit is also responsible for the state mandated Sexual Assault Response and Referral's (SARR) submissions twice a year by keeping record of all sexual assault cases throughout the year where there are charges.

The SVU participates as a member of the Sussex County Multidisciplinary Team (MDT). MDT is a collaborative partnership established to coordinate the response to allegations of child abuse and child sexual abuse. The MDT brings together law enforcement, prosecutors, DCP&P, child advocacy professionals, Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNE), mental health professionals, and victim advocates to ensure each case is reviewed and handled in a coordinated, comprehensive, and child-focused manner.

In 2025, the Sex Crimes/Child Abuse Unit investigated 76 sex crime cases (such as sexual assaults and aggravated sexual assaults) and 10 child abuse cases. The Unit also reviewed 89 referrals from DCP&P, which were referred to other appropriate agencies. There was not a material increase in Sex Crimes or Child Abuse offenses this year.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, FAMILY COURT

In 2025, the Domestic Violence Unit maintained a consistently high and steady caseload across all indictable offenses (particularly strangulations and other aggravated assaults), Family Court matters, and weapons-related cases. There were approximately 71 domestic violence contempt cases completed in the Family Division.

EXTREME RISK PROTECTION ORDERS (ERPOs)

An ERPO is a civil court order that temporarily restricts a person from purchasing, owning, possessing, or receiving firearms when they pose an immediate and present danger of causing bodily injury to themselves or others. ERPOs are designed to help prevent suicide, domestic violence, mass violence, and other firearm-related tragedies before they occur.

In 2025, a total of 72 Temporary Extreme Risk Protective Orders (TERPOs) were issued during the year, representing a measurable increase from prior years and resulting in a corresponding rise in firearm seizures. This increase has created significant logistical challenges related to evidence storage, both within the SCPO's evidence room and at local police departments.

HIGH-TECH CRIMES

Created in 2006 to meet the rising level of computer-facilitated crimes occurring in Sussex County, the High-Tech Crimes Unit is responsible for the investigation of computer-related crimes, including crimes committed against children, financial crimes, and identity theft. Detectives from this Unit are part of a statewide taskforce known as the New Jersey Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Taskforce which investigates cases involving the manufacturing, distributing, and possessing of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), as well as other internet crimes against children. The Unit is also responsible for the forensic analysis of all digital media, and assists local law enforcement agencies with forensic collection, processing, preservation, and analysis of digital evidence.

In 2025, the High-Tech Crimes Unit continued to manage a substantial workload. The Unit received approximately 84 National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) referrals, initiated and investigated approximately 133 new cases, processed 27.26 terabytes of digital evidence, executed search warrants, conducted 40 knock-and-talk operations, and effectuated 15 arrests. In addition to these primary investigations, the Unit provided extensive support to numerous other cases within the SCPO and assisted multiple local departments as well as state and federal partners when called upon for mutual aid.

The Unit continues to adapt to rapidly evolving technology including artificial intelligence, GPS tracking devices, Wi-Fi-enabled systems, drones, and cellular jamming equipment, all of which require ongoing training and skill development.

Notably, in 2025, the Unit and the FBI worked together in an investigation involving a juvenile defendant residing in Sussex County and his ties to UTPP (YouTube Patrol Police) and the “764” group, an international sextortion network. The High-Tech Crimes Unit has provided related UTPP and 764 group trainings to other counties and child advocacy centers. These combined efforts have enhanced the Unit’s effectiveness and contributed to increased arrests, successful prosecutions, and positive recognition for the Sussex County Prosecutor’s Office.

MEGAN’S LAW

“Megan’s Law” was created in 1994, prompted by the tragic murders of seven-year-old Megan Kanka and Amanda Wengert. The Registration and Community Notification Laws are intended to inform schools, community organizations, and members of the public about the presence of certain sex offenders residing in New Jersey.

The Megan’s Law Unit is responsible for registering and tracking individuals who are subject to Megan’s Law and are residing, employed, and/or attending school in Sussex County. Included in these responsibilities is conducting tier classifications and notifications for all registrants and prosecuting those registrants who are noncompliant with their registration obligations.

In 2025, the SCPO’s Megan’s Law Unit maintained approximately 195 active registrants in Sussex County.

JUVENILE

The Juvenile Unit is the central authority for all investigations involving juvenile offenders and plays a critical role at every stage of the juvenile justice process. In 2025, the Unit handled 51 juvenile prosecutions. That figure does not include numerous additional case screenings, consultations, and stationhouse adjustment approvals conducted throughout the year.

Throughout 2025, there was an increase in reports regarding the distribution of CSAM between minors, i.e., juveniles sharing explicit photographs and videos of themselves via Snapchat with other juveniles. Those images are sometimes shared throughout a school.

The New Jersey Statewide Threat Assessment Team (NJSTAT) was developed by the NJOHSP and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to act as an in-depth screening system for at-risk juveniles who have the possibility of committing acts of violence. By collaborating with educational professionals, mental health screeners, and law enforcement, the NJSTAT program assists with getting at-risk juveniles proper resources with the goal of avoiding the criminal justice system.

In 2025, the SCPO NJ State Liaison assisted in two NJSTAT meetings with the state-level team to assist with getting resources for at-risk juveniles.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Another responsibility of the Unit is acting as the Human Trafficking liaisons for Sussex County for tips and referrals received through the state human trafficking tip line. The Unit conducts follow-up investigations, assesses reported information, and coordinates appropriate investigative responses. These complex investigations require specialized training, investigative techniques, and collaboration with local, state, and federal partners to identify victims, investigate offenders, and ensure appropriate resources are utilized. Members of the Unit also provide training

and guidance to local law enforcement officers on recognizing indicators of human trafficking, responding to potential victims, and effectively handling related investigations.

NEW JERSEY CLERGY ABUSE TASK FORCE

The SVU also participates in the New Jersey Clergy Abuse Task Force. Referrals are received directly from the Clergy Abuse Hotline and/or directly from the Diocese of Paterson. The Unit then serves as the primary investigative resource conducting victim and witness interviews, reviewing records including allegations of historical abuse, and working with prosecutors to determine appropriate legal action.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Professional Standards Unit has the responsibility to review and investigate complaints of police misconduct involving all municipal police departments in Sussex County and the Sussex County Sheriff's Office. The SCPO does not investigate New Jersey State Police troopers, as those responsibilities fall within the purview of the NJSP's Office of Professional Standards. The Unit is guided by the New Jersey Attorney General's Internal Affairs Policy and Procedures which is a formal procedure for investigating anonymous, citizen and agency complaints. These procedures ensure fairness and protect the rights of citizens, law enforcement officers, and their agencies.

In 2025, the SCPO brought two internal affairs matters to conclusion. One involved a police officer who failed to properly investigate a welfare check of an unresponsive motorist in the roadway (State Highway 23) and related charges. That officer was terminated. The other internal affairs matter involved a police officer who fell asleep during their shift. That officer was suspended for 20 days without pay.

In 2025, the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office completed 26 internal affairs investigations. As of January 1, 2026, the SCPO had a total of two pending internal affairs matters.

POLICE LICENSING

The IA Unit also ensures that all sworn officers within the SCPO complete their mandated police licensing training in accordance with the Police Licensure Act (effective January 1, 2024). The law was designed to ensure that police license holders are in good standing with their employers, meet certain uniform professional standards, and receive ongoing training in best practices in the field in order to become and continue to serve as officers. Training includes the following:

- Twice annual firearms qualifications
- Use of force policy reviews
- Vehicle pursuit policy reviews
- Domestic violence updates
- Case law updates
- CLEAR Institute training courses
- Search and seizure updates
- Active shooter refreshers
- Defensive tactics training

The Police Licensure Act makes policing a licensed profession in New Jersey, with the aims of improving officer development and safety and bolstering trust between law enforcement officers and the public.

APPELLATE & ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT

The Appellate and Administrative Unit is led by FAP Shaina Brenner. The unit is responsible for representing the State in appellate proceedings before the Superior Court, the Appellate Division, the Supreme Court of New Jersey, and federal appellate courts. The unit is also responsible for handling various administrative tasks within the SCPO including, but not limited to, drafting forfeiture complaints, responding to requests for records under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) and common law right of access, and responding to expungement applications, post-conviction motions, firearms appeals, executive clemency petitions, and name change applications. The unit is also responsible for investigating and prosecuting bias crimes and handling all fugitive matters.

BIAS CRIMES UNIT:

Bias incidents are on the rise nationally and in New Jersey. The Bias Crimes Unit is responsible for investigating all bias incidents that occur within Sussex County and prosecuting crimes of Bias Intimidation. Investigating bias incidents and crimes involves a fact sensitive analysis, and the Unit is comprised of specially trained Detectives that work closely with local law enforcement, the New Jersey State Police, as well as the FBI. The SCPO is a member of the New Jersey Bias Crime Officers Association and trains its local law enforcement officers on how to recognize, respond to, and report bias incidents and bias crimes in the State.

The Unit also offers school and community presentations with the aim of building a safer, more respectful community. Our communities are strengthened when we treat one another with dignity, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

In 2025, there was one charge for bias intimidation, though it was later determined to have been improperly charged and was ultimately dismissed. There was a total of 70 reported bias incidents in the county in 2025.

FUGITIVE UNIT:

The Fugitive Unit is comprised of an Assistant Prosecutor, Detective Sergeant, and County Detective who are responsible for locating and apprehending wanted offenders. It is the responsibility of the Fugitive Unit to bring wanted individuals back to New Jersey for criminal prosecution. It is also the responsibility of the Fugitive Unit to arrest and incarcerate individuals located within Sussex County who are wanted as fugitives from out-of-state authorities. The Fugitive Unit facilitates the surrender of fugitives from one state to another through the extradition process, which allows for transport across state lines.

OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT (OPRA) UNIT:

The New Jersey Open Public Records Act, N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1, et seq., allows for public access to government records with certain exceptions. The purpose of OPRA is to maximize public knowledge about public affairs in order to ensure an informed citizenry and to minimize the evils inherent in a secluded process. The provisions of the OPRA strike a balance between the competing interests of privacy and open government; accordingly, under OPRA, all government records shall be disclosed upon request except those exempted by statute, legislative resolution, administrative regulation, executive order, rules of court, judicial decisions, or federal law.

In 2025, the SCPO responded to 61 OPRA requests.

APPELLATE STATISTICS:

Direct Appeals: At the beginning of 2025, there were 21 appeals pending with the Appellate Division (17 criminal and four municipal). In 2025, 19 new appeals were filed with the Appellate Division (14 criminal and five municipal). A total of 18 appeals were disposed of. At the conclusion of the year, 22 pending direct appeals (17 criminal and five municipal) remained on the calendar.

Petitions for Certification: In 2025, five new Petitions for Certification were filed in the New Jersey Supreme Court. Two were disposed of. At the conclusion of the year, two petitions remained on the calendar.

Habeas Petitions: One habeas petition remained pending at the end of 2025.

Petitions for Post-Conviction Relief (PCR): At the beginning of 2025, there were three PCR petitions pending. In 2025, four new PCR petitions were filed, while four were disposed of. At the conclusion of the year, three PCR petitions remained on the calendar.

Municipal Appeals: At the beginning of 2025, there were 13 municipal appeals pending. In 2025, 15 new municipal appeals were filed. A total of 24 were disposed of. At the conclusion of 2025, four municipal appeals remained on the calendar.

Firearms Appeals: At the beginning of 2025, four firearms appeals were pending. In 2025, four new firearms appeals were filed. A total of six were disposed of. At the conclusion of 2025, two firearms appeals remained on the calendar.

Executive Clemency: In 2025, there were 30 applications for executive clemency filed with the Governor's Office.

2025 NOTABLE CASES

State v. Colleen Eutermarks

On June 4, 2025, the Appellate Division affirmed the trial court's denial of the defendant's application for Recovery Court admission. The Appellate Division also affirmed the defendant's convictions and sentence. The defendant was previously convicted, after a jury trial, of 27 counts of second-degree Child Endangerment for operating a school bus with numerous students onboard while under the influence of alcohol. She was convicted of one count for each student that she transported while intoxicated. The defendant was sentenced, on June 6, 2024, to a 14-year term of incarceration in New Jersey State Prison.

State v. Joseph Crilley

On September 9, 2025, the Appellate Division affirmed the lower court's order denying defendant's motion to suppress evidence. The defendant had previously pled guilty, on August 4, 2023, to two counts of Vehicular Homicide and one count of Assault by Auto in connection with a fatal crash in Lafayette that left two people dead and one critically injured. On January 26, 2024, the defendant was sentenced to an aggregate term of 10-years of incarceration with an 85% period of ineligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act. In addition, his driver's license was ordered suspended for a period of 10 years following his release from prison.

OFFICE OF VICTIM WITNESS ADVOCACY

The Sussex County Prosecutor's Office of Victim Witness Advocacy's mission is to ensure that victims of crimes are treated with fairness, compassion, and respect by the criminal justice system as mandated by Paragraph 22, Article 1 of the New Jersey Constitution. In order to accomplish this mission, the Unit provides services to assist victims and witnesses in coping with the aftermath of victimization and help make their participation in the criminal justice system less difficult and burdensome. Additionally, information on crime victims' rights and the impact of crime on victims is disseminated to the public, law enforcement, and social service agencies in order to help broaden the understanding and assistance of crime victims.



The Office of Victim Witness Advocacy is an essential part of the criminal justice system because it ensures that crime victims receive the support, information, and resources they need while participating in the legal process. When victims are informed, protected, and supported, they are more likely to participate in the criminal justice process. That leads to stronger prosecutions, connections to community resources, greater offender accountability, safer communities, and increased public confidence in government.

For example, a domestic violence victim may initially be too afraid to testify because of threats from the offender. A victim advocate helps develop a safety plan, obtains information about protective orders, and connects the victim with emergency shelter. As a result, the victim is able to participate in the prosecution, leading to the offender's conviction and preventing future violence.

Another example is when a family loses a loved one to homicide. They are suddenly faced with overwhelming grief while trying to understand a complex criminal investigation and court process. A Victim Witness Advocate helps families receive timely case updates, prepares them for court proceedings, assists with victim impact statements, and connects them with grief counseling and financial resources.

During 2025, the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy served 1,729 crime victims. Of all victims assisted by the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy this year, 24% were victims of domestic violence, 20% were victims of assault, and 10% were victims of theft. Whether the county experiences violent crimes such as homicide, aggravated assault, sexual assault, domestic violence, and robbery, or property crimes including burglary and theft, each incident creates victims who often face emotional, physical, financial, and legal challenges. Each of these numbers represents not just a case but people and families who require services. The unit provided over 1,600 services to victims in 2025 including such things as case updates, information and referrals, court accompaniment and assistance with restitution.

In New Jersey, every county prosecutor's office maintains an Office of Victim Witness Advocacy to protect victims' rights and provide these essential services.

SCPO INITIATIVES

RESILIENCY PROGRAM:

The SCPO recognizes that few professions are more challenging than law enforcement. It is vital that all officers within the county are equipped with the tools they need to cope with the unique stressors of their jobs. In accordance with the 2019 Attorney General Directive, the SCPO has one Chief Resiliency Officer and one Resiliency Officer to support the emotional and psychological well-being of the law enforcement officers within our Office as well as county wide law enforcement.

ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING:

In compliance with Attorney General mandates, the SCPO ensures that multiple in-person active shooter trainings occur on a yearly basis for Sussex County Law Enforcement Officers. The SCPO Active Shooter Training Coordinator collaborates with instructors to develop a lesson plan and implement said training at multiple facilities. The SCPO Rescue Task Force Liaison creates operations plans for any active shooter events and assists in obtaining funding and equipment necessary for the successful implementation of the trainings. In 2025, a total of two in-person active shooter trainings were hosted by this agency.

SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY:

School safety and security is of the utmost concern to the SCPO. The SCPO takes proactive measures to protect the safety and security of all students and school staff members in the County. In that regard, the SCPO is tasked with collecting and reviewing Emergency Response Templates from all educational facilities within Sussex County. The SCPO is also involved with the development of structured reunification protocols to ensure that students are safely accounted for and released to authorized adults during emergency, crisis, or evacuation situations.

The SCPO School Safety and Security Coordinator reviews and assists local schools in the development and implementation of school reunification drills. The Security Coordinator also actively collaborates with School Resource Officers (SROs) within the County to ensure student safety and security within our schools. In 2025, Sussex County conducted two reunification drills.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Community engagement describes the collaboration between organizations and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, resources, and support. As part of the Sussex County community, the SCPO and Office of Victim Witness Advocacy partners with a variety of organizations and participates in several events throughout the year including, but not limited to, the following:

- The New Jersey State Fair/Sussex County Farm & Horse Show
- Children's Day at the Fair
- Senior Day at the Fair
- Taking Flight to Change Middle School Summit - Center for Prevention and Counseling
- Game of Life at Sussex County Technical School
- Ginnie's House Open House
- DASI Clothesline Project
- Sussex County Day
- DASI Candlelight Vigil
- National Night Out

The SCPO is also dedicated to helping the community by offering a variety of community presentations. These presentations cover broad topics, including but not limited to, the following:

- Internet safety for all ages
- Information about the Sussex County Special Needs Registry
- Identifying and understanding bias crimes
- Drug abuse

- Crime prevention tips
- Trending frauds and scams
- Scams that target the elderly

The SCPO will also attend local schools, upon request, to educate students on topics such as drug use/abuse, internet safety, juvenile offenses, bias and cyberbullying.

OPERATION HELPING HAND

Operation Helping Hand (OHH) was developed by the New Jersey Attorney General's office as a way to combat drug addiction. In Sussex County, OHH is implemented through the C.L.E.A.R. Program – led by the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office in coordination with the Sussex County Association of



Chiefs of Police and Center for Prevention & Counseling. The goal is to encourage those in need to go to any local police department for assistance without the fear of arrest or prosecution, but rather, that they will be given the help and resources they need to begin their journey to recovery.

OHH actively participates in community events, such as the Sussex County Fair, to engage the public, educate individuals about substance use/abuse, and connect individuals and their families with appropriate services.

By conducting door-to-door outreach or by deploying our addiction recovery mobile outreach van, Sussex County OHH's mission during each encounter is to have law enforcement officials, accompanied by recovery support specialists, assist residents in need by providing on-the-spot referrals to treatment and linking them with a recovery coach, or providing referrals to other necessary treatment resources.

ARRIVE TOGETHER

The SCPO is committed to improving how law enforcement officials respond to members of the community experiencing mental and behavioral health emergencies. In partnership with Atlantic Health Services Hospital/Newton Medical Center, and our community partners, the SCPO has implemented the Alternative Responses to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation (ARRIVE) Together program. Through ARRIVE Together, the SCPO aims to (1) increase the utilization of mental health resources; (2) improve trust between law enforcement and the community; and (3) keep Sussex County residents safe.

In 2025, the SCPO's ARRIVE Together program expanded county-wide to include all 11 police departments and the New Jersey State Police.