

# 2023

# ANNUAL REPORT



Office of the Hudson County Prosecutor  
Esther Suarez  
Prosecutor

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## **MESSAGE FROM PROSECUTOR ESTHER SUAREZ**

I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report of the Office of the Hudson County Prosecutor for your review in accordance with the requirements of N.J.S.A. 52:17B-111.

Each year, I am immensely proud of the dedication and professionalism of our staff. Our detectives work around the clock to keep our community safe. The Assistant Prosecutors of this Office, tirelessly, seek justice in the courtroom for those effected by crime. Our Victim Witness Advocates serve as a voice for those whose voices cannot be heard. Support Staff and Agents ensure our Office operates efficiently. This report is reflective of their commitment to excellence.

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



**Respectfully submitted,**

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

## **EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW**

The top priority of the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office (HCPO) has always been to treat those with whom we contact justly and fairly. The members of the HCPO continued to present themselves as professionals committed to public safety and service. Because of their efforts, this Office reached a number of important milestones in 2023.

The HCPO continued to make investments in top of the line technology to expedite our investigative work. Our state of the art Cyber Security Lab has been instrumental in retrieving time-sensitive data from electronic devices. Much of 2023 was spent outfitting our new DNA Lab. With accreditation anticipated later this year, we will soon have an in-house forensic team that can process material of evidentiary value with a quicker turnaround time.

Our jobs in law enforcement cannot be done as a single agency alone; it requires good working relationships with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners. In 2023, the HCPO assigned investigators to work in an on-loan capacity with multiple partners, including the Jersey City Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the United States Marshals Service, and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Doing this has allowed us to share valuable resources, which has proven to build safer communities. As a direct result of these partnerships, multiple violent offenders were apprehended and several drug trafficking networks were dismantled. Similarly, the HCPO utilized officers from municipal departments to assist the Major Case Unit, Special Victims Unit, and Narcotics Task Force with various investigations. These partnerships have been an incredible asset to the HCPO, and the success we have seen would not be possible without the support of the Hudson County Chiefs of Police.

Hudson County experienced a record low number (15) of homicides in 2023. While this data is of no consolation to victims and their loved ones, the Homicide Unit closed the year with a

100% solve rate. This means these investigations led to charges and/or arrests in all 15 matters, building on its success of past years.

The Special Victims Unit continued to work closely with its partners to investigate sex crimes. Members of this unit served on the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force to protect our youth from being exploited online and through social media. Having our Child Advocacy Center operational for 2023 created a safe and welcoming environment for children, who have been harmed in unspeakable ways, to connect them with immediate recovery resources.

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

In addition to our investigative and prosecutorial work, the HCPO prioritized building relationships with those we serve. Many of our employees assisted the HCPO's Community Outreach Office by engaging with community leaders, local nonprofits, and schools to foster partnerships between these local organizations and law enforcement. Highlights from 2023 included hosting a candlelight vigil for Overdose Awareness Month, participating in Junior Police Academies throughout the county, and offering safety presentations at schools.

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

## **PRETRIAL DIVISION**

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

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

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

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

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

relevant evidence. A Grand Jury Agent coordinates the appearance of Police Officers and civilian witnesses at Grand Jury hearings.

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

## **TRIAL DIVISION**

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

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

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

The Recovery Court team consists of a Judge, Assistant Prosecutors, Public Defenders, a Recovery Court Coordinator, a Team Leader, Supervising Probation Officers, and Probation



Officers. The Recovery Court team remains actively involved with a participant's recovery during the entire supervisory period.

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

## **CIVIL LITIGATION UNIT**

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

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

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

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

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

Currently, the Civil Litigation Unit consists of one Chief who calls upon staff from various Divisions and Units of the HCPO for assistance. These staff members are responsible for providing subject matter expertise and administrative assistance to the Unit.

## **FORFEITURE UNIT**

Civil forfeiture actions are instituted against money or property that is deemed to be proceeds of illegal activity or that has been, or was intended to be, used in the furtherance of illegal activity. The purpose of seeking forfeiture of such money or property is to deter future acts of criminality by preventing individuals from profiting from their unlawful conduct and/or the use of said money or property in future crimes. In civil forfeiture actions, the State bears the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, the criminal character of the property. Defendants/claimants have the right to challenge the forfeiture. If the State prevails in a forfeiture action, the forfeited money or property is utilized solely for law enforcement purposes.

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

## **IN-COURT UNIT**

The primary function of the In-Court Unit of the HCPO is to provide investigative support for those cases assigned to the Pretrial and Trial Units. In 2023, the Unit was comprised of one Captain, one Lieutenant, one Sergeant, 10 Detectives, six Agents and one support staff.

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

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

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

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

During 2023, the investigative efforts of the In-Court Unit resulted in the completion of approximately 8,010 detention requests. The detention requests consisted of Assistant Prosecutor investigative follow through on cases being processed by the Pretrial and Trial divisions. The In-Court Unit conducted 428 original exclusive investigations (walk-ins), resulting in 27 original complaints with criminal charges.

During 2023, Detectives assigned to the In-Court Unit conducted 76 background investigations including but not limited to prospective employees of the HCPO. Additionally, In-Court Detectives and Agents assisted Hudson County municipal police departments by generating 1,026 Grand Jury subpoenas for active and on-going investigations.

The In-Court Unit continues to become more efficient. Personnel assigned to the Unit work diligently to enhance cases as they transition from pre-indictment to post indictment stages, thereby further ensuring that justice is served for the residents of Hudson County.

## **INSURANCE FRAUD UNIT**

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

### **SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES INSURANCE FRAUD UNIT**

#### **State v. Harvey Benton**

In this matter, Progressive claimed that its insured, Harvey Benton, had filed a fraudulent claim for the theft of his Honda Civic. Benton applied for an insurance policy for his vehicle on August 16, 2021. Eleven days later, on August 27, 2021, Benton contacted the Bayonne Police Department and reported that he parked his vehicle the night before, and in the morning it was gone. Benton provided his Connecticut license plate number to police officers.

On August 31, 2021, Benton filed a notice of loss to Progressive, claiming his vehicle was stolen. During Progressive's investigation, the company located the vehicle at a tow yard, displaying a temporary registration tag. The Civic was not previously located by police officers because it was entered with the wrong VIN number. Progressive found the Civic had been impounded there since July 22, 2023, before the policy inception.

The IFU's investigation found that the expired registration displayed a real number and belonged to a private citizen who had it on their new car before obtaining permanent plates. The

Bayonne Police Department had issued the car numerous tickets before towing the vehicle from the area surrounding Benton's home in Bayonne. When the vehicle was entered into NCIC for towing records, it was entered with the VIN number displayed on the temporary plate. IFU found that Benton was using temporary plates that did not belong to him on two of his vehicles to prevent repossession. The IFU executed a search warrant of the Civic in order to locate Benton's real plates in the trunk.

On June 5, 2023, Harvey Benton pled to third degree Insurance Fraud and was entered into the PTI program for one year.

### **State v. Joel Chaviano**

A tip-line referral was received alleging Stealth Strategic Operational and Tactical Solutions (Stealth) submitted a forged certificate-of-insurance to a prospective customer. A private security company sought to hire Stealth for a security detail at two Walmart locations during the Christmas holiday in 2021. The private security company requested and obtained a certificate of insurance from Stealth indicating that the company had worker's compensation and liability coverage at the time of the security detail. The private security company sought to confirm the authenticity of the certificate with its insurance producer. The producer recognized the certificate was forged and neither insurance policy were active.

The IFU's investigation found the certificate was emailed to the private security company by Joel Chaviano, a consultant for Stealth. The IFU discovered it was Chaviano alone who communicated with the private security company and Walmart during the contract negotiation. Chaviano was unable to bind legitimate policies in time and submitted a forged certificate to comply with the private security company's request.

On September 21, 2023, Joel Chaviano was enrolled into the PTI program without a plea.



**State v. Kaquan Van Liew, et al.**

The IFU received a referral alleging that Kaquan Van Liew, a security guard for the Jersey City Board of Education, had submitted 56 fraudulent insurance claims to AFLAC and MetLife Insurance for work related accidents. Many claims were dated during the COVID-19 shutdown of 2020. During the investigation, the IFU received additional information from the New Jersey Division of Banking and Insurance pertaining to three other individuals — Shalonda Bullock, Dionne Diggs and Gerald Hunter — whom they believed were connected to Van Liew. Bullock and Diggs were also security guards with the Jersey City Board of Education. Bullock was believed to have filed 18 fraudulent claims. Diggs was believed to have filed five fraudulent claims. Hunter was suspected to have filed 2 fraudulent claims.

The IFU proceeded to investigate this group of four individuals and reviewed the medical records that were submitted with the claims. The records were improperly formatted and inconsistent with legitimate records. Submissions from all four claimants appeared copied from the same format. Many of the records were allegedly from Bayonne Medical Center and reflected the emblem of RWJ Barnabas Health, though these two corporations are unaffiliated with each other. In a medical record submitted by Bullock for one of her claims, the IFU identified Kaquan Van Liew's name as the patient, rather than herself, evidence of a copying error. In documents submitted for claims by Hunter, Van Liew's electronic signature appeared instead of Hunter's signature. Bullock's name also appeared on a medical record submitted for Hunter's claim. The IFU was able to trace the deposit of payout checks to various banks for each of the four defendants. In a recorded interview with the IFU, Van Liew admitted to filing fraudulent insurance claims.

Kaquan Van Liew pleaded guilty to second-degree Insurance Fraud and was admitted into PTI. Dionne Diggs and Gerald Hunter were admitted into PTI without a plea. Shalonda Bullock pleaded

guilty to third degree Insurance Fraud and was sentenced to a one-year probationary term. The Court ordered \$5,575 in restitution.

## **MAJOR CASE UNIT**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Regional Arson Task Force (RATF) assists local authorities in the determination of the origin and cause of fires that result in death, create widespread damage, or are suspicious in nature. The RATF consists of both fire department personnel and law enforcement personnel. These combined fields are essential for conducting a thorough fire investigation and complete scene examination. Experienced on-loan members of local fire departments who have knowledge of fire behavior and suppression tactics are teamed with law enforcement officers to investigate these matters. Members of the RATF work to provide the highest level of service to the citizens of Hudson County. In 2023, the RATF conducted 14 total fire investigations, including oversight and follow-up.

## **SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES**

### **HOMICIDE UNIT**

#### **State v. Lucas Cooper**

On January 24, 2023, members of the Jersey City Police Department received a call from a 14-year-old caller who stated that her father was hurting her mother and that there were possibly shots fired. Responding units located the victim, later identified as Temara King — DOB 1/12/1988 — suffering from multiple gunshot wounds. King was subsequently transported to Jersey City Medical Center where she was pronounced dead at 8:06 a.m. The Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Homicide Unit was notified and responded. The New Jersey State Regional Medical Examiner's Office performed the post mortem examination of King and determined the Cause of Death to be a Gunshot Wound to the Head and Torso and the Manner of Death to be Homicide. During the course of the investigation, members of the Homicide Unit identified Lucas Cooper as a suspect. Cooper fled the area and was located by Pennsylvania State Police units in the Allentown, Pennsylvania area. State Police units detained Cooper after a car stop on Route 22 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Cooper was arrested and charged accordingly.

### **State v. Gregory Mallard**

On May 14, 2023, a male entered the Jersey City Police Department to report that his daughter — Norelis Mendoza — was missing. Members of the Hudson County Prosecutor’s Office Homicide Unit assisted members of the Jersey City Police Department’s Missing Persons Unit after an investigation was initiated on May 15, 2023. The body of Norelis Mendoza was located on May 17, 2023 in the wooded area of the railroad parallel to Rt. 440 South. Mendoza was pronounced dead at 1:03 p.m. An initial post mortem examination noted injuries consistent with a pedestrian struck by a vehicle. During the investigation, detectives obtained video surveillance, which depicted Mendoza running towards the intersection of Burma Road and Thomas McGovern Avenue in Jersey City. She was then struck by a blue Dodge Ram driven by Gregory Mallard. Mallard is the former boyfriend of Mendoza and the father of her child.

On May 19, 2023, Mallard was arrested and charged accordingly.

### **State v. Jimmy Quintero**

On February 7, 2023, members of the Hudson County Prosecutor’s Office Homicide Unit received information that a first-floor tenant on Murphy Place in West New York heard loud noises coming from upstairs. He responded upstairs and was forced to kick the door open. Upon his entry into the location, he observed a tenant, Jimmy Quintero, with a knife in his hand, attempting to harm himself. West New York Police Officers responded to the residence. Quintero was treated for his injuries by the responding officers. The officers subsequently searched the apartment and located a victim, Daniela Garcia Murillo, in a lifeless condition on a bedroom floor. Murillo was pronounced dead on scene at 6:31 a.m. Quintero was transported to Hackensack Medical Center, where he was placed under arrest for the death of Murillo. The New Jersey State Regional Medical

Examiner's Office performed the post mortem examination of Murillo and determined the Cause of Death to be Multiple Stab Wounds and the Manner of Death to be Homicide.

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

On February 8, 2023, at 9:01 a.m., the Union City Police Department and North Hudson Regional Fire and Rescue received multiple 9-1-1 calls reporting a heavy smoke condition at 1009 Bergenline Avenue in Union City. Upon arrival, responding units observed fire and smoke coming from 1009 Bergenline Avenue. North Hudson Regional Fire and Rescue, along with numerous other Fire Departments, conducted offensive and defensive fire operations. Buildings at 1005, 1007, and 1011 Bergenline Avenue sustained fire, smoke, and water damage. The Regional Arson Task Force (RATF), the Union City Police Department, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms/Explosives, were requested to investigate the Origin and Cause of the fire. During the investigation, numerous interviews were conducted by the RATF investigative staff. These interviews determined the first signs of smoke and fire came from the basement area of 1009 Bergenline Avenue. The RATF was able to make entry into the area to obtain photographs of the basement where a coffee maker was being used. The building occupants reported numerous electrical issues throughout the building. The area of Origin was identified within the basement area of 1009 Bergenline Avenue. The Cause of the fire was listed as Undetermined, however, electrical could not be ruled out at the time of the investigation. No serious injuries or fatalities occurred during this event.

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

On October 16, 2023, at approximately 12:46 a.m., the Jersey City Police Department responded to a head on collision in the area of 220 Paterson Plank Road in Jersey City. Three

individuals were deceased and three were seriously injured. An investigation by the Regional Collision Investigation Unit determined that a BMW X5 was traveling northbound at a high rate of speed when it crossed into oncoming traffic and struck a KIA Amanti traveling southbound. The BMW was occupied by five students from China who were residing in the area. The driver — Ziyang Wang — and a front seat passenger sustained bodily injury. Two of the three occupants in the back seat were pronounced dead. The third occupant in the rear seat sustained serious bodily injuries. The driver and lone occupant of the KIA — Dylan Weidenfeld — was pronounced dead at the scene. The BMW Air Bag Control Module recorded speeds in excess of 100 miles-per-hour. On October 18, 2023, Wang was arrested and charged with three counts of Manslaughter and three counts of Reckless Death By Auto.



## **NARCOTICS TASK FORCE**

The purpose of the Narcotics Task Force (NTF) is to identify, investigate and dismantle large scale and violent drug trafficking organizations in and around Hudson County.

In 2023, the NTF was comprised of one Captain, one Lieutenant, two Sergeants, 11 Detectives — including two Detectives assigned to Federal Agencies — five Assistant Prosecutors — including one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, and one support staff member.

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

The following section highlights investigations from 2023.

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

#### **State v. Anthony Crawford, et al. and State v. Darryl Mobley, et al.**

Between March 2023 and November 2023, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Narcotics Task Force and the Hoboken Police Department conducted a narcotics investigation involving Anthony Crawford, a known distributor of large quantities of heroin and fentanyl in Hoboken. In August 2023, the NTF was able to identify Crawford's supplier, Darryl Mobley. At this time, the NTF had an active and on-going investigation into Mobley and his operation, and were previously unaware that Crawford and Mobley were connected. Both cases were investigated simultaneously and independent of one another, which resulted in obtaining Search Warrants for

multiple locations associated with Crawford in Hudson County and Union County and locations associated with Mobley in Hudson County and Essex County. In November of 2023, Search Warrants for both cases were executed simultaneously resulting in the following seizures; 17 kilograms of heroin/fentanyl, 2.7 kilograms of cocaine, seven guns, and six arrests. Defendants were charged with Firearms offenses, Money Laundering, and narcotics offenses.

**State v. Reyes Paula-Villar**

In December 2022, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Narcotics Task Force opened a narcotics investigation targeting Reyes Paula-Villar. Utilizing various investigative techniques, the NTF was able to identify Paula-Villar's residence and stash location. In January 2023, after weeks of extensive surveillance, the NTF executed a Search Warrant of his residence located in Jersey City. The Search Warrant resulted in the seizure of more than \$125,000 in United States currency, approximately 300 grams of cocaine, approximately 13,800 heroin/fentanyl pills, and one handgun. Paula-Villar was charged with numerous CDS related charges.

**State v. David Pineiro**

In April 2023, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Narcotics Task Force conducted a narcotics investigation targeting David Pineiro, who was known to be distributing large quantities of CDS cocaine and heroin in the Jersey City area. In July 2023, after a culmination of a two-month investigation utilizing extensive surveillance and investigative techniques, a Search Warrant for Pineiro's residence in Jersey City, was executed. The Search Warrant resulted in the following seizures: 20 ounces of cocaine, 14 ounces of heroin, more than \$25,000 in United States currency, two handguns, two rifles, ballistic plates, one high capacity magazine, and one silencer. Pineiro was charged with CDS and firearms related offenses.

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

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

During 2023, the SP/CTU was comprised of one Lieutenant, one Detective, and one Risk Mitigation Planner. The Lieutenant and Detective serve as the Office Liaison to the Hudson County Office of Emergency Management and County Counter Terrorism Coordinator (CCTC). They were also assigned in an on-loan capacity to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force (FBI JTTF).

During 2023, the SP/CTU continued to serve various roles related to the Hudson County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Urban Area Security Initiative Region (UASI), County Working Group (CWG) for Homeland Security Grant Programs, and the Hudson County Counter Terrorism Task Force (CTTF). These duties include attending meetings, developing Investment Justifications and Spending Plans for grant funding initiatives, procuring and installing equipment, as well as working on various committees and sub-committees for OEM, CWG, UASI and CTTF related issues.

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

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

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

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

Outreach efforts by the SPU increased the number of House of Worship applications for the DHS/FEMA Non-Profit Security Grant Program. The SPU continued to work with Houses of Worship for the 2023 grant program that was set at \$150,000 per site.

Also during 2023, the Unit continued oversight and maintenance of radiological detection equipment obtained through OHSP and New Jersey State Police. This equipment is part of the ongoing Secure the Cities Initiative, developed by the Department of Homeland Security, in

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

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

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

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

responses included assisting local, state, and federal agencies investigating terrorism related leads/cases connected to Hudson County in any way. Due to the CCTC being assigned in an on-loan capacity to the FBI JTTF, the CCTC was able to provide current threat streams to the CTTF and provide guidance on investigative leads and potential threats.

During 2023, the CTTF assisted OHSP in the handling of investigative leads, many of which were forwarded to local coordinators for further investigative action. All of these leads were entered into the SAR's database at CT Watch located at the Regional Operations and Intelligence Center in Trenton. The CTTF also participated in regional Homeland Security exercises, distribution of related equipment, and arranging training for their respective departments.

## **SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT**

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

During 2023, the SIU was comprised of one Captain, one Lieutenant, two Detectives, one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, and one Assistant Prosecutor. Many of the matters handled by the SIU are long-term financial crime investigations that often require extensive records analysis, detailed report writing, spreadsheet preparation, and physical and electronic surveillance. In addition, the SIU remains active in various public and private sector networking and information sharing groups/forums. These groups — which include law enforcement agencies, banks, investment firms, and other businesses — are often instrumental in the furtherance of investigations, and help streamline the ability to obtain necessary information in a short amount of time. The SIU also works closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the United States Secret Service, the United States Department of Homeland Security, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, and local police departments.

In 2023, arrests were made for various types of crimes, involving numerous smaller scale investigations, including a number of cases referred by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission as part of its Facial Scrub Initiative. The following section contains examples of highlighted investigations from 2023.

**SELECTED CASE SUMMARIES  
SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT**

**State v. Patel, et al.**

The Special Investigations Unit received information that a business owner hired Janvi Hotel Supply LLC to perform contract work at business owner's three properties. The business owner reported receiving an invoice for approximately \$200,000 from Janvi Hotel Supply LLC. Despite paying the invoice, the business owner reported that none of the work was performed.

The SIU's investigation led to the arrests of Viral Patel, Priyanka Patel, and Pratik Patel. The defendants were charged with Theft by Deception and Conspiracy to Commit Theft in December 2023. Subsequent to their arrests, additional victims were identified and interviewed. In several cases, no work was conducted and in the remaining cases, partial work was conducted. The defendants were charged with an additional six counts of Theft by Deception and six counts of Conspiracy to Commit Theft.

**State v. Morales, et al.**

The SIU received a report that more than \$300,000 was stolen from a Union City-based staffing company. As part of the investigation, bank statements and employee payroll records were obtained. An analysis of the records found that multiple fictitious employee accounts were created in the company's payroll system, diverting money into a joint bank account held by Angelica Morales Fuentes and Hector Ortiz III. On April 26, 2023, members of the SIU arrested Morales Fuentes and Ortiz on charges of Theft by Deception and Conspiracy. Morales Fuentes was additionally charged with Computer Criminal Activity. Morales was sentenced to three years in prison and ordered \$60,000 in restitution. Ortiz' complaint was dismissed based on the co-defendant's cooperation.



### **State v. Zamir Thomas**

The SIU was notified that an employee with the City of Jersey City was collecting pay for work that was not performed. The investigation centered on Zamir Thomas, a Quality of Life Task Force member, and included an analysis of employment records, timesheets, GPS coordinates of Jersey City vehicles, and payroll, among other things. On July 28, 2023, Thomas was arrested and charged with one count of Theft by Deception. The investigation found that Thomas spent several hours at his Jersey City residence on multiple occasions while he was being paid to perform his duties. Thomas was sentenced to probation, loss of current and future public employment, and ordered \$6,900 in restitution.

## **SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT**

In 2023, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit (SVU) continued following protocols established by the Hudson County Prosecutor regarding allegations of sexual penetration, sexual contact of victims under the age of 13, and child abuse cases resulting in serious bodily injury. The SVU investigated sex offenses where strangers, sex offenders, law enforcement officers, teachers, and religious leaders were accused. The SVU also continued to work closely with state and local law enforcement agencies and the Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) on physical and sexual child abuse cases.

Municipal and college police departments remain involved with sexual assault investigations in Hudson County. The SVU provides assistance, guidance, and direction to law enforcement partners when needed. The SVU remained involved with the activation of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) on sexual assaults that occurred within a five-day period. The SVU also collects Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits, related forensic evidence, and submits findings to the New Jersey State Police Forensic Lab.

The SVU continues to provide training on sexual assault investigations and the associated county protocol. Training sessions are held for municipal and college police departments upon request or recommendation. Recruits at the Hudson County Public Safety Training Center also receive this specialized training. Municipal and college police departments are alerted to sexual assault related trainings when scheduled throughout New Jersey.

The SVU investigative and legal staff monitors and assesses internal protocols concerning case file preparation, arrests, evidence processing and analysis, and security. The SVU staff receives in-house training sessions on interviews, interrogations, and tactics. Detectives also attend

other related training courses throughout the year in an effort to continue to improve and maximize investigative excellence.

In 2023, the SVU investigated 313 cases compared to 317 cases in 2022. There were 64 arrests for SVU related crimes in 2023 compared to 87 arrests in 2022.

The Unit has one Captain, one Lieutenant, and four Sergeants. Each Sergeant supervises a squad of three Detectives. Two of the 12 Detectives were on-loan to the SVU by the Hoboken and West New York police departments. Two of the investigative squads work steady shifts 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the two remaining squads work weekly rotating shifts of 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. Each squad is on-call for the duration of one week, every four weeks. The Unit also has one agent and two support staff.

The SVU has remained active with community outreach. Presentations on sexual assault awareness, prevention, and handling of disclosures continue to be offered at police departments, public schools, and universities. The SVU's goal is to educate individuals on how victims should be treated, reduce the amount of sexual abuse incidents, and encourage victims of abuse to come forward.

Additionally, members of the SVU take part in the New Jersey Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC). One Sergeant and two Detectives serve on the ICAC Task Force. In 2023, the ICAC Task Force received 276 cyber tips, 189 of which were closed. The unit referred 61 cyber tips to other jurisdictions, five investigations were conducted, three arrests were made, and 141 subpoenas were served. The ICAC also executed three search warrants.

The use of electronic devices continues to increase in crimes against children, and often contain critical evidence. In 2023, there were 72 electronic devices forensically analyzed for investigative purposes.

Jersey City Medical Center, Hoboken University Medical Center, and Christ Hospital were certified SART sites in 2023. There were 160 SART activations in Hudson County and 10 SART activations outside of Hudson County that required a SVU Sergeant or Detective to contact the Forensic Nurse Examiner/SART Coordinator to initiate a response.

The SVU investigated several complex and challenging cases in 2023. The cases summarized below attest to the high quality investigative performance by SVU personnel. SVU supervisors, Detectives, Assistant Prosecutors, and local law enforcement officers worked collectively to develop and apply investigative strategies that resulted in arrests subsequent to many investigations. The thorough canvass for surveillance cameras and subsequent review of footage has been a critical investigative step in many cases. This requires patience and persistence, and SVU Detectives consistently displays these skills. The Unit has also conducted an increasing amount of consensual intercepts pursuant to the New Jersey Electronic Surveillance and Wiretap Act, which continually prove their value in garnering critical information on cases.

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

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

### **State v. Joseph Suarez**

On January 10, 2023, the HCPO's ICAC Task Force received multiple cyber tips reporting the possibility of newly produced images of child sex abuse material being shared through social media. The images/videos were viewed and confirmed to be images of child sex abuse material.

Investigative efforts led Task Force members to discover a case in North Carolina involving the sexual assault of a child. The social media user was identified as Joseph Suarez, of West New York. A court-authorized search warrant for Suarez's residence and person was executed on January 18, 2023. During the court-authorized search, more than 1,000 images of child sex abuse material were located on several data storage devices. Approximately 50 electronic devices were seized. Suarez was charged with sexual assault, conspiracy to commit aggravated sexual assault, and three counts of endangering the welfare of a minor.

### **State v. Elijah Lloyd**

On May 10, 2023, the Jersey City Police Department notified the SVU that a 63-year-old female reported being sexually assaulted by an unknown male, later identified as Elijah Lloyd. The victim was interviewed and stated earlier that day the defendant walked into her store, located on West Side Avenue in Jersey City. The female was assisting the defendant when he pulled down a ski mask and walked toward her behind the counter. The defendant blocked her from being able to walk away from where she was standing. The defendant took her cellular phone and unsuccessfully attempted to send \$5,000 to himself. The defendant told the female he had a gun and asked her to give him all the money she made during the day. The female explained she had not sold anything. The defendant then threatened to shoot the female, forced her into the store restroom, locked the door behind them, and sexually assaulted her. After the incident, the defendant stole the victim's purse and cellphone.

On May 11, 2023, the victim's purse was located in a trash can in Lincoln Park. A BOLO was created and disseminated to the Jersey City Police Department and the defendant was identified. Jersey City Police Officers located the defendant for questioning and he dropped a black ski mask as officers approached him. DNA evidence was analyzed and was a positive match for

the defendant. Lloyd was charged with aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, robbery, terroristic threats, theft by unlawful taking, and obstructing.

### **SVU LEGAL TEAM OVERVIEW**

In 2023, the legal side of the SVU was staffed with a Chief Assistant Prosecutor, two Assistant Chief Assistant Prosecutors, and five Assistant Prosecutors. In addition to prosecuting sex crime cases originating from HCPO investigations, the team also prosecuted sex crime cases investigated by municipal police departments. The SVU also prosecutes child abuse cases and all disorderly persons domestic violence contempt cases in the Chancery Division, Family Part. The SVU is also responsible for the tiering of all Hudson County registered sex offenders, prosecuting failures to register and violations of Community Supervision for Life, and applying Megan's Law registrants and Community Supervision for Life parolees for termination of their obligations.

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

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

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

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

The Chief Assistant Prosecutor and SVU Captain conducted trainings in sex crime investigations, child abuse cases, and Megan's Law for recruits at the Hudson County Public Safety Training Academy. The Chief Assistant Prosecutor also lectured for the Basic Sex Crimes/Child Abuse Investigations Course hosted by the New Jersey Sex Crimes Officers Association.

Below highlights an SVU prosecution from 2023.

**State v. Evin Ferman-Argueta**

In December 2017, three men broke into a couple's home in Kearny. The men waited for the male resident to leave the home. After entering the home, the three men tied up the female occupant while she was sleeping on her bed with their baby. One of the men, later identified as Evin Ferman-Argueta, sexually assaulted the victim. The three men stole property belonging to the couple. Two of the men previously pleaded guilty in prior years to 15 years New Jersey State Prison with an 85 percent parole disqualifier each. In September 2023, during jury selection, Ferman-Argueta pleaded guilty to first-degree Kidnapping and first-degree Aggravated Sexual Assault. The State is recommending a New Jersey State Prison sentence of 25 years with an 85 percent parole disqualifier under the No Early Release Act.

## **JUVENILE UNIT**

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

In 2023, the staff of the Juvenile Unit consisted of one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, two Assistant Prosecutors, one Detective, and one support staff.

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

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

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

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



5. The juvenile's community and educational ties
6. The likelihood of the juvenile's success in any alternative disposition program

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

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

## **APPELLATE UNIT**

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

In its current composition, the Appellate Unit staffs one Chief Assistant Prosecutor, one Assistant Chief Assistant Prosecutor, two Assistant Prosecutors, and one support staff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Advocacy
- Informing victims of their rights within the criminal justice system
- Providing information on the status/disposition of adult and juvenile criminal cases
- Referring to social service agencies and counseling/therapeutic services
- Assisting in filing applications with the Victims of Crime Compensation Office
- Assisting with the return of property
- Providing information about the criminal justice system to orient the victim
- Accompaniment to court
- Assisting with Victim Impact Statements

- Serving as a liaison for victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses with prosecutorial staff, investigative staff, agencies, and social service providers
- Providing notification of offender release from incarceration, parole and other related releases

The Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy is responsible for responding to the concerns of all crime victims, victim-survivors, and witnesses regarding their victimization, and delivering the appropriate services. This is accomplished in a safe, responsive environment where they can have a Victim/Witness Advocate attend to their concerns. Providing these services and resources — as well as a responsive environment — promotes healing and empowers those victimized by crime.

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

In 2023, the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy comprised of a Victim/Witness Coordinator and six Victim/Witness Advocates. Three of the advocates are bilingual in English and Spanish.

The Victim/Witness Coordinator and Advocates sit on multiple committees and boards, including the New Jersey Victim/Witness Coordinators Association, Multi-Disciplinary Team Coordinators Association, Hudson SPEAKS Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Sexual Assault Response Team Advisory Board, and Domestic Violence Working Group. The Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy also partners with various county and national victim-centered and community organizations to remain updated on new legislation and current trends with victims

and victimization. These committees, boards, and partnerships are an imperative element to the Office of Victim/Witness Advocacy's functionality, as well as its commitment and duty to serve Hudson County.

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

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH OFFICE**

The Hudson County Prosecutor's Office remains committed to serving the community in various ways.

At the beginning of 2023, the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office collaborated with the Drug Enforcement Administration to host an interactive educational program for Union City parents. Hidden in Plain Sight offered a law enforcement perspective of how to identify drug use or risky behaviors in youth. A mock bedroom was displayed for parents to identify possible warning signs.

The HCPO assisted three community refrigerators in Hudson County by obtaining food through a collaboration with the Hudson County Department of Health and Human Services. The HCPO continued working on the goals outlined in the Office's Diversity Program for Recruitment and Selection. To accomplish this, the HCPO attended multiple career fairs across the state and strengthen its relationships with local colleges and universities.

Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors delivered presentations about careers in law enforcement, internet safety, juvenile justice, and bias, among other topics. Seeing an increase of vaping in schools, Detectives created presentations on the dangers of vaping and drug use, at the request of local middle and high school educators.

The HCPO celebrated Black History Month at the Whitney M. Young Jr. Community School in Jersey City. The Chief of Detectives read a book to kindergarten students and discussed the role of law enforcement officers in the community. During the month of Ramadan, members of the HCPO attended community Iftars countywide. This allowed the HCPO to strengthen its

relations with the Muslim community and provide religious leaders with information on state and federal security grants.

During the summer, the HCPO provided information on elder abuse, internet and telephone scams, and financial exploitations to seniors at the North Bergen Housing Authority. Detectives had the opportunity to participate in Junior Police Academies in Hoboken, North Bergen, Union City, and Secaucus.

For International Overdose Awareness Month in August, the Operation Helping Hand team hosted a candlelight vigil and memorial walk at West Hudson Park in Kearny. The goal of the event was to help spread awareness, remember those whom we have lost, and help end the stigma surrounding substance use related deaths. Community partners in attendance spoke with attendees and provided them with resources to share with those who may be struggling with substance use.

In November, the HCPO visited VFW Post 2294 to celebrate Veteran Day. Detectives had the opportunity to have lunch with local veterans and thank them for their service.

The Prosecutor and the Chief of Staff became members of the Hudson County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls. This countywide initiative aims to provide women equal access to healthcare, education, financial resources, and opportunities for leadership. The Commission's mission is to create a more inclusive Hudson County where every woman and girl can reach their full potential.

The HCPO ended the year with a Holiday Toy Drive to benefit families in need during the holiday season in coordination with the Division of Child Protection & Permanency.