



“We need to be intolerant of double standards and of lame excuses for incompetence and corruption!”

Paula T. Dow



***MESSAGE FROM
Prosecutor Paula T. Dow***

***The mission of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office is
to seek justice, to serve justice and to do justice.***

In the 2006 and 2007 court year, the business of law enforcement changed dramatically in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. We have searched for and implemented new ways to address gang violence. We opened a state-of-the-art crime scene facility which has changed the way criminal investigations are conducted throughout the County; and our trial unit is now completely vertical. However, as the Prosecutor's Office continues to strengthen its prosecutorial tools, our criminal case load remains the most challenging in the State.

Despite recent press reports of decreased crime, our overall caseload has increased. While there was a slight decrease in homicides and sexual assaults, aggravated assaults and narcotics cases significantly increased. The amount of child abuse cases remained nearly the same.

The increase in aggravated assaults, robberies and narcotic offenses is reflective of gang violence that has become epidemic throughout the State. My Office is addressing this problem in Essex on several fronts. Our Gang and Narcotics Unit operates a database containing intelligence on over 3,000 local gang members. The Unit maintains a strong presence in the community, both in terms of traditional investigations and prosecutions, and in terms of educating community members, especially young persons. We have also successfully joined forces with the United States Attorney's Office and created an Essex-Federal Gang Suppression Partnership. The Partnership brings together local, county and federal law enforcement agencies for the first time in the history of this County.

Results are already apparent. In February 2007, Frederick Parrish, a gang member affiliated with the Bloods and Crips, was sentenced to 30 years for the shooting death of another gang member. Fifteen members and associates of the Bloods street gang were arrested and charged with federal crimes in June 2007. The charges and arrests were the result of a year-long investigation by the Essex-Federal Gang Suppression Partnership.

Gang member, Naeem Mitchell, was recently sentenced to 30 years in prison for his involvement in a shoot-out with four Newark police officers at a Newark housing complex in 2005. In the fall of 2007, Bloods gang member, Khalil Tutt, was convicted by a jury in the fatal shooting of Newark Police Officer Dwayne Reeves in 2005.

In October 2006, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office opened a 15,000 square foot, state-of-the-art crime scene investigation facility. The facility features a forensic processing room, digital photo processing room and a drying chamber designed to process and package blood-soaked evidence. The Unit's computer system is linked to the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) to identify and match fingerprint evidence. Its high tech computer system allows detectives to visually reconstruct crime scenes. In addition to investigating homicides, shootings and sex crimes, the Crime Scene Unit is able to assist county police departments in burglaries and other criminal investigations. In West Caldwell, the police department was able to solve a string of burglaries after the Unit recovered forensic evidence at one of the crime scenes. As a result of a DNA match, Aaron Buie of Montclair was charged on April 27, 2007 with the burglaries.

Our Trial Unit handles the most difficult caseload in the State. The nearly 7,000 indictments that are returned each year account for more than half of the first and second-degree cases prosecuted statewide. To ensure that these cases receive the careful attention they deserve, my Office pressed for, and received, the support of the judiciary and the County administration in converting to a vertical court system. On October 1, 2007, the conversion was complete. The vertical system streamlines prosecutions, reduces time from arrest to disposition, fosters greater accountability and provides better utilization of limited resources.

There have been a number of successful prosecutions this past year. One involved a former East Orange Police Detective, Norman Price, who was recently sentenced to 20 years in prison for money laundering. Price stole funds from the East Orange Police Department by submitting fraudulent invoices to the City and subsequently generating false purchases of police equipment. Price and his wife used the money to buy fur coats and other luxury items.

Two former Seton Hall University students were sentenced to prison for setting a fire in a dormitory back in 2000, that led to the deaths of three students and the injuries of 58 students. In 2007, Joseph LePore and Sean Ryan were sentenced to five years in prison under a plea agreement.

On another front, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office was awarded a federal grant to create a cold-case squad that will bring cutting-edge DNA technology to bear upon old unsolved cases. Four experienced detectives will examine old case files in search of evidence that might yield

DNA specimens. The detectives will be working closely with the New Jersey State Police Forensic Science Lab. In 1998, the State Police lab began using more sophisticated DNA technology, known as short tandem repeat analysis or STR, which can obtain DNA from microscopic specimens like skin cells or smears of perspiration. More recently, the lab acquired the capability to conduct mitochondrial DNA testing, which can lift genetic information from extremely old and degraded biological specimens.

In addition, the Essex County Prosecutor's Office was awarded a federal grant to combat aggressive driving. During the past decade, about 80 people each year have lost their lives to motor vehicle-related accidents in Essex. The grant is designed to fund special educational and enforcement efforts that target the driving behavior leading to these accidents. In a recent media campaign made possible by the grant, public awareness ads were posted on 100 New Jersey Transit and DeCamp buses throughout Essex County. The grant also funds overtime for local police departments who devote special resources in the crackdown on aggressive drivers.

Our Community Justice Program continues to maintain a strong and visible presence within the Essex County community. Nearly thirty high school students participated in the Office's summer youth internship program. Many more young people attended the bi-annual youth conferences organized by our Community Justice program for middle and high school age students throughout Essex County. Still other members of the community have had direct contact with my Office through our Speakers Bureau.

With the support of the citizens of Essex County, this Office will continue to make significant progress in serving Essex County.



Essex County Prosecutor Paula T. Dow with Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. and State Attorney General Anne Milgram





A BRIEF HISTORY...

In 1776, the State of New Jersey ratified its first Constitution (superseded by later Constitutions in 1844 and 1947). Under this Constitution, the elected Governor appointed an Attorney General to enforce the laws of the State. The Attorney General in turn appointed deputies for the various counties, including Essex, to enforce the criminal laws on behalf of the local populace. In 1822, the New Jersey General Assembly passed an act authorizing a more independent Prosecutor of Pleas for each county, to be appointed by the Court of Quarter Session once every five years. A few years later, the Governor was given the authority to appoint each county's Prosecutor of Pleas. On Feb. 20, 1829, Amzi Dodd became the first governor-appointed Prosecutor of Pleas for Essex County. The earliest record of a prosecution by Prosecutor Dodd involves "a nuisance in suffering the water to stagnate and become offensive in the old burying ground" in Newark.

The first Prosecutor of Pleas worked alone, but by 1877 the Prosecutor required the help of a First Assistant. As Essex County grew and matters became more complex, the Office grew in size. By 1922, Prosecutor John O. Bigelow employed 28 men, including three Assistant Prosecutors, two Detective Captains, two Lieutenants, and various detectives and clerks. In the 1920s and 30's, cases involving gambling, organized crime and official corruption were growing in number. In October of 1935, the nationally-known organized crime figure Dutch Schultz was shot at the Palace Chop House in Newark. Although the prime suspect was found hanged soon after the incident, the Office continued its investigation and identified Schultz's real shooter who pled guilty to the murder in 1940.

By 1945, the Office still had only three Assistant Prosecutors, despite a growing number of murder and gambling cases. In 1951, Prosecutor Edward Gaulkin gained attention by successfully prosecuting four men charged with conspiracy, extortion and bribery in the Newark milk scandal case. In 1959, Governor Robert Meyner nominated Brendan T. Byrne of West Orange as the 25th Prosecutor of Essex County. Prosecutor (and later Governor) Byrne served the Office until 1967. By 1962, there were 16 Assistant Prosecutors, most of whom were part-time employees. Shortly thereafter, the first female Assistant Prosecutor, June Strelecki, was appointed. Also during Byrne's tenure, the "Charlie Squad" was formed, a name coined after members of the public were urged to report illegal gambling by calling a dedicated phone number and asking for "Charlie."

In 1967, the City of Newark experienced a week-long civil disturbance, which heralded long-term social and economic change in Essex County. These transformations challenged future Prosecutors to respond to changing patterns and volumes of crime with increased professionalism and dedication. By 1973, the legal staff numbered 63 lawyers, all full-time. County Investigators replaced the former Detectives, and were increasingly selected from the ranks of experienced local police officers. Under Prosecutor George Schneider (Prosecutor from 1981 to 1986), the number of Assistant Prosecutors exceeded 100. Increasing resources were dedicated to special squads. The Homicide Squad was expanded and a Narcotics Section, which at first was a joint task force with the Sheriff's Office, was created. Eventually specialized units were established in Child Abuse, Sex Assault, Arson, Domestic Violence, Megan's Law and Gangs.

In 1986, Governor Thomas Kean appointed the first African-American Prosecutor in Essex County (and only the second in the State), Herbert H. Tate, Jr. Computerization of the Office was begun and continued in stages throughout the terms of Prosecutor Tate and his successor, Prosecutor Clifford J. Minor. Also during their terms, a sexual assault case was brought against a group of high school athletes from Glen Ridge, who were later convicted for victimizing a 17 year-old mentally retarded woman. This case was the subject of a popular book, a TV movie, and an episode on the TV show "Law & Order."

In 1998, the first female Prosecutor, Patricia Hurt, was appointed by Governor Christie Whitman. Prosecutor Hurt was followed by Acting Prosecutor Donald Campolo and Acting Prosecutor Paula T. Dow. In 2005, Governor Richard Codey swore Acting Prosecutor Dow to the office of Essex County Prosecutor. In the early years of the 21st Century, the Office is responding aggressively to increased auto theft and expanded youth gang activity. It recently completed a second generation of computerization complete with e-mail and Internet access and increased its outreach to the public through its web site (www.njecpo.org), its Victim-Witness Advocacy Office, and its Community Justice Program. Lawyers, investigators and support staff have continued the work of Amzi Dodd into the 21st Century, and are honored to be part of the Office of the Essex County Prosecutor.

(With thanks to Francis D. Falivena, Jr., Assistant Prosecutor, Retired, an ECPO history enthusiast.)