Business Administration Unit

The Business Administration staff oversees a $37 million operating budget along with Essex County Prosecutor's Office's criminal forfeiture accounts. Additionally, it oversees the Office's 12 major grant-funded programs totaling more than $1.6 million per year. The Unit provides crucial support services at ECPO's six office sites, including facility management, supply distribution, inventory, purchasing, budgeting, personnel records, time keeping, payroll, and criminal case file storage and retrieval. Capital equipment—copiers, telephones, fax machines, desk units and file storage cabinets—is continually monitored to identify and prioritize replacement needs.

The Unit assists the Prosecutor and the executive management team with long-term planning and strategic-decision support, including staffing plans, compensation policies, and capital spending/infrastructure decisions.

The Business Administration Unit’s support functions also include:

- Cooperation with program and financial auditors
- Workers' Compensation reporting
- Office renovation and safety improvements
- Purchase request processing and shipping receipt
- Supply storage, inventory, and distribution
- Liaison to County, State, and Federal government offices

2016 Accomplishments

In support of the Prosecutor's efforts to secure additional space for the Office to relieve crowding and to promote efficiency, the Business Administration Unit coordinated efforts with the County of Essex in improving facilities for our staff. The Unit coordinated an extensive upgrade of the heating and cooling systems at our headquarters office in the Veterans Courthouse during 2016. This required providing temporary working space for employees as contractors installed modern thermostat and cooling equipment along the perimeter of the building over the course of six months. With proactive planning and monitoring on the part of Business Administration staff, the disruptions to our daily operations and management were held to an absolute minimum.

In 2016, the Business Administration Unit continued its efforts to efficiently manage the Office's overall file storage space, which is distributed over several sites and is in short supply. The Unit continued to coordinate the disposal of paper files that are no longer needed, and ensured their proper disposal considering the potentially sensitive nature of certain material. Certain older paper files that were determined necessary to retain are moved from overcrowded locations in the Veterans Courthouse to a more accessible location in Belleville, where better environmental conditions for long-term file storage are available. The Unit also continues to support a variety of digital scanning options for files where original document retention is not strictly mandated by law.
The Business Administration Unit continued to work closely with the Prosecutor and other high-level ECPO managers in responding to the continuing fiscal challenges presented by reduced County revenues and a State-mandated 2% budget increase cap. Through careful planning and monitoring of expenditures, staff turnover positions were filled when necessary and critical to the continued functioning of the justice system in Essex County.

To this end, the Business Administration Unit worked closely with the Prosecutor and managers of the criminal prosecution units to arrange for the resources needed to support ECPO's response to New Jersey's Criminal Justice Reform initiative, which took effect on January 1, 2017. One of the key resources was the procurement and roll-out of the CSI Infoshare enterprise-level database system, for unified data management of ECPO's investigation and case prosecutions. The Business Administration Unit actively collaborated with the Information Technology Unit in the procurement and implementation of this new system, arranging for over $500,000 in new computer software procurements.

In 2016, the Business Administration Unit personnel also played a key role in operationalizing two new federally-funded grant programs, a $594,023 federal COPS Anti-Gang Initiative Grant (a data driven anti-gang effort in conjunction with its Narcotics Task Force Unit), and the $350,000 federal SMART Prosecution Grant (an effort within the Adult Trial Section to utilize social media to enhance evidence collection in important critical prosecutions).

Business Administration Unit personnel also provided key support in maintaining the Office's web site, www.njecpo.org. The Unit also continued to assist in the maintenance of the Word Press content management platform.
Community Justice Unit

The Community Justice Unit promotes awareness of the role and function of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office. By attending community meetings to address issues related to crime, substance abuse and crime prevention, the Unit serves as a liaison between law enforcement and the residents of Essex County. The Unit is dedicated to creating and executing programs that offer children and teens positive alternatives and interventional strategies aimed at preventing delinquency.

2016 Accomplishments

In 2016, the Community Justice Unit provided workshops to over 5,000 Essex County residents. Topics covered in workshops included careers in law enforcement and an overview of the workings of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office, the criminal justice system, expungements, gang awareness, bullying and internet safety.

Among other things, the Community Justice Unit held a full day female youth empowerment conference entitled, “Being Inspired & Empowered.” The purpose of the conference was to engage young women and empower them to make positive choices to become leaders in their communities. Over 200 high school students from Essex County attended this full day event, which was held at Rutgers University’s School of Criminal Justice.

For the fifteenth consecutive year, ECPO held a five-week summer internship program to expose high school students to careers in law, law enforcement and government. Thirty high school juniors from Essex County participated in this unique program where they toured local and federal law enforcement agencies, participated in a mock trial, learned about local and state government, attended Trooper Youth Week with the New Jersey State Police and participated in cultural trips.

On October 21, ECPO sponsored a career day experience entitled, “Project I Can Achieve Now! (I.C.A.N.).” More than 70 middle school students from Fairview Elementary School in Bloomfield, University Heights Charter School in Newark and Links Charter School in Newark participated. This program exposed students to careers in law enforcement and local government and provided them a civics lesson. They met with representatives from ECPO, the Essex County Freeholders Office, Essex County Executive’s Office, Essex County Sheriff’s Department and the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, students participated in a mock election in recognition of the upcoming presidential election.

On October 6, the Community Justice Unit partnered with Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Team of Essex County (ADAPT) and Essex County’s Department of Health Services to provide a half-day information session at Life Christian Church in West Orange on substance abuse resources to clergy members.
On December 20, the annual youth conference entitled: “What’s it All About?” World Against Violence (W.A.V.) took place. This conference addresses issues affecting middle school students. Over 500 middle school students from Essex County attended the full-day event at Caldwell University. Students participated in workshops on making positive choices, nutrition, teen dating, and cyber-safety. Over 30 representatives from various social service and youth agencies provided students with information on educational and recreational resources.
Information Technology Unit

The Information Technology Unit's role is to advance the mission, vision and goals of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office (ECPO) by providing technical solutions for law enforcement and trial court needs. The ITU is responsible for overseeing the design and implementation of all the technological needs of the office.

The ITU consist of four sections: Network Administration/Helpdesk, Office Automation/Training, Software Engineering and Media Services/Litigation Support.

Network Administration/Help Desk – This section's main objective is to focus on strategic areas that sustain critical infrastructure through day-to-day operations, modifications, augmentations, replacement and routine maintenance of desktop computer, communication equipment, server equipment, proper infrastructure security, software and database software. The section also provides end user hardware, software, computer support, as well as dependable remote, mobile services with appropriate security mechanisms.

Office Automation/Training – Advances in the training and support of individual computer users are met through “ECPO University,” a training program designed to support ECPO staff. Courses are offered to enhance the staff’s knowledge base, and mandatory courses, such as “Introduction to ECPO Technology” and “Introduction to Promis/Gavel” are included in the “New Hire” course.

Software Engineering – In the effort to meet the increasing need for statistical and technical data, the ongoing development of office-wide databases and maintenance of existing databases has allowed Assistant Prosecutors and detectives to track their cases, log evidence and print detailed reports.

Media Services/Litigation Support – Media services are provided to all units of the ECPO to assist Assistant Prosecutors and detectives in preparing, organizing and presenting information at all stages of litigation. Media is conveyed through the creation of large-scale graphic displays, including maps, charts, graphs, timelines and automated presentations utilizing various video and computer equipment. Additionally, mass production of media discovery materials is generated from the ITU, among other services.

2016 Accomplishments

In 2016 the Information Technology Unit faced many challenges in training and implementing a new Criminal Case Management system, new Office Productivity Software, expanding the use of a Mobile Workforce and the beginning of providing support 24/7 to in-house personnel and police departments in the county.

This was in part due to what occurred in November of 2014 when New Jersey voters approved Criminal Justice Reform/Speedy Trial Act, a ballot question, amending the
state constitution to allow judges to release low-risk offenders without bail and deny bail to high-risk offenders. Throughout 2015 and 2016, the ITU had been working to prepare for the changes that took effect on January 1, 2017. Under the new law, a hearing must be held within 48 hours of arrest, including weekends, to determine whether a defendant is deemed high risk or not.

This change has provided an opportunity for all agencies to review and improve casework flow processing, policies and the use of technology to ensure the agency is prepared to meet the new standards.
Media Relations Office

The Office of Media Relations in the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office manages external communications for the largest and busiest Prosecutor’s Office in the State of New Jersey in the largest media market in the country.

The responsibilities of the Media Relations Unit include:
- Serving as lead spokesperson for the Essex County Prosecutor and office staff.
- Maintaining daily contact with print and broadcast media regarding homicides, arrests, trials, indictments, convictions and other newsworthy developments.
- Remaining on-call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for breaking news stories.
- Planning and managing press conferences.
- Developing and implementing a strategic communications plan with the Prosecutor.
- Assisting local police departments with media relations.
- Working cooperatively with law enforcement partners at the state and federal levels.
- Providing current information to public officials and government agencies on relevant investigatory and prosecutorial activities.
- Educating Assistant Prosecutors and other staff regarding dealing with the press.
- Overseeing the production of the ECPO Annual Report.
- Assisting with community outreach efforts.

2016 Accomplishments

In 2016, the Media Relations Office continued to provide timely and accurate information to members of the press who are dealing with a 24-hour news cycle which requires them to gather and publish news at a breakneck speed.

The Media Relations Office works to strike a balance between three competing interests: protecting the rights of victims along with the integrity of investigations while recognizing and respecting the public’s right to know. Transparency is critical to maintaining public confidence in the work done by the Assistant Prosecutors, detectives and support staff. Yet, confidentiality is often crucial to the successful investigation and prosecution of cases. Consequently, the Media Relations Office attempts to keep the public informed regarding the status of cases while also protecting victims and the ongoing investigative process.

In 2016, hundreds of press releases were issued by the ECPO regarding homicides, arrests and convictions. Some of the more high-profile cases that garnered significant media attention include:

**State v. Ali Muhammad Brown** -- In January 2016, Ali Muhammad Brown, 31, of Seattle, Washington was sentenced to 36 years and six months in New Jersey State
Prison for the armed robbery of a West Orange man on July 10, 2014. Brown was sentenced to 35 years for the first-degree robbery and two weapons offenses. The judge also imposed a consecutive 18-month sentence for possession of hollow point bullets. Under the No Early Release Act, Brown must serve 33 years before becoming eligible for parole.

The victim was opening the passenger side door of his car in the parking lot of an apartment complex in the 200 block of Mount Pleasant Avenue in West Orange when he was approached by Brown. Wearing a mask and dressed in camouflage, Brown confronted the victim at 6:00 a.m. He stole the victim’s wallet and other personal items and then ordered the victim into the trunk of his car.

Law enforcement linked Brown to the robbery prior to his capture on July 18, when officers located Brown in a makeshift campsite near the apartment complex. Upon arresting Brown, officers seized a loaded firearm that was linked to several homicides that Brown has been charged with committing. Brown is currently awaiting trial for the murder of Brendan Tevlin in West Orange. He is also charged with three murders in Seattle, Washington.

State v. Marjorie Anna Stubblefield — In January 2016, the former chairwoman of the Rutgers University Philosophy Department was sentenced to 12 years in New Jersey State Prison for sexually assaulting a developmentally-disabled man in her school office.

On October 2, 2015, an Essex County jury convicted Stubblefield, 46, of West Orange of two counts of first degree aggravated sexual assault for repeatedly engaging in sexual acts with a man suffering from cerebral palsy who was unable to speak or communicate. The victim wears a diaper and requires assistance with basic needs such as eating, walking and bathing and has the mental capacity of a toddler.

Much of the media attention on the case revolved around the defense’s argument that Stubblefield could communicate with the victim through something known as “facilitated communication,” a controversial and discredited method of communicating.

State v. Krisla Rezireksyon — In July 2016, Rezireksyon, also known as Venette Ovilde, was sentenced to 45 years in New Jersey State Prison for starving her three children, causing the death of one in May 2011.

In March 2016, an Essex County jury convicted Rezireksyon of aggravated manslaughter for killing her eight-year-old daughter, Christiana Glenn. The child died of starvation and the mother’s failure to seek medical treatment for a broken femur bone, the largest bone in the leg. Instead of getting help, the mother poured salt and gasoline in the wound and covered it with cornmeal. In addition to causing the one’s death, she was found guilty of starving her six-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter. They too suffered broken bones from beatings.
**State v. Jeremy Arrington** – In November 2016, Jeremy Arrington, 26, of Newark, was charged in a triple homicide in which a young college student, who was visiting the family, and two children were fatally stabbed. Arrington went to a home in the 100 block of Hedden Terrace in Newark and fatally stabbed three individuals. There was a total of nine people in the home at the time – four adults and five children. Arrington was known to the family. After the attack, Arrington fled.

Shortly before 8:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 6, Arrington was discovered barricaded in a residence in the 200 block of Pomona Avenue. After about an hour, Arrington was arrested without incident. Arrington was charged with three counts of murder, three counts of attempted murder, criminal restraint, unlawful possession of a handgun, unlawful possession of a knife, and possession of a handgun and a knife for an unlawful purpose. The three people killed were identified as: Aerial Little Whitehurst, female, age 8, of Newark; Al-Jahon Whitehurst, male, age 11, of Newark; and Syasia McBurroughs, female, age 23, of Cedar Knolls. Three other victims, a 29-year-old female, a 13-year-old male and a 13-year-old female, who are twins, remain hospitalized in critical, but stable condition. Arrington is awaiting trial.
Victim-Witness Advocacy Office

The mission of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit is to treat victims of crime and their families with dignity, compassion and respect. The Unit helps to find resources for them that meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, employment, transportation, and childcare for school-aged children. The Unit also assists victims and witnesses in dealing with the psychological trauma of crime, and helps them to obtain professional assistance as needed. It helps victims and witnesses to understand their rights and responsibilities in the criminal justice system, providing continual communication and coordination regarding case progress and participation in legal proceedings.

2016 Accomplishments:

In 2016, the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office assisted 11,903 victims and witnesses, initiating approximately 151,000 items of correspondence on their behalf.

Office staff continued its 70-hour intimate partner violence training program in 2016. The program, entitled “Sanctuary”, is designed to provide local residents who fall victim to domestic violence-related assault, sexual assault, and child abuse with supportive, culturally sensitive, crisis intervention services. Survivors of domestic violence-related homicide victims are also assisted through this program. Sanctuary volunteers met for three times per week over a seven-month period. The additional 30 hours allowed participants to be exposed to other topics not covered fully during the standard 40-hour training program. Interactive exercises, which included role plays, case studies, scenarios, simulations, individual and group activities, video presentations, field trips, and court-watch activities, afforded program participants the opportunity to develop and practice and perfect the skills covered during the training sessions. Since its inception in 2010, Sanctuary has graduated over 325 volunteers who are now equipped to provide immediate outreach, advocacy, and support services to those intimate partner victims and their children within a 48- to 72-hour period.

The Unit continued to expand its formal relocation program in 2016, through which 57 program clients and their families were assisted. This program offers and provides security and protection to victims and witnesses who have been threatened, intimidated or harassed because they have provided information to law enforcement regarding organized crime, gang-related, and domestic violence cases. Trained advocates provide survivors of crime with referrals to social service agencies that offer emergency shelter placement, transitional and permanent housing, food and clothing. The advocates also work closely with local housing authorities, welfare agencies, social security offices and school districts to ensure that the victim/witness is fully and successfully integrated into the new living environment.

Unit staff continued to enhance the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit's portal on the Office’s general website during the calendar year. The Victim-Witness portal is colorful,
interactive, user-friendly, visually-appealing, and easily understood by those who access the pages. The website content includes: information on the amendments to the Crime Victims’ Bill of Rights, notification process, the crisis reaction, HIV/AIDS/Hepatitis C testing, the criminal justice process, information on how to obtain a temporary/final restraining domestic violence order, tips for witness testimony and V.I.N.E. notification. In the revised structure and format of the website section, the information is arranged alphabetically by victim’s crime type.

Further, the Victim Witness Unit conducted 27 community outreach forums throughout 2016. Approximately 200 community residents, including approximately high school and college students who attend area colleges, received information on the services provided through the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office.

Finally, Unit staff also organized the Office’s annual “Christmas Holiday Toy Drive” to assist needy families, many of which were assisted by the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit, in December 2016. Approximately 500 toys, board and video games, dolls, electronics, balls, and clothing items were collected and distributed to ten social services agencies who, in turn, distributed to toys to those in need residing in Essex County.