Crash and Fire Investigation Unit

In 2019, the Crash and Fire Investigation Unit continued investigating all fatal crashes and fires, and all serious bodily injury motor vehicle crashes with a criminal element (i.e. all hit and runs, driving under the influence and unlicensed drivers where serious injury resulted). The Assistant Prosecutors then prosecuted all vehicular homicides and related offenses, as well as fatal and non-fatal arson cases. Non-fatal arson cases are investigated by local departments, with assistance from prosecutor's office personnel, and where appropriate, prosecution by the Assistant Prosecutors of the CFIU. CFIU, a subset of the Homicide Unit, continues to be staffed by three Assistant Prosecutors including one Assistant Prosecutor-Supervisor who carries a case load as well. The criminal investigators of the Crime Scene Investigation Bureau conducted the investigations of fatal crashes and fires throughout the county. In CSIB, all detectives are responsible for traditional crime scene processing of homicide and search warrant scenes and the expert analysis associated with that work, plus investigations of all fatal and serious bodily injury crashes and fatal fires.

At all times, there is at least one Detective and one Assistant Prosecutor on-call with investigative and prosecutorial supervisors always available as well. In addition to the investigations described above, the on-call Assistant Prosecutors are additionally responsible for assisting local police and the New Jersey State Police 24 hours a day seven days a week with obtaining telephonic warrants for the taking of bodily fluids in DUI cases. Fatal crashes on any of Essex County's interstate highways are investigated by the New Jersey State Police in conjunction with the Assistant Prosecutors of CFIU.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019 CFIU/CSIB investigators investigated 34 fatal crashes, 17 serious injury crashes, and 15 arson cases including 8 with fatalities. This does not include dozens of non-fatal crash and fire investigations and prosecutions aided and conducted by the Assistant Prosecutors of CFIU in conjunction with local agencies and the New Jersey State Police.

In 2019 the Assistant Prosecutors of CFIU initiated an investigation into an area school bus company that allegedly engaged in dangerous and fraudulent activity after one bus driven by an unlicensed driver high on CDS crashed a school bus with a special needs student on board resulting in injuries. That investigation expanded into a Task Force with the New Jersey Attorney General's Office - Office of Public Integrity and Accountability, and the Passaic County Prosecutor’s Office that has resulted in charges against the management and ownership of the company and the corporate entity itself.

The Assistant Prosecutors and Investigators of CFIU and CSIB also share the responsibility of meeting with surviving family members of criminal and non-criminal fatal crashes and fires to explain the investigations and charging decisions of each
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investigation. Once the criminal prosecution concludes, or the decision to not prosecute an incident is made, the Assistant Prosecutors and Investigators also have roles in the subsequent and inevitable civil litigation that results from the incidents we are responsible for investigating.

In addition to the investigative and local support work in these specialized investigative areas, CFIU personnel successfully tried several cases in 2019, obtaining convictions and lengthy prison sentences for cases where intoxicated drivers caused fatal crashes in school zones. Numerous other convictions by plea agreement were also obtained in which custodial consequences were imposed where appropriate. At the same time guilty pleas were also obtained in non-injury arson cases where justice was done in the form of treatment focused rehabilitative pleas where appropriate for mentally ill defendants who had created dangerous situations, but had fortunately not injured anyone.

These trial victories and significant pleas are a testament to the thorough investigations, preparations and skilled prosecutions by the attorneys the Crash and Fire Investigation Unit and investigators of and Crime Scene Investigations.
Domestic Violence Unit

The Domestic Violence Unit, which was established in 1992, addresses domestic abuse between intimate partners and adults who reside in the same household. The Unit is comprised of seven attorneys, one director, one captain, one lieutenant, one sergeant, four detectives, two support staff and a victim/witness advocate. The Unit reviews cases with the goals of protecting the interests of the victims as well as prosecuting domestic violence incidents.

Domestic abuse is a self-perpetuating and escalating social phenomenon. It affects all people regardless of their race, culture, religion, economic strata and/or sexual orientation. Criminal sanctions are a key component of society’s response to curtailing this abuse. When appropriate, the Domestic Violence Unit will seek to incarcerate violent and persistent offenders. In many cases, batterers are given the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves, with the hopes that this will end the cycle of violence.

Additionally, the psychological impact of domestic abuse on victims and families are a major factor in our case analysis. The Domestic Violence Unit, in collaboration with the Victim-Witness Advocacy Unit, offers support to victims with the goal of helping them regain a sense of personal safety and security. Referrals to shelters may also be a viable option when appropriate.

This multifaceted approach in victim assistance is necessary because domestic violence victims are often unwilling to testify against their abusers because of safety and financial concerns, the impact on children and other family members, as well as the victim’s own relationship dynamics with the abuser. It is the job of the Assistant Prosecutor to balance the need for deterrence, the level of cooperation of the victim as well as being a strong advocate for justice. The Domestic Violence Unit serves a pivotal function in the community in its zealous efforts to prosecute abusers and attend to the needs of the victims of abuse.

2019 Accomplishments

During 2019, the members of the Domestic Violence Unit processed 2,847 Domestic Violence cases. The Assistant Prosecutors assigned to the Unit presented 734 cases to the Grand Jury during this period. The following are examples of the spectrum of cases handled by the Domestic Violence Unit in 2019.

State v. Pedro Vaca -- Defendant Vaca pled guilty to first degree attempted murder. The defendant cut the throat of his children's mother. He was sentenced to 13 years in state prison. He also strangled her and set the apartment on fire. He must serve 85 percent of that sentence before he is eligible for five years of parole supervision.

State v. Ahmad Daniels – Defendant Daniels pled guilty to a second-degree Robbery. The defendant kicked and hit his girlfriend in the head and face while he stole her purse
that contained her wallet and other personal items. He also threw her onto a metal dog cage.

Furthermore, the Domestic Violence Unit handles cases when defendants are charged with violating civil restraining orders issued to protect victims of domestic abuse. These violations or contempt charges are typically handled in the Family Court. The Assistant Prosecutors assigned to Family Court handled 226 of these cases in 2019.

Members of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office, including personnel in the Domestic Violence Unit, continue to play a significant role in the Essex County Domestic Violence Working Group. These members also play an active role in the Law Enforcement Subcommittee, which is comprised of law enforcement, the judiciary, victim service providers, probation officers and Family Court employees. The Domestic Violence Working Group addresses systemic problems in the domestic violence field and endeavors to coordinate the efforts of the various member organizations. The Group is instrumental in implementing the dictates of the New Jersey’s Domestic Violence Procedures Manual as well as making strides in improving the service of Temporary Restraining Orders.

The Essex County Prosecutor's Office is one of the lead partners in the Essex County Family Justice Center, located at 60 Nelson Place, Newark. The Family Justice Center is recognized as a “best practice” in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention by the U.S. Department of Justice on Violence Against Women. The Family Justice Center brings together, under one roof, domestic violence advocates, civil legal service providers and other community-based organizations to provide crisis intervention, safety planning, counseling, self-sufficiency services, as well as access to the criminal justice system through a liaison to the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.
Extradition Unit

The Essex County Prosecutor’s Office Extradition Unit facilitates the return of fugitives who have been accused or convicted of a crime. The Unit is responsible for providing the legal paperwork needed to return an offender to New Jersey. The Unit also arranges the return of fugitives to other jurisdictions where an offender is wanted by law enforcement for a crime committed in that location.

Those working in the Unit must have knowledge of the various legal mechanisms found in both state and federal statutes to compel the return of a fugitive wanted for a crime committed in New Jersey as well as an understanding of the proper procedures for returning a fugitive to another jurisdiction.

Among other things, it may involve securing a Governor’s warrant if the accused fights extradition. It also involves working closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019 the extradition unit received 346 requests for extradition. Essex County coordinated the legal paperwork to extradite 265 fugitives to other jurisdictions and to return 124 fugitives back to Essex County.
Financial Crimes Unit

The Financial Crimes Unit is dedicated to the detection and prosecution of cases involving the unlawful conversion of funds or property. Most of these cases involve fraudulent activities using checks, credit cards, bank accounts and mortgages. Victims of financial crimes are varied and include some of the most vulnerable victims, such as the elderly or infirm and some of the more affluent, such as private and professional corporations.

The Assistant Prosecutors in the Unit are supervised by a Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor; assigned detectives conduct the investigations, supervised by a Captain of Detectives. Presently, this Unit is staffed by a Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor, three Assistant Prosecutors, a Detective-Sergeant, three detectives, one legal assistant, and one clerical supervisor. The Financial Crimes Unit is a vertical prosecution unit, meaning it handles the cases from inception to prosecution.

When the Financial Crimes Unit receives an allegation of criminal conduct, it must determine whether a criminal prosecution is warranted. If it is, a criminal charge and/or a presentation to a Grand Jury is conducted after a thorough investigation. If an indictment is returned, the Financial Crimes Unit is responsible for the case through a trial or plea agreement. The Financial Crimes Unit fulfills the need to investigate serious financial crime cases at the county rather than municipal level. Municipal police departments are often not able to thoroughly investigate complicated economic crimes. Indeed, in many cases, governmental, bank, and financial records can only be obtained by grand jury subpoena, court order or search warrant, and therefore are beyond the reach of a municipal police department. Many “white collar” crimes are multi-jurisdictional in nature. Beyond this, such cases are far more complex than the “average” case. They usually require review of voluminous records by an experienced detective. Because of the complexity of the allegations and investigations, close interaction between the Assistant Prosecutor and Detective is necessary throughout the investigation; especially since these investigations often involve assembling and reviewing complex financial and business records, preparing and obtaining court orders for in- and out-of-state records (such as bank records, handwriting, toll records).

In 2012, the Financial Crimes Unit expanded to include an Insurance Fraud Division. The Insurance Fraud Division is partially funded through a grant from the New Jersey Attorney General’s Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor, and works closely with that Office in identifying, investigating and prosecuting appropriate cases. In 2015, the Financial Crimes Unit expanded even further to include an Intellectual Property (Counterfeiting) Division. The Division is partially funded through a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance and its goal is to investigate and prosecute this ever-growing crime.
2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Financial Crimes Unit concluded several notable cases, including the following:

**State v. Christopher Brandt** -- The defendant, a former employee of a dairy located in Newark, NJ, still had access to their facility and had stolen palettes of bulk items destined for major coffee chain retailers. The estimated loss from the theft that occurred was over $100,000 in wholesale value. It was determined that the suspect was selling the stolen products on eBay.

In the early morning hours of June 3, 2018 Newark Police officers responded to the dairy for a burglary in progress. Officers arrested Christopher Brandt, who was wearing a very distinct outfit that matched the outfit worn by the suspect in the first theft. Records obtained from eBay indicated that the defendant had been selling stolen bulk coffee products since 2014. The case was presented to the Grand Jury and true billed.

In April of 2019, the Defendant pled to 2nd degree theft by deception and 2nd degree money laundering. The Defendant was sentenced to a term of imprisonment and ordered to provide $111,498.60 in restitution to the victim.

**State v. Sukhjinder S. Jaswal and Gurjinder Jaswal** -- This case was the result of a joint investigation by the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office Financial Crimes/Intellectual Property Unit and the New Jersey Division of Taxation Office of Criminal Investigation. The investigation involved locations in Newark, East Orange, and Montville, NJ that were involved in distributing large quantities of contraband cigarettes that contained counterfeit New Jersey Cigarette Tax stamps. The counterfeit tax stamps allowed the suspects to avoid paying the applicable taxes.

After a lengthy investigation, search warrants were executed at the various locations on May 13, 2019, which resulted in the seizure of a large quantity of cigarettes containing contraband counterfeit stamps as well as unlawful cash proceeds derived from the criminal activity. The Defendants, Sukhjinder Jaswal and Gurjinder Jaswal, both pleaded guilty to the charges of Trademark Counterfeiting, Misconduct by a Corporate Official, and Unlawful Sale of Cigarettes without the required stamp.

The defendants, Sukhjinder Jaswal and Gurjinder Jaswal, both were sentenced and required to forfeit a large amount of U.S. currency which was derived from the criminal activity.
Homicide Unit

The Homicide Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office functions as both an investigative and prosecutorial unit. The Unit is staffed full-time by Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives. Unit personnel respond to all homicides, suspicious deaths and certain non-fatal shootings.

Assistant Prosecutors assigned to the Homicide Unit assist detectives in obtaining search warrants and communications data warrants. Homicide Assistant Prosecutors are on-call 24 hours a day and can prepare warrant requests at any hour of the day or night. The ability to obtain warrants and other legal documents on an emergent basis is often crucial to ensuring that all relevant evidence is collected in a manner that will withstand legal challenges and will be admissible in subsequent legal proceedings.

As an investigation proceeds, case detectives in the Unit meet with an Assistant Prosecutor to determine if probable cause exists to bring criminal charges. Moving forward, the Assistant Prosecutor and case Detective then present a complaint containing a statement of probable cause. If the probable cause is accepted by the magistrate, the complaint is signed and an arrest warrant is issued. The Assistant Prosecutor and case Detective then prepare the case for presentation to a Grand Jury. In most instances, the assigned Assistant Prosecutor will continue with the case through final disposition. Vertical prosecution of homicide cases provides continuity throughout the process. Having the same team involved with the case throughout the proceedings is also beneficial for the surviving family members.

In matters in which a juvenile is charged with a homicide offense, the Homicide Assistant Prosecutor will prosecute the matter in Family Court or, in appropriate cases, seek to prosecute the juvenile as an adult.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office continued with the Homicide/Major Crimes Task Force. Detectives from the Newark, East Orange, Irvington, Bloomfield, and Orange police departments, and the New Jersey State Police are assigned to the Homicide Unit pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and conduct investigations in the county. All homicides, death investigations and police shootings throughout the county are investigated by the Homicide Major Crimes Task Force. Having municipal detectives co-located in the Homicide Unit allows for continuity of investigations and eliminates duplicative efforts by county and local officers.

During 2019, the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office Homicide Unit investigated 82 homicides. Additionally, there were forty-seven special investigations that the Task Force oversaw. The 82 homicides in 2019 represent a decrease from the 104 homicides that occurred in 2018. Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives assigned to the Homicide Unit prepared, reviewed and executed over 400 search warrants and 350
communications data warrants.

**Notable Cases**

While many cases have been handled by the Assistant Prosecutors assigned to the Unit in 2019, below is a description of a few of the more notable cases in 2019.

In **State v. Khalil Wheeler-Weaver**, the defendant was a serial killer convicted at trial of killing Sarah Butler, Robin West and Joann Brown, desecrating their remains, and attempting to murder, kidnapping and aggravated sexual assault of a fourth woman who survived. He has not been sentenced yet, but is facing multiple life sentences.

In **State v. Hassan Todd**, the defendant fired multiple times at the victim, Elijah Roberts, in broad daylight. Witnesses from the community came forward and testified that the defendant shot and killed the victim. The jury convicted the defendant on all charges. The defendant is now serving a 65 year sentence in prison.

In **State v. Shaheed Blamahsah**, the defendant was charged with multiple counts including murder, robbery, felony murder, conspiracy and witness tampering. A jury convicted the defendant of all counts except murder – where the jury hung. The defendant was sentenced to a life sentence in prison plus an additional 5 years for witness tampering for the murder of Bruce Turner.

In **State v. Tamodd Young**, the defendant was charged with the murder of Jerome Brown and weapons possession counts. The jury convicted the defendant of all counts of the indictment including murder. The defendant is currently serving a 55 year sentence in prison.
Professional Standards Bureau

The Professional Standards Bureau (PSB) consists of two branches. The prosecution branch is led by a Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor along with three additional Assistant Prosecutors. The investigative branch is led by the Captain of Prosecutor's Detectives, who has overall command of the Bureau and reports directly to the Chief of Detectives. The investigative branch is presently staffed by two lieutenants, one sergeant and one detective.

The PSB is primarily responsible for the investigation and prosecution of all criminal misconduct involving police in Essex County and all Prosecutor's Office employees. It also conducts activities to improve the administration and delivery of police internal affairs services on a countywide basis, including internal affairs training. Two clericals oversee all office operations and manage the records system and paralegal functions of the PSB. One of those employees also manages the clerical needs of the separate Corruption Unit.

When the PSB receives an allegation of criminal conduct committed by a sworn law enforcement officer, a decision is made about whether a criminal prosecution is warranted. When a criminal prosecution is required, the case is charged and resolved pre-indictment or presented to a Grand Jury. If an indictment is returned, the PSB is responsible for the case through the plea agreement or trial. In addition, PSB personnel investigate all non-fatal police shootings and pursuits with serious bodily injury to determine whether they comply with the guidelines and directives set forth by the New Jersey Attorney General. If there is a material, factual issue regarding a police shooting, it is presented to a Grand Jury. All fatal police shootings are investigated by the Attorney General's Office. Internal responsibilities for the PSB include, but are not limited to, random drug screening, investigation of violations of rules and regulations, risk analysis management and integrity testing.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the PSB received 400 new cases. An additional 74 cases were still pending from the prior calendar year. The PSB completed 395 investigations. Of the open cases, seven resulted in criminal charges. The PSB also investigated multiple officer-involved shootings.

There were several noteworthy criminal cases in 2019. A Newark police officer was charged with aggravated manslaughter, aggravated assault, possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose and official misconduct. This case is pending trial.

Two Essex County correctional officers were charged with falsifying official records at the Essex County Jail.
A Newark police officer was charged and prosecuted for filing a false police report.

A Montclair Police Department lieutenant was charged with possession of illegal assault firearms.

An officer with the New Jersey Institute of Technology was charged and prosecuted for falsifying official records.

An Irvington police officer was prosecuted for filing a fraudulent claim for unemployment benefits.

The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), consisting of an Assistant Prosecutor and numerous PSB and ECPO investigative personnel, investigated all non-fatal officer-involved shootings. The CIRT also responded to all police pursuits resulting in serious injury and numerous in-custody deaths at the Essex County Jail and Northern State Prison. In addition, the PSB conducted a two-day county-wide training regarding all Attorney General Policies and Directives applicable to internal affairs investigators.
**Special Prosecutions Unit**

The principal mission of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office Special Prosecutions Unit is to investigate and prosecute offenders who engage in organized criminal activity. Due to the connection between drugs and violence, the Special Prosecutions Unit of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office is comprised of three sections: Narcotics/Gang Task Force, Violent Crimes, and the Intelligence Unit. Special Prosecutions is staffed full-time by one chief assistant prosecutor, two supervisory assistant prosecutors, and four assistant prosecutors. The Narcotics/Gang Task Force section is staffed full-time by one captain, one lieutenant, two sergeants, and seventeen detectives. The Intelligence Unit is comprised of one captain, one sergeant, two detectives, three investigative aides, one legal assistant, and one analyst who is on loan from the National Guard. The attorneys and investigators work closely with and assist local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

The Narcotics/Gang Task Force Section of the Special Prosecutions Unit operates both daytime and evening shifts. The Unit targets and prioritizes the most violent offender zones; gathers intelligence of confiscated firearms and enters ballistics into the National Integrated Ballistics Identification Network (NIBIN System); coordinates intelligence led policing strategies in cease fire grid areas with Newark and Irvington law enforcement officials; and conducts warrant roundups of wanted targets of gang violence, narcotics, and firearm offenses. The Narcotics Task Force actively targets mid- to upper-level narcotics distributors (those generally dealing in quantities of second-degree weight or higher) operating in Essex County. In addition to initiating investigations and prosecuting those cases, the Narcotics Task Force assists federal, state, county, and municipal law enforcement agencies with their investigations.

The Violent Crimes Section of the Special Prosecutions Unit handles county-wide carjacking investigations, non-fatal shootings, and cybercrimes, as well as animal cruelty investigations. The Violent Crime Section also assists local agencies with cases involving public alarms or public threats which typically involve threats to schools, public facilities, and infrastructure. Additionally, the attorneys assigned to Special Prosecutions provide police with legal advice to agencies county-wide on a 24-7 basis, including guidance on investigative steps, assistance with subpoenas, search warrants, communications data warrants, and other First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendment issues. The Unit also aids local agencies in need of specialized guidance on complex, sensitive, and high-profile cases, as well as county-wide and state-wide violent crime sprees and auto-theft investigations. The attorneys assigned to the unit handle all aspects of the case including investigation, search and seizure, arrest, grand jury proceedings, pretrial motions, and trials.

The Intelligence Section serves as an independent unit. The function of the Intelligence Unit is to gather data, analyze that data, and disseminate the information derived from the data. Data is received from various law enforcement agencies (Municipal, County, State, and Federal), other Intelligence units and open sources. The Intelligence Unit provides support to all investigative and legal personnel within the Essex County
Prosecutor’s Office. The Intelligence Unit also provides support to outside agencies that seek our help and assistance.

One detective, from the Intelligence Unit, is currently assigned to the New Jersey State Police Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC) and one detective is assigned to the Newark Real Time Crime Center (RTCC). The ROIC is New Jersey’s fusion center and the RTCC is one of the three mini fusion centers throughout New Jersey (which is a subsidiary of the ROIC), that have partnerships with federal, state, local law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Both detectives are working in conjunction with the New Jersey State Police, local, state, and federal agencies, to provide support and real time intelligence for events as they occur.

The Intelligence Unit also provides support by offering information and support for the following: round-up of suspects, debriefing of suspects, comparative analyses, license plate checks, gang identification and classification, and full and modified profile reports on persons, places and businesses. The Intelligence Unit tracks and maintains a database for heroin seizures, Naloxone Deployments, and overdoses within Essex County. The Intelligence Unit also disseminates a bi-monthly newsletter that encompasses a crime overview, gun recoveries, homicides, aggravated assaults, robberies, carjackings, burglaries, thefts, vehicular incidents, arrests, Megan's Law Offenders, sensitive crimes, wanted persons, and police safety & awareness and training.

2019 Accomplishments

**State v Helder Goncalves et al.** Dubbed “Operation Short Storm,” detectives conducted an extensive two-year investigation into gambling and narcotics distribution in the City of Newark. This investigation conducted in connection with a similar narcotics investigation being handled by The Essex Sherriff’s Office culminated in the execution of search warrants across the State on August 22, 2019 and August 23, 2019. Detectives seized the following:

- 51 pounds of marijuana
- 4 kilos of cocaine
- 7 weapons (including a .223 assault rifle)
- $305,372.00 cash
- 12 vehicles (including two Mercedes Benz 550 sedans)
- Several pieces of jewelry (including Rolex, Brietling, and Gucci watches)
- 50 people were charged and arrested for conspiracy to distribute CDS, gambling, and weapon charges.

**State v. Duval, et al.** Detectives investigated a firearm that was found to be involved in numerous additional shootings through the National Integrated Ballistics Identification Network (NIBIN System). The investigation resulted in seven defendants being charged with an organized financial fraud scheme involving 2nd degree theft. Detectives found large amounts of incriminating documents, checks, and credit cards. Additionally, the
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Investigation resulted in one of the defendants being charged with a shooting, one of the defendants being charged with second degree eluding and another defendant being charged with second degree escape.

State v. Karlin Grant & Dennis Anderson. Detectives engaged in a long-term investigation into Dennis Anderson and Karlin Grant for narcotics distribution which led to search warrant executions. Detectives executed a search warrant at the residence of Karlin Grant-240 South Harrison Street, Apt. 1401, East Orange, New Jersey. While conducting the search of the location detectives recovered the following:

- 971 grams of suspected MDMA/Methamphetamines
- Jewelry
- Financial documents

They further executed a search warrant at 23-25 Stecher Street, Newark, New Jersey, a property owned by Dennis Anderson. This location was identified as a stash/Manufacturing house. While conducting the search of the location detectives recovered the following:

- 3 Firearms (fully loaded)
- 8 Kilograms of grams of CDS Cocaine and Heroin

Detectives also executed a search warrant at the residence of Dennis Anderson 28 Laurel Avenue, Livingston, New Jersey. While conducting the search of the location detectives recovered the following:

- 50 grams of Marijuana
- A large amount of assorted Edible Marijuana
- Jewelry
- Financial documents
- $19,108.00 in US currency

Their “business” paperwork showed incorporating false LLCs and purchasing the stash house and other houses. Tax records showed little to no income or income from a false LLC.

State v. Fanslau. The victim was found unresponsive in Cedar Gove from an apparent overdose of heroin. The medical examiner report confirmed that the cause of death was acute intoxication due to narcotics. Several months of investigation revealed that the defendant was the person who supplied narcotics to the defendant.

State v. Leonard Barron, Ernest Barron. Detectives investigated narcotics distribution in Newark and executed search warrants at Leonard Barron age 50, and his father Ernest’s residences. Leonard Barron pled guilty to distribution of heroin and possession of the handgun and was sentenced to 8 years in prison.
State v. Shells, et al. Detectives investigated a string of violent crimes that occurred in September of 2019. The investigation resulted in charging four defendants with multiple violent crimes including three defendants charged with a robbery that occurred on September 5, 2019; two defendants being charged with a carjacking that occurred on September 20, 2019; one defendant charged with a carjacking that occurred on September 22, 2019; two defendants charged with a robbery that occurred on September 28, 2019; and three defendants charged with a robbery that occurred on September 28, 2019.
Special Victims Unit

The Essex County Prosecutor’s Office Special Victims Unit (SVU) investigates and prosecutes cases involving crimes against the most vulnerable members of the community. The Unit has a dedicated Child Abuse Unit (CAU) that investigates all cases of sexual abuse and maltreatment of children. SVU also investigates and prosecutes all cases involving the sexual assault and abuse of adults, including those with cognitive, developmental or physical disabilities. The cases are investigated under the auspices of the Sexual Assault Rape Analysis (SARA) Unit. An integral part of the SVU is the Forensic Nurse Examiner’s Program that is tasked with performing sexual assault examinations on children and adults. The SVU also has a Bias Crimes Unit that includes teams of Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives dedicated to investigating and prosecuting bias crimes.

Additionally, SVU also investigates and prosecutes allegations of Elder Abuse, Human Trafficking, and Internet Crimes Against Children Unit. Also, under the SVU umbrella is a dedicated Megan’s Law Unit, responsible for evaluating how likely an offender is to re-offend. The Megan’s Law Unit is also responsible for prosecuting individuals convicted of sexual offenses who violate the conditions imposed at sentencing, including failure to register under Megan’s Law, violations of parole supervision for life and community supervision for life.

The above units and teams were merged into the Special Victims Unit to better serve the victims through the most comprehensive investigations possible. All but the Megan’s Law Unit are located at the Wynona M. Lipman Child Advocacy Center, better known as Wynona’s House Child Advocacy Center, at 185 Washington Street in Newark. This allows for sharing of resources, information and experience between the units. The functions within the Special Victims Unit now operate under the command of a Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor who is assisted by a Supervising Assistant Prosecutor and a Captain of Detectives assisted by a Lieutenant of Detectives and Sergeant of Detectives. The units and teams are overseen by a Chief Assistant Prosecutor and Deputy Chief of Detectives. Also, available to the victims are on-site Victim Witness Advocates who work closely with the staff to ensure that the needs of the victim are met during the investigative and legal process. The goal of this holistic approach is to ensure that victims, witnesses and their families are provided with services and guidance and that their questions and concerns are addressed.

The SVU staff receives specialized training in the most advanced best practice standards to ensure that the victims’ legal rights and emotional well-being are the primary consideration. The SVU Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives are assisted by allied professionals such as forensic interviewers, forensic pediatricians, trauma focused therapists and others in specialized fields. The SVU also works with advocates representing child abuse, sex crimes, elder abuse and intellectually impaired victims. By working with allied professionals, prosecutions are enhanced and further trauma to victims is minimized.
The SVU also focuses on the training of law enforcement personnel and the education of the public through SVU seminars presented by SVU staff. The unit has presented a training seminar for all municipal, county and state law enforcement personnel working in Essex County, as well as Police Academy training. The unit also provided public education seminars to different community groups including religious organizations, multiple college groups, high school students and interns.

CHILD ABUSE UNIT

The Child Abuse Unit (CAU) was established by the Essex County Prosecutor's Office (ECPO) in 1983 in recognition of an urgent need to protect abused children and prosecute those who harm them. ECPO placed specialized law enforcement personnel with the desire, training and experience to serve abused children. Unlike most child abuse units throughout the country, the ECPO CAU serves all children up to the age of 18. The CAU is also staffed by various SVU Assistant Prosecutors, detectives and support staff. The CAU maintains a 24-hour on-call service for all county municipal detectives and New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJDCF) caseworkers (Division of Child Protection and Permanency and Institutional Abuse Investigative Unit).

The children of Essex County are our greatest resource, and the CAU is committed to their protection. To accomplish this mission, the CAU uses the most advanced methods to successfully identify, apprehend and prosecute those who commit crimes against children. When crimes against children occur, the CAU diligently pursues the arrest, indictment and conviction of those responsible. At the same time, the Constitutional rights of the accused are respected.

By their very nature, child abuse investigations and prosecutions are extremely difficult. The CAU uses a multi-disciplinary team approach to investigations and victim services. In conjunction with Wynona’s House, a non-profit organization, NJDCF, and the Metro Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Center, at Children’s Hospital of New Jersey at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, the CAU is an integral part of the Wynona M. Lipman Child Advocacy Center in Newark. Wynona’s House is only one of a few child advocacy centers in the country to have a full-time Prosecutor's Office unit, child protective service caseworkers, juvenile trauma focused therapists, forensic pediatricians and multi-disciplinary coordinators all under one roof.

The philosophy of the Lipman Center is the “Child Comes First,” and a multi-disciplinary approach is used to protect child victims from unnecessary trauma during the investigative stages of a case. Under this approach, a single interview of all victims of sexual abuse under the age of 12 years old is conducted by a highly skilled primary interviewer, while professionals from other agencies view the recorded interview in an adjacent room. The technique prevents multiple interviews by law enforcement officials.
and reduces trauma suffered by the victim. In addition, the family members of victims receive a wide range of services.

The Forensic Video Interview (FVI) of all children under the age of 12 who have been sexually and/or physically abused, neglected, or have been witnesses to violence was established in 2000. A specially trained forensic interviewer conducts the interviews, while members from NJDCF, the Metro RDTC, law enforcement and assistant prosecutor’s sit in a monitoring room nearby. In 2019 there were 181 forensic interviews conducted by ECPO and CAC personnel.

Cases are investigated either solely by the CAU or through joint investigations with municipal Detectives or staff of NJDCF. The Assistant Prosecutors assigned to the Unit handle a significant number of cases from the inception of the investigation to the case’s ultimate disposition. The Unit is responsible for investigating or co-investigating cases involving children under the age of 18 who were victims of crimes which include sexual abuse, child endangerment (abuse, neglect, cruelty, and abandonment), child pornography, interference with custody/kidnapping, and luring.

Depending upon the results of the initial interview with the child, he or she may require a medical examination and assessment by medical staff located at Wynona’s House. Wynona’s House collaborates with the Metro RDTC whose physicians have extensive training in both pediatrics and issues related to child abuse. Through the compilation of the child’s medical history and the examination, evidence may be obtained and stored for the potential prosecution of the alleged perpetrator. The physicians also provide basic, preventative healthcare services to ensure the complete recovery of victims of child abuse. Since 2018 the Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) Program added pediatric patients and began doing pediatric forensic exams.

Wynona’s House has implemented a 24-hour, 7-day a week on-call schedule for its investigative staff, thereby ensuring that all child abuse victims will be treated with the best care and concern, regardless of when they are victimized or choose to disclose.

**2019 Accomplishments**

In 2019, the Child Abuse Unit received 1,177 referrals for investigation.

**Notable cases from 2019 include:**

**State of New Jersey v. Kevin L. Jimenez** -- On February 21, 2019, the defendant, a coach for a youth basketball team pled guilty to second degree sexual assault. The defendant admitted that while working as coach for a youth basketball team, he touched the then 12-year-old victim’s intimate body parts for sexual gratification. At the time of the sexual assault, the victim was one of the players on the basketball team. The defendant was a coach for the Amateur Athletics Union (AAU), a youth basketball league which held practices at the Abundant Life Academy in Nutley and Our Lady of Sorrows in South Orange. The defendant will have to serve a sentence of eight years in
New Jersey State Prison and will not be eligible for parole until he has completed 85% of the sentence under the No Early Release Act. The defendant was also sentenced to Megan’s Law registration and Parole Supervision for Life. The case was handled by former SVU Assistant Prosecutor Amani Abdellah.

State of New Jersey v. Kenneth Palmer -- On May 7, 2019, the defendant, a paraprofessional at Jefferson Elementary School in Maplewood, was sentenced to 10 years in New Jersey State Prison subject to the No Early Release Act, for masturbating in the hallways of the school and taking an inappropriate photograph of a student. The defendant, who was from Randolph was arrested on Sept. 28, 2017 at a Shop Rite in Succasunna in a different case. During that investigation by the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office, authorities discovered on his phone videos of Palmer masturbating in front of children. It was later determined the conduct took place in the hallways of Jefferson school, where he was employed. He was charged in Essex County with multiple acts of sexual assault for engaging in an act of criminal sexual contact with himself in view of children younger than 13. Supervising Assistant Prosecutor Deborah Freier handled the case.

State v. Domingo Azcona -- On June 21, 2019, the defendant was sentenced to a 12-year New Jersey State Prison sentence subject to the No Early Release Act. The defendant plead guilty to one count of 1st degree aggravated sexual assault of a 14-year-old child. The defendant must serve 85% of his sentence before he is eligible for parole. Upon his release, he will be subject to Megan’s Law and Parole Supervision for Life. The defendant had sexually abused the child who later disclosed. The case was handled by Supervising Assistant Prosecutor Kathleen Lyons-Boswick.

State v. Luis Ramos -- On November 15, 2019 the defendant was sentenced to a 10-year New Jersey State Prison sentence subject to the No Early Release Act. The defendant plead guilty to one count of 2nd degree sexual assault by sexual contact of a child between 13 and 15 years old. The defendant must serve 85% of his sentence before he is eligible for parole. Upon his release, he will be subject to Megan’s Law and Parole Supervision for Life. The case was handled by Assistant Prosecutor Jeffrey Conrad.

State v Jaymie Soto -- On October 4, 2019, the defendant pled guilty to 2nd Degree Aggravated Assault of a child and was sentenced to six years subject to the No Early Release Act. The defendant assaulted an infant causing serious bodily injury. The case was handled by Supervising Assistant Prosecutor Kathleen Lyons-Boswick.

SEXYUAL ASSAULT RAPE ANALYSIS UNIT

Adult sexual abuse cases are investigated under the auspices of the Sexual Assault and Rape Analysis (SARA) Unit, which is one of the oldest investigative units in the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office. It originated in the 1970’s after the Newark Police Department became one of the first police departments in the nation to establish a sex
crimes unit. The SARA Unit was developed to provide legal guidance and investigative support for all municipal police departments in Essex County.

The SARA Unit originally prosecuted all cases of sexual abuse in Essex County. As the field of sex crime investigations became more specialized in the early 1980's, a separate Child Abuse Unit was developed. By 2001, after the opening of the Wynona M. Lipman Child Advocacy Center, all cases involving juvenile victims of abuse (under the age of 18) were solely prosecuted by the Child Abuse Unit. Today, the SARA Unit exclusively handles cases involving adult victims of sex crime. SARA Unit staff consists of experienced Assistant Prosecutors, Detectives, and clerical support employees, and cooperates closely with members of the onsite Forensic Nurse Examiners who manage the FNE Program.

Members of the legal and investigative staff are available 24 hours a day to assist local law enforcement with their investigations. The SARA Unit has also adopted a vertical prosecution approach, whereby prosecutors assigned to a case will handle it from start through trial. This allows for a more victim-centered approach. A victim will be given the stability of having to deal with a single investigative and prosecution team, thereby sparing the victim, the need to endlessly repeat the details of the sexually abusive act to countless people. This approach protects the victim from the need to continually relive the abusive act. The SARA Unit was involved in many cutting-edge legal issues, including the use of DNA evidence and internet-related crimes. With the establishment of a national DNA data bank by the FBI, Essex County was the first county prosecutor's office in New Jersey to have a positive match on a previously unidentified offender, as well as the first county prosecutor's office in the state to have a positive match on multiple cases committed by a serial sex offender.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the SARA Unit received 379 referrals for investigation.

Notable cases from 2019 include:

**State v. Paulo Barros** -- The victim, a 24-year-old woman reported to the Newark Police Department that she and the suspect, were in a dating relationship around January 2019. By the end of February, she broke off the relationship. They both agreed to continue to live together, but not as boyfriend and girlfriend. Victim placed a “Go-Pro” camera in her bedroom and noticed that the suspect would enter her room and sexually assault her during her sleep. Victim suffers from insomnia, which requires her to take medication to sleep. When taking this medication, victim can sleep up to 12 hours and may be very difficult to awaken. Suspect was charged with 1st degree aggravated sexual. This case is being handled by Assistant Prosecutor Jenna Gouck.
SEXUAL ASSAULT NURSE EXAMINER PROGRAM

On May 4, 2001, Assembly Bill 2083 was signed into law, providing for the establishment of a statewide FORENSIC NURSE Examiner (FNE) program. By doing so, New Jersey became one of the first states in the nation to develop a comprehensive statewide program to address the needs of sexual assault victims. The law required each County Prosecutor appoint or designate a certified sexual assault nurse examiner to serve as program coordinator for that county. The legislation also established a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) program, which provides a team approach to assisting assault victims. The SART members include specially trained local police officers, nurse and/or physician examiners and victim advocates. These programs are now being implemented in Essex County. Their overall goals are:

• To ensure timely and accurate collection of forensic evidence, thereby allowing for just determinations in sexual assault cases.

• To enhance the assessment and documentation of any medical trauma sustained by the sexual assault victim.

• To create compassionate and sensitive ways to address the physical, emotional and psychological needs of sexual assault victims.

• To coordinate the efforts of local police, hospitals, prosecutors, rape crisis centers and service providers to improve the quality of care and services offered to sexual assault victims in Essex County.

The FNE/SART Program utilizes a victim-centered approach to sexual assault cases. The overall program, which dramatically improves community response to sexual assault, offers immediate and effective attention to rape victims by nurses and /or physicians who have been specially trained to provide a compassionate, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive forensic evaluation and medical treatment. A FNE will perform a forensic examination following standardized procedures to collect and preserve relevant evidence once the victim’s immediate medical needs have been addressed. Additional support is provided by the SART members to address the legal, medical, psychological and emotional needs of the victim. Similar programs in the State have been proven to provide highly reliable evidence to maintain aggressive prosecution of sexual assault cases.

Currently, the Essex County FNE/SART program services six county hospital sites, and forensic examiners are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to respond to the medical/forensic needs of sexual assault survivors. Essex County hospitals that have agreed to participate in the FNE/SART program are: Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (Newark), Mountainside Hospital (Montclair/Glen Ridge), Saint Barnabas Medical Center (Livingston) and University Hospital, Rutgers (Newark); Clara Maas Hospital and St. Michael’s Medical Center which also affiliates with the program to provide HIV/AIDS testing and counseling without cost to victims upon request.
The Essex County Prosecutor’s Office has received grants from the New Jersey State Office of Victim Witness Advocacy to help develop the program and to assume certain operating costs. The FNE/SART Coordinator is responsible for the operation and management of the countywide program. Anyone who would like more information should contact the Program Coordinator at 973-753-1130.

2019 Accomplishments

The success of the program is evidenced by the frequency with which the program was used. In 2019, in Essex County there were a total of 283 FNE/SART activations at participating hospitals in response to the needs of sexual assault victims. Included in that number were 54 pediatric cases.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING TEAM

Human trafficking is modern day slavery that controls and exploits vulnerable members of our community. Victims are often lured into forced labor, sex trafficking and other forms of servitude using force, coercion, abduction, fraud and other methods. The victims range from juvenile runaways to undocumented immigrants. The New Jersey Human Trafficking statute, N.J.S.A. 2C:13-8, is one of the most comprehensive statutes in the country aimed at eradicating this criminal behavior.

The Human Trafficking Team is led by a senior Assistant Prosecutor and senior Detective. Investigations use the full resources of the Special Victims Unit as well as the Narcotics Task Force. The team shares intelligence and conducts joint investigations with multi-county, statewide and national human trafficking entities. It is common for an operation to include the New Jersey State Police, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, NJDCF and allied professionals in the field such as Polaris. By having the Human Trafficking Team as part of the Special Victims Unit, the victims receive the best therapeutic services possible. The social services/therapeutic component of the unit is the primary component of the unit.

ELDER ABUSE TEAM

The Elder Abuse Team is led by a senior Assistant Prosecutor, who is also a registered nurse, and a senior SVU Detective, and staffed by SVU detectives and Victim Witness Advocates. The team uses the services of experts in fields involving the unique medical and emotional needs of the elderly. The team investigates and prosecutes cases involving physical abuse, neglect, fraud and other crimes against those who are over 62-years old. The team also works with the Financial Crimes Unit and other units within the ECPO to enhance investigations.
2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Elder Abuse Team investigated eight cases involving alleged physical abuse, sexual abuse and fraud.

BIAS CRIMES UNIT

The Essex County Prosecutor’s Office recognizes the distinctive fear that is generated, and unique trauma suffered by victims of bias crimes. The ECPO considers bias crimes (also known as hate crimes) to be serious crimes that can affect an entire community. Bias crimes are aggressively prosecuted through vertical prosecution by the Bias Crimes Unit. In 2013, the Unit was placed within the Special Victims Unit to better serve the victims through the most comprehensive investigations possible and provide the best therapeutic support for the victims.

By law, a bias crime occurs when a person, group or their property is targeted for intimidation based upon race, color, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, or ethnicity. N.J.S.A. 2C:16-1. A person convicted of a bias motivated crime is subject to enhanced punishment. The Bias Crimes Unit is led by a designated Assistant Prosecutor and Detective. Bias crimes are investigated by detectives trained to conduct interviews in a sensitive manner. Victims are also referred to counseling and other assistance programs.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Bias Crimes Unit opened 29 cases.

MEGAN'S LAW UNIT

The ECPO established its Megan’s Law Unit in January of 1995 in response to state legislation designed to protect potential victims from convicted sex offenders. The law is named after Megan Kanka, a seven-year-old girl who was sexually assaulted and murdered by a neighbor who was a convicted sex offender. Simply put, the promise of Megan’s Law is that if people know about a sex offender’s presence in their community, they are better able to safeguard against potential victimization.

The Unit is responsible for evaluating how likely a convicted sex offender is to commit a new sex offense. These evaluations are made in accordance with guidelines established by the Attorney General’s Office and are triggered when a sex offender is released from prison or sentenced to probation or parole supervision for life. The seriousness of the offender’s Megan’s Law triggering conviction(s), their offense history, their personal characteristics, and their community support are all analyzed. Additionally, these reviews may include an evaluation of the offender’s prison records, school and employment records, and conduct while under parole or probation. Upon completion of this process, a report is compiled establishing a risk level. After notice of a
hearing is given to the offender, a hearing is held (on Tier 2 and Tier 3 cases, i.e., the more serious cases) before a Superior Court judge who makes the final determination of the offender’s tier classification. Depending upon the designated tier level, school and/or community notification may be initiated. Effective January 1, 2002, notification of some offenders is posted on the Internet.

There are three types of Tier classifications. Tier 1 offenders are deemed low-risk and notification is limited to the police departments where the offender lives and/or works and the State Police. Tier 2 offenders are considered moderate-risk and notification is sent to all schools, day-care centers, women’s shelters and registered community organizations within an area where the offender is “likely to encounter” potential victims. Tier 3 offenders are considered high-risk and all residences, businesses, schools, day care centers, women’s shelters and registered community organizations within the offender’s “likely to encounter” zone are given notice. The court determines the geographic scope of notification and the types of institutions to be notified in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cases. Local law enforcement agencies and the State Police also receive notice in these cases.

With respect to sex offender publication on the Internet, all Tier 3 offenders and certain Tier 2 offenders are eligible for publication on the New Jersey Sex Offender Internet Registry. As previously mentioned, all Tier 2 and Tier 3 offenders are entitled to a judicial hearing and it is the judge who makes the final determination whether an offender will be listed on the Internet and what type of community notification will be made. If the court rules that a case is Internet eligible, the offender’s name, county of residence, date of birth, physical attributes, type of conviction, modus operandi and photograph will be published. His street address and the municipality in which he lives will also be included. In addition to Internet publication, community notification will also be ordered per the “likely to encounter” standard. If the court rules that an offender is not eligible for the Internet but still finds that they are a Tier 2 or Tier 3 offender, then notification will proceed as outlined above.

The ECPO’s Megan’s Law Unit is the busiest Megan’s Law Unit in New Jersey. With over 1,500 sex offenders residing in within the county at any given time, Essex County has more registered sex offenders residing within it than any other County.

Due to the transient nature of a significant portion of the sex offender population in Essex County, the number of court hearings required and conducted can be voluminous. This is because even after the tiering process is completed by the issuance of a court order, a sex offender is entitled by law to a new court hearing every time he or she moves to a new address within Essex County, or moves into Essex County from elsewhere. The Megan’s Law Unit must then conduct a new notification regarding the offender, encompassing his or her new area of residence. Transient sex offenders also consume time, resources and manpower spent on locating, tracking and verifying their whereabouts on a continuing basis. Additionally, a Megan’s Law file can only be closed if a registered sex offender dies or is relieved by way of a court order of all Megan’s Law obligations. Thus, the overall number of Megan’s Law cases or files being handled by
the Unit increases on an annual basis.

In July 2009, the Megan’s Law Unit launched the Megan’s Law Fugitive Initiative. This program is a collaborative and systematic effort by ECPO, along with federal, state, county and local law enforcement agencies, to make our communities safer from sex offenders. The Initiative is a team effort focused on the apprehension of Megan’s Law offenders from Essex County with outstanding warrants, and those who are in violation of the statutes governing mandatory registration with the appropriate law enforcement agencies, as well as sex offenders who are non-compliant with the conditions of Community Supervision for Life where applicable. The initiative is modeled after the U.S. Marshals’ Operation Falcon Fugitive Program, which is based on the collaboration of various law enforcement agencies to achieve a common goal.

The Megan’s Law Unit also focuses on the training of law enforcement personnel and the education of the public through Megan’s Law seminars. The unit has hosted a daylong training seminar for all municipal, county and state law enforcement personnel working in Essex County. The unit also provided public education seminars to eight different community groups including the Essex County Community and Clergy Coalition and the Mayor and Council of the Township of Nutley.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, there were approximately 1,750 sex offenders in Essex County. The Megan’s Law Unit also indicted approximately 100 sex offenders. This number represents a steady volume in the number of violations sex offenders in Essex County have committed pertaining to Megan’s Law, Parole Supervision for Life, Community Supervision for Life and the New Jersey Sex Offender Monitoring Act.