**Business Administration Unit**

The staff of the Business Administration Unit oversee a $38.2 million operating budget, along with Essex County Prosecutor’s Office's criminal forfeiture accounts. Additionally, the Unit oversees the Office's seven major grant-funded programs totaling more than $1 million per year. The Unit provides crucial infrastructure 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

**2019 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 continued its ongoing coordination with the County of Essex in improving facilities for our staff. Following several major unit relocations in 2017 and 2018, the Office continued in 2019 to coordinate smaller personnel relocations and office facility upgrades.

The Unit also 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 coordinates the disposal of paper files that are no longer needed, and ensures their proper disposal considering the potentially sensitive nature of certain material. Certain older paper files that are necessary to retain continue to be 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.

In 2019, the Business Administration Unit actively collaborated with information technology staff from both ECPO and the County of Essex in order to help the County implement new digital information systems for its personnel, payroll and purchasing management functions. Administration staff were trained in the use of these new systems and the implementation and change-over to these systems was successful.

The Business Administration Unit continued in 2019 working 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.

Business Administration Unit personnel continued to provide support in maintaining and updating the Office's web site, www.njecpo.org. The Unit also continues to assist in the maintenance of the web site's WordPress content management platform. In 2019, the Unit also continued to provide ECPO management with detailed statistical data on-demand, along with monthly reports of key indicators that measure overall production volume and outcome performance.
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 aimed at offering children and teens positive alternatives and interventional strategies aimed at preventing delinquency. The Community Justice Unit provided workshops to over 5,000 Essex County residents in 2019. Workshop topics included:

- Bullying
- Careers in the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office
- Criminal Justice System
- Expungements
- Gang Awareness
- Internet Safety
- Overview of the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office
- Sexual Assault Prevention

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Community Justice Unit partnered with the Irvington Neighborhood Improvement Association on June 18th to provide a forum on substance abuse treatment services in Essex County. Acting Essex County Prosecutor Theodore Stephens, II, discussed Operation Helping Hand, a diversionary program for drug addicts. Representatives from Saint Barnabas Medical Center, Essex County’s Department of Community Health Services and the Alcohol, Drug Abuse Prevention Team of Essex County discussed substance abuse services.

This was the 18th consecutive year in which ECPO held a 5-week summer internship program to expose high school students to careers in law, law enforcement and government. The 2019 Summer Youth The internship Program ran from July 8 through August 9. Thirty high school juniors from Essex County participated in this 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.

The Community Justice Unit worked with ADAPT (Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Team of Essex County) and Essex County’s Department of Health Services on October 17th to provide a half day information session on substance abuse resources to clergy and community members. Acting Essex County Prosecutor Stephens provided attendees with an overview of Operation Helping Hand. Over one hundred clergy and community members attended the half-day session held at Bella Italia Restaurant in Orange.
Some 600 middle school students from Essex County attended the ECPO youth conference entitled: “What’s it All About?” World Against Violence (W.A.V.) at Caldwell University on December 19. Students participated in workshops on making positive choices, substance abuse prevention, teen dating, and cyber safety. Over 30 representatives from various social service and youth agencies provided students with information on educational and recreational resources.
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 municipal, state and federal levels
- Working closely with the Open Public Records custodian for the ECPO
- Providing current information to public officials and government agencies on relevant 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

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Media Relations Office continued to deal with the digital age of news in which reporters are looking for timely and accurate information at a rapid pace and are eager to update significant breaking news stories around the clock. Increasingly they are attempted to accomplish their goals with smaller staffs and less of an ability to do first-hand reporting.

The Media Relations Office works to strike a balance between competing interests. On one side of the equation is the right of victims and the need to protect the integrity of investigations. On the other side, is the public’s right to know.

Transparency is critical to maintaining public confidence in the Office. 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. It is a delicate balance.
Some of the cases that garnered significant press coverage during 2019 included the following:

**State v. James R. Ray, III** – This is an ongoing case that started in 2018. New York lawyer James Ray, III, 55, is accused of fatally shooting Angela Bledsoe, the 44-year-old mother his daughter, at the home they shared on North Mountain Avenue in Montclair on Oct. 23, 2018. He was apprehended in Cuba on Oct. 31, 2018 and subsequently returned to New Jersey to face trial.

The Essex County Prosecutor’s Office working with the FBI, the Montclair Police Department, Allentown, PA Police Department, the New Jersey State Police, Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Embassy in Havana, and Enforcement and Removal Operations Customs were able to bring Ray back to the United States where he is still awaiting trial because of pretrial motions and other legal proceedings.

He is charged with murder and weapons offenses. Ray practiced at The Law Firm of Ray and Associates on Fulton Street in Manhattan.

**State v. Khalil Wheeler Weaver** – In this case serial killer Khalil Wheeler Weaver was found guilty in December 2019 of killing 20-year-old college student Sarah Butler of Montclair, Robin West, 19, of Philadelphia and Joann Brown, 33, of Newark. He was also found guilty of the sexual assault and attempted murder of a third woman. At the time of the murder, Wheeler Weaver was working as a security guard for Sterling Securities and had dreams of becoming a police officer. At trial, the state argued successfully that the murders began on Aug. 31, 2016 with the murder of West and continued until the murder of Butler.

It was after Butler’s murder that the investigation revealed that all the victims had been in contact with Wheeler Weaver prior to their deaths. DNA evidence matching Wheeler Weaver was found under Butler’s fingernails. Much of the case was based on geolocation data that placed Wheeler-Weaver’s phone at or near the scene of the crimes.

Sentencing is pending.

**State v. Joseph Porter** -- In this case, Porter, 27, of Elizabeth is charged with a Maplewood double murder. He is accused of killing David Kimowitz, a 40-year-old comedy club owner and comedian, along with the family’s nanny 26-year-old, Karen L. Bermudez-Rodriguez, in the Kimowitz’s Maplewood home. Porter, who dated the au pair, is accused of fatally stabbing the two. The wife and two preschool children were at the Jersey Shore at the time of the fatal attack.

The case is awaiting trial.

**State v. Lamont Stephens** – In March of 2019 Stephens, who was on the FBI’s most wanted list, was returned to New Jersey to face trial for the Oct. 17, 2014 murder of his
then fiancée Olga DeJesus, a Newark mother of two. He also killed the family dog, a chihuahua.

Stephens was arrested in Prince George County Maryland, where he was also charged with the murder of Natina Kiah, 40. He killed her and her cat. He had been living with the woman who he befriended while living at a homeless shelter. She worked at the shelter as a security guard.

State v. Jovanny Crespo – A Newark police officer, Crespo was charged with aggravated manslaughter for the Jan. 2018 killing of Gregory Griffin, 46, who was shot by Crespo as he fled from police following a traffic stop. A second man in the car was also shot but survived his injuries. The case garnered national attention because Crespo is the first New Jersey police officer to be charged with a homicide for actions taken during the course of employment.
Victim-Witness Advocacy Office

The Essex County Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy was started by the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office in 1982 pursuant to New Jersey law, which requires the county Victim-Witness Coordinator to implement and provide services to crime victims. The Office’s primary mandate is to fulfill the provisions of the New Jersey Constitution and New Jersey statutes which require:

- That crime victims be treated with dignity, compassion and respect.
- That victims be informed and consulted in matters such as plea bargaining.
- That victims be given the right to be heard at all stages of the criminal justice process.

The Essex County Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy helps victims and witnesses deal with immediate life needs, especially those who live within Essex County’s lower income neighborhoods, who are most at-risk of experiencing violent crime and whose lives are most vulnerable to economic and personal disruption. The Office helps them to find the resources needed to maintain basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, employment, transportation, daycare for pre-school children, etc. It also assists victims and witnesses in dealing with the psychological trauma of crime (which cuts across all economic and social strata) and helps them obtain professional assistance as needed. The Office then helps victims and witnesses to understand and fulfill their rights and responsibilities within the criminal justice system, providing continual communication and coordination regarding case progress and participation in legal proceedings.

As appropriate, the Office accompanies victims to court. Office personnel also assist victims in gaining economic compensation for their losses through insurance, restitution and the Victims of Crime Compensation Board. The Office assures victims and witnesses that it is equally concerned with their overall well-being as with obtaining the conviction of the offender.

The Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy has a qualified staff with significant training and professional counseling experience in emergency assistance, crisis management and interpersonal violence. The staff includes a Victim-Witness Coordinator, Victim-Witness Counselors, and Clerical Assistants. The Coordinator meets bi-weekly with the Counselors to review and evaluate cases, discuss progress and develop service plans to ensure procedural and programmatic compliance with state and federal regulations. The Office is supported in part by state and federal government grants.

2019 Accomplishments

In 2019, the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office assisted 10,035 victims and witnesses, initiating approximately 110,000 items of correspondence on their behalf. Office staff continued its 80-hour intimate partner violence training program in 2019. The program,
entitled “Sanctuary,” is designed to provide 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 meet three times a week over a seven-month period. Interactive exercises, which include role plays, case studies, scenarios, simulations, individual and group activities, video presentations, field trips, and court-watch activities, afford program participants the opportunity to develop and practice the skills covered during the training sessions. Since its inception in 2010, Sanctuary has graduated over 380 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 2019, through which approximately 89 program clients and their families were assisted. This program 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, 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. (Victim Information Notification Everyday).

In the revised structure and format of the website section, the information is arranged alphabetically by victim’s crime type. Unit staff are also developing a digital application that delivers information about local support services available to Essex County crime victims via a desktop, smart phone, and/or tablet. Crime victims will be able to enter the service needed and a zip code and receive agency information in their area. The app is equipped with agency locations, hours of operation, services provided and fees (if applicable), maps of walking and driving routes, parking areas near the agency where the crime victim is seeking services, and links to New Jersey Transit bus and train schedules for public transportation information. The app is scheduled to launch in the fall of 2020.

Further, the Victim Witness Unit conducted 21 community outreach forums throughout 2019. Approximately 200 community residents, including high school and college students, 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 2019. Approximately 650 toys, board and video games, dolls, electronics, balls, and clothing items were collected and distributed to twelve social services agencies who, in turn, distributed toys to those in need residing in Essex County.
Adult Trial Investigation Staff

Reception Desk