

Business Administration Unit

The staff of the Business Administration Unit oversee a \$41.1 million operating budget, along with Essex County Prosecutor's Office's criminal forfeiture accounts. Additionally, the Unit oversees the Office's 8 major on-going grant-funded programs and several special grants 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, employee assistance, and criminal case file storage and retrieval. Our capital equipment inventory — including copiers, telephones, fax machines, desk units, printers 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, budgeting decisions, 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
- Personnel policy oversight, monitoring and assistance
- Purchase request processing and shipping receipt
- Supply storage, inventory, and distribution
- Liaison to County, State, and Federal government offices

2021 Accomplishments

The outbreak of the COVID pandemic in March of 2020 provided special challenges to the ECPO Administration function. As the pandemic evolved, changed and continued throughout 2021, the Administration Unit's response continued to respond and adapt. In addition to planning for office space that relieves crowding and promotes efficiency, the Business Administration Unit had to coordinate with the County of Essex to accommodate the changing federal and state guidelines and County policy regarding social distancing and facility sanitizing, employee testing, and the enforcement of policies regarding employees who have contracted or have been exposed to COVID. The Unit continued to coordinate protective facility measures, and to support work-at-home arrangements. A key challenge was in preparing for the phased return to the

SUPPORT UNITS

office from work at-home; by September, the office was back to full-time office staffing. The return to the office was a success thanks in part to Administration's support. However, by December, the rise in new cases stemming from the Omicron variant caused the Office to return temporarily to a partial work-at-home schedule for many employees.

Throughout this time, Administration staff worked to maintain its key role in budget planning, procurement oversight, hiring processing, personnel management, facilities repair and improvements, and grant funding oversight. Staff helped to minimize and overcome the pandemic-related disruptions that temporarily slowed our key investigative and prosecutorial functions, and allowed ECPO personnel to maintain productivity whether working in-office or remote from home. The staff of the Administration Unit will continue to help our Office respond and adapt to the challenges that this ongoing pandemic may yet bring.



Special Agent Eapen Mathen

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 COVID pandemic devastated our communities beginning in March 2020. Despite the physical closings of schools, organizations, and businesses; we continued to provide outreach programs to the community. Programs were modified from in-person to virtual and hybrid to comply with The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines on the COVID pandemic.

The Community Justice Unit provided in person and virtual workshops on the following topics:

- Careers in the Essex County Prosecutor's Office
- Criminal Justice System
- Use of Force
- Gang Awareness
- Internet Safety
- Operation Helping Hand
- Overview of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office
- Sexual Assault Prevention

2021 Accomplishments

During 2021, the unit held a series of virtual town hall events to educate the public on the topic of opioid abuse and substance abuse treatment under Operation Helping Hand. The town hall series was conducted in partnership with the Essex County Division of Community Health Services and Family Connections ADAPT Coalition (Alcohol and Prevention Team of Essex County). Virtual town hall meetings were held on March 24, 2021, in East Orange, April 28 in Bloomfield, May 26 in Irvington, June 15 in Belleville, July 14 in Newark and Aug. 4 in West Orange.

This was the 20th consecutive year in which ECPO held a summer internship program to expose high school students to careers in law, law enforcement and government. The 2021 Summer Youth Internship Program was held virtually from July 6th through August 13th, 2021. Forty-five high school juniors from Essex County participated in this informative program where they participated in college and career readiness workshops. Interns learned about the role and functions of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office. Interns also participated in workshops that focused on making positive choices, substance abuse prevention, gang awareness and teen dating violence prevention.

SUPPORT UNITS



Executive Assistant Prosecutor Gwendolyn J. Williams

The Community Justice Unit partnered with ADAPT (Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Team of Essex County) and Essex County's Department of Community Health Services to hold the 7th annual Interfaith Symposium. The Interfaith Symposium was titled, "Unmasking Our New Reality: Empowering Faith Communities to Reduce at Risk Behaviors and Addiction." The symposium was held virtually on October 21st to provide information sessions on substance abuse resources to clergy and community members. Sessions were also geared towards emotional and spiritual wellness during the COVID pandemic.

In person community outreach sessions were held to provide the public with substance abuse treatment information and resources under Operation Helping Hand. On November 9, 2021, the Community Justice Unit held an Operation Helping Hand outreach initiative at Lincoln Park in Newark from 9:00 a.m. through 2:00 p.m. Representatives from Integrity House, Essex County Department of Family Assistance & Benefits and Covenant House participated in the day-long event. On November 15, a subsequent Operation Helping Hand outreach program was held at 7th Avenue and Stone Street in Newark. This operation was in collaboration with the

City of Newark's Hope One, affiliated with the Newark Police Department. Social service agencies including Integrity House, Essex County Department of Family Assistance & Benefits and Covenant House, Hyacinth Foundation, Amera Group and Whole Life Family Church had information tables to interact with the community. Amera Group provided free COVID testing for community members.

A town hall meeting on sexual assault prevention on college campuses was held on December 14, 2021 from 2:00 p.m. through 3:30 p.m. The town hall meeting was held in collaboration with staff from the Special Victims Unit. Kathleen Lyons-Boswick, Supervising Assistant Prosecutor provided the presentation. Staff and students from local colleges and universities attended the information session along with staff members from non-profit organizations.

On December 14, the Community Justice Unit in collaboration with the Domestic Violence Unit also held a virtual town hall meeting on protection orders. Unit Director / Assistant Prosecutor Dawn Simonetti provided the informative session from 6:00 p.m. through 7:00 p.m.

The Community Justice Unit held a youth conference entitled: "What's it All About?" World Against Violence (W.A.V.) to address issues affecting middle school students on December 17, 2021. Two hundred and fifty middle school students from Essex County registered to participate in the virtual youth conference. Students participated in workshops that focused on coping skills during the COVID pandemic, entrepreneurship, making positive choices, substance abuse prevention, and cyber safety.

SUPPORT UNITS

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. Approximately one fourth of all felonies in New Jersey are prosecuted through the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

The responsibilities of the Media Relations Office 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 and the ECPO Internal Office newsletter
- Assisting with community outreach efforts

2021 Accomplishments

In 2021, the Media Relations Office continued to respond to changes brought on by COVID, a global pandemic that significantly altered the methods used to communicate with the press and the public. While some in-person press conferences occurred in 2021, the ECPO continued to primarily rely on virtual press conferences, email blast, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate with the press and public. Many newsworthy trials and court proceedings were delayed because of the pandemic but some in-person proceedings occurred with limited public access. Despite shifts in the delivery of information, the Media Relations Office continued to strike a balance between competing interests. Those interests include the rights of the victims and the public and the need to protect the integrity of investigations. As always, the rights of defendants are extraordinarily important under our system of justice. As a result of COVID, health and safety concerns factored into this delicate equation.

Working with the Judiciary, the defense bar, and other stakeholders, we were able to balance those interests and continue the transparency and responsiveness that is critical to maintaining public confidence in the Office.

The following cases are some of the high-profile cases resolved in 2021:

State v. Khalil Wheeler-Weaver – In this case, serial killer Khalil Wheeler-Weaver was found guilty in December 2019 of killing three women and attempting to kill a fourth. The victims were: 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 a private security company 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. Much of the case was based on geolocation data that placed Wheeler-Weaver's phone at or near the scene of the crimes. On Oct. 6, 2021, Wheeler-Weaver was sentenced to 160 years in New Jersey State Prison. The delay in sentencing was primarily due to COVID.

State v. Lamont Stephenson – In March of 2019, Stephenson, a fugitive 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. Stephenson was arrested in Prince George County Maryland after he allegedly murdered Natina Kiah, 40. He is accused of killing her and his cat in her Washington, D.C. home. He had been living with Kiah. They met while he was living at a Washington, D.C. homeless shelter. She worked as a security guard at the shelter. This case has not gone to trial yet.

Because trials were halted, many of the high-profile cases that garnered press attention in 2020 remained on the docket in 2021, including the following:

SUPPORT UNITS

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 of his daughter. The murder occurred on Oct. 23, 2018, at the home they shared on North Mountain Avenue in Montclair. 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, the Allentown, PA Police Department, the New Jersey State Police, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Embassy in Havana, and Customs Enforcement and Removal Operations were able to bring Ray back to the United States where he is still awaiting trial.

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. The murder occurred in the Kimowitz's Maplewood home. Porter, who dated the au pair, is accused of fatally stabbing the two. Kimowitz's wife and two preschool children were at the Jersey Shore at the time of the fatal attack. The case is awaiting trial.

State v. Jovanny Crespo – A Newark police officer, Crespo was charged with aggravated manslaughter for the Jan. 2018 killing of Gregory Griffin, 46. Griffin 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 on the job.

New newsworthy cases charged in 2021:

Louis Santiago – An off-duty Newark police officer was charged with vehicular homicide after hitting, Damian Z. Dymka, a 29-year-old pedestrian, while on the Garden State Parkway on Nov.1.

Jamie Moore – In Oct. 2021, when this case began, it appeared to be a tragic tale of a missing teenager. Moore presented herself as a tearful mother seeking help from the public to find her teenage daughter. By Nov. 12, Moore was arrested by detectives from the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit and the East Orange Police Department and charged with abuse and neglect.

The mother made statements to reporters that garnered widespread attention. The ECPO took over the case and launched an investigation which led to the daughter being found at a homeless shelter in New York City. Once police located the daughter, she made statements that resulted in the mother being charged with two counts of second degree endangering the welfare of a child. The endangering charges include allegations of physical abuse and neglect. Among other things, the

mother was accused of physically assaulting her 14-old-daughter, forcing her to logout of online school during the 2020-21 school year and failing to enroll her in school during the 2021-22 school year when they moved to another community. The case is pending.



Katherine B. Carter
Public Information Officer Essex County Prosecutor's Office

SUPPORT UNITS



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 Office. 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 Advocates and Clerical Assistants. The coordinator meets bi-weekly with the advocates 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.

2021 Accomplishments:

In 2021, the Victim-Witness Advocacy Office assisted 8,936 victims and witnesses, initiating approximately 95,000 items of correspondence on their behalf despite the demands the global pandemic. Unit staff remained accessible to county residents seeking vital criminal justice-related services while working in office and remotely.

The Unit continued to expand its formal relocation program in 2021, through which approximately 1,213 program clients and their families were assisted. This program advocates on behalf of 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, security, and protection. 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

SUPPORT UNITS

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 also developed 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 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.

Further, the Victim Witness Unit conducted and/or participated in fifteen community outreach forums throughout 2021. Approximately 400 community partners representing the business, educational, law enforcement, emergency/social service, mental health, and social justice sectors, 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 2021. Through the generosity of office staff, six local social services agencies benefited from our collective efforts and received toys, gift cards, and monetary support that helped each agency to expand their holiday outreach efforts to assist needy families residing in Essex County.

COVID Food Distribution Program



Acting Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens and other ECPO staff at East Orange Food Distribution Program. This program and others sponsored by the County of Essex aided communities that were severely disrupted by COVID. ECPO staff participated in multiple events during 2021 under the direction of Acting Prosecutor Stephens.



Operation Helping Hand



Operation Helping Hand is an initiative sponsored and funded by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office. The goal is to fight the opioid crisis by disrupting the cycle that causes those addicted to continue to commit crimes to support their drug habit. Working with local law enforcement the Essex County Prosecutor's Office has identified drug "hot spots" – places known for drug activity – and targets those areas for arrests and or intervention. When drug users are arrested, they are immediately offered the opportunity to enter drug treatment. Such opportunities are also afforded through non-arrest operations. Arrangements are made for transportation and other services. Participants are tracked as they go through the treatment process. The program also includes law enforcement training, community outreach, and public awareness measures in Essex County.





Record Room



The ECPO Record Room is responsible to maintain, track, store and archive the many thousand criminal case files generated each year within the County, so as to help ECPO carry out its critical role in the criminal justice system.



Acting Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens II, with Acting First Assistant Romesh Sukhdeo (left) and Acting Chief of Detectives Mitchell McGuire III.

