



# Morris County Prosecutor's Office 2023 Annual Report



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Morris County Prosecutor's Office



MORRIS COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE  
2023 YEAR END REPORT

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# About the Morris County Prosecutor's Office

The Morris County Prosecutor is the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for Morris County, New Jersey. The Prosecutor maintains The Office of the County Prosecutor, which is located in the Morris County Administration and Records Building at 10 Court Street in Morristown, as well as the Special Operations Division at an offsite location.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO) is staffed by approximately 170 members in legal, investigative, and support functions. In addition to the Prosecutor, the staff consists of assistant prosecutors, sworn law enforcement officers who serve as investigators, prosecutor's agents, victim/witness counselors, and clerical employees. In 2023, the MCPO opened 2,014 prosecutions and reviewed 2,548 criminal matters. That same year, 500 cases were concluded by plea, and eight jury trials were held.

Morris County is a jurisdiction of over 500,000 residents living in an area of nearly 482 square miles. There are 39 municipalities in Morris County, ranging in population size from Parsippany-Troy Hills Township (population of approximately 56,162 residents) to the Borough of Victory Gardens (approximately 1,582 residents). Within the county, 37 municipalities maintain an independent police department. It is also home to the Morris County Sheriff's Office, under the leadership of Sheriff James Gannon.

Morris County was created on March 15, 1739, when it split from Hunterdon County by an act of the colonial legislature. The county – which included modern-day Sussex and Warren counties and consisted at the time of four townships - was named for Colonel Lewis Morris, the first governor of the Royal Province of New Jersey. The village of New Hanover, in Morris Township, was selected as the county seat and renamed Morristown.



*Morris County Courthouse 1913*

Known as “the military capital of the American Revolution,” Morris County has consistently been an emblem of the founding principles of the United States and the freedoms that continue to drive its identity. Morristown, once home to General George Washington and his Continental Army, has been a location for unwavering honest government and order. In fact, it was Morris County that was home to the Continental Army for two different winters; a safe location just the right distance away from British-occupied New York. Although the land may not look the same as it did during the times of Washington, historical sites such as the Ford Mansion (Washington's Headquarters) and Jockey Hollow work in tandem with newer structures to uphold Morris County's timeless values and charm.

The first Morris County court met on March 25, 1740, in Jacob Ford's tavern in Morristown. In 1776, Jacob Ford and Samuel Tuthill were appointed the county's first judges.

There were very few lawyers in the 1700s. People often went to court without representation and were subject to only the judge and jury. The prosecuting officers were court employees who drafted indictments and sent them to the Grand Jury. The Attorney General acted as the Prosecutor of the Pleas, representing the State in county trials. A County Court of Common Pleas heard cases between two people, as opposed to cases involving the state and an individual. At this time, the court was held in the tiny Morris County Court House located on the Morristown Green close to the First Presbyterian Church (a marker stands on the site today).

In 1822, the State General Assembly of the State of New Jersey created the role of the Prosecutor of the Pleas. The Court of Quarter Session appointed a Prosecutor of Pleas to each county once every five years. On December 20, 1824, George K. Drake became the first Prosecutor of the Pleas for Morris County. Years later, the Governor of the State of New Jersey, rather than the Court of Quarter Sessions, was designated to appoint the Prosecutor of Pleas.

Throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, the Prosecutor dealt with crimes ranging from petty theft, to murder and robbery. The title and role of the Prosecutor of Pleas continued until 1948 when a statutory change modified the title to County Prosecutor. John D. Collins, the twenty-third Prosecutor, is the first in the line of our modern idea of the County Prosecutor. Changes to the law by the Legislature during the mid-twentieth century reclassified many criminal offenses, which generally left the more serious crimes for the attention of the County Prosecutor and lesser crimes to the municipal courts.

Robert J. Carroll is the 34th Morris County Prosecutor.

# A Message from Prosecutor Robert J. Carroll



On behalf of the people serving in the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, I welcome you to our Office's 2023 Annual Report. Last year we began posting this report on our website so that the public may have an opportunity to read about the many varied functions of a Prosecutor's Office. I hope you will find the report enlightening and informative. I trust it will explain my role as Prosecutor, and the roles of my staff members, in the Criminal Justice System. At all times we strive for fairness and justice in all prosecutions, to listen to victims' voices, and, most importantly, to protect all of our citizens in this complex, fast-moving, and multi-faceted world.

Continuing to recognize the impact that mental health issues have on all aspects of society, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office has expanded the use of alternative dispositions for eligible offenders. Utilization of proven effective programs such as Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), the Mental Health Diversion Program, the Veterans Diversion Program, Recovery Court, are options that may, in some cases, be appropriate for some offenders. Many of these programs have come about as a result of a cooperative effort by our Office, the Sheriff's Office, and the Judiciary. In each, an offender's criminal conduct is

carefully evaluated, and if eligible, an offender is provided with specialized services which are proving to be an effective remedy against recidivism.

This year we instituted a new program known as ARRIVE (Alternative Responses to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation) Together. We partnered with the NJ Office of the Attorney General to introduce this program in Morris County and we are excited about the initial results. The program pairs responding police officers with mental health professionals in situations that may benefit from the combined response of a trained law enforcement officer along with the experience of a specialist trained to deal with a subject in the throes of a mental health crisis. We also have prioritized community outreach and communication, student safety and anti-

bias programs, senior citizen anti-scam education, and continuing specialized education for law enforcement personnel. These programs are supervised by our talented legal staff of Assistant Prosecutors who work tirelessly, with coordination from our Support Staff and Victim-Witness Advocates, all to ensure justice is achieved for both crime victims and violators.

In addition to introducing innovative approaches to addressing criminal conduct and its societal origins, our Office is dedicated to intelligence and information sharing among law enforcement and to providing assistance when needed by a municipality. Our Detectives are outfitted with the latest technology and equipment, and they are trained and experienced in many specific areas. Some of those areas of specialized investigation are Homicides, Illegal Firearms, Internet Crimes Against Children, Human Trafficking, Burglaries, Distribution of Controlled Dangerous Substances, and Vehicle Thefts. Because of the commitment of our Office, the Sheriff's Office, the Office of Emergency Management, and all of the municipal police departments in Morris County, law enforcement's responses can be mobilized efficiently and rapidly in any given situation. In addition, we share intelligence and work closely with our Federal and State law enforcement partners.

We would especially like to thank our citizens for their continued support and vigilance. An alert citizenry is a vital asset to law enforcement in preventing crime and keeping our communities safe. Let us all look out for each other.

# Mission Statement

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office commits its resources in partnership with the law enforcement community and citizens of Morris County to promote a safe and secure environment, free from the fear of crime. The members of this office serve to minimize the impact of the criminal justice system upon the lives of victims, witnesses, and their families by helping them overcome the effects of crime, to help them navigate their involvement in the criminal justice system, and to help them support successful prosecutions.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office, as the chief law enforcement agency in Morris County, provides leadership and supervision over the chiefs of police and municipal prosecutors with a view to ensure the effective, efficient, and uniform enforcement and prosecution of the criminal laws throughout Morris County.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office is tasked with using all reasonable and lawful thoroughness for the detection, arrest, indictment and conviction of offenders against the laws of the State of New Jersey, as well as strengthening the relationship between law enforcement and the public it serves and improving the quality of life in Morris County. The Prosecutor has overall command of the agency and is the final authority in all matters of policy, procedure, special orders, discipline and promotion. In line of authority after the Prosecutor are the First Assistant Prosecutor and the Chief of Detectives.



(L-R) First Assistant Prosecutor Maggie M. Calderwood, Prosecutor Robert J. Carroll, and Chief of Detectives Robert M. McNally.



## Prosecutor Robert J. Carroll

Morris County Prosecutor Robert J. Carroll is a veteran attorney, having held numerous, sensitive law enforcement positions in New Jersey state and county government during his over four decades of public and private service. Starting as an Essex County Investigator in the early 1970s, Carroll later went to law school and became an Essex County Assistant Prosecutor. He initially worked in the Trial and Appellate sections, and later served as Assistant Prosecutor/Supervisor of the Organized Crime and Special Prosecutions section in that agency. In 1980, he was selected to become a Deputy Attorney General in the elite Special Prosecutions section of the NJ Division of Criminal Justice, a unit he later headed. As a Deputy AG Section Chief, Carroll investigated and prosecuted major illegal drug operations, public and governmental corruption and Organized Crime enterprises and specialized in electronic surveillance and undercover operations.

Thereafter, Carroll was appointed in 1986 to a Supervising Deputy Attorney General, in the Statewide Organized Crime and Racketeering Task Force (OCRTF) in the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. He was later promoted to task force Chief/Assistant Attorney General in 1989. In that capacity, Carroll investigated and prosecuted major New Jersey criminal enterprises and public corruption. The OCRTF successfully investigated and prosecuted hundreds of organized crime members, associates and their criminal "crews." Among the convictions of major figures, Carroll's unit investigated, tried and secured a conviction of the infamous "Iceman" killer, Richard Kuklinski, for several brutal murders. This case has been popularized in pop culture and media. He also led investigations into five La Cosa Nostra Crime families and personally prosecuted the hierarchy of the New Jersey Lucchese Crime Family, achieving a major RICO-murder conviction.

Throughout his career, Carroll focused on developing investigational harmony and avoiding conflicts in prosecutions and field level operations. For his leadership role in organized crime cases and his efforts to create effective interagency team building, he has received numerous outstanding performance awards from many agencies, including the FBI, NJ State Police, Secret Service, N.J. Division of Criminal Justice, U.S. Marshals Service, U.S. Attorney's Office, ATF, the Federal Organized Crime Strike Force, and numerous Prosecutor's Offices.

Carroll has acted as an instructor for a number of law enforcement institutions, including the New Jersey State Police Academy, the Essex County Police Academy, and has educated hundreds of state and tribal leaders in law enforcement and anti-corruption methods. Before his current appointment as Morris County Prosecutor, Carroll served as Director of the Law Department for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, the largest toll road authority in North America. He previously also served as Acting Sussex County Prosecutor. He also supervised thousands of individual and corporate background investigations while serving as a Chairman of a Gaming Commission and Compliance Officer for major Native American Gaming Facilities.

Carroll earned a Bachelor's Degree from Wake Forest University, where he was a scholarship football player and Dean's List student. He holds a J.D. from the Seton Hall University School of Law and is a member of the New Jersey State and Federal Bars. He also holds an Executive Certificate for Leadership Development from Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations where he also taught a course on labor ethics and preventing corruption in labor unions.

# Prosecutor

First Assistant Prosecutor

Chief of Detectives

Chief of Staff

Office Manager

Deputy Chief of Detectives

Finance

Executive Assistant (2)

PIO/OPRA

## Courts & Administration Division

General Investigations Unit,  
Pre-Trial Services/Diversion/  
Firearms Regulations Unit,  
Intake Unit,  
Appellate,  
Mental Health Veterans  
Diversion Unit,  
Victim Witness Unit,  
Evidence Custodian,  
Support Services

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17 Assistant Prosecutors  
14 Investigative Staff  
32 Support Staff

## Family Division

Domestic Violence Unit,  
Firearms Returns,  
Juvenile, Missing Persons  
Unit,  
Bias Crimes Unit,  
Community Outreach &  
Recruitment,  
Firearms & Training,  
Humane Law  
Enforcement

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6 Assistant Prosecutors  
8 Investigative Staff  
3 Support Staff

## Tactical Division

Major Crimes Unit,  
Sex Crimes/Child  
Endangerment Unit,  
Megan's Law/ICAC Unit,  
Administration & Policy  
Development

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8 Assistant Prosecutors  
19 Investigative Staff  
7 Support Staff

## Specialized Crimes Division

Professional Standards  
Unit,  
Insurance  
Fraud/Financial Crimes  
Unit,  
Expungements, OPRA

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4 Assistant Prosecutors  
10 Investigative Staff  
2 Support Staff

## Special Operations Division

Intelligence/Homeland  
Security Unit,  
Special Enforcement  
Unit,  
Hi-Tech Crimes Unit,  
Fugitive Unit,  
Arson/Environmental  
Crimes Unit,  
Asset Forfeiture Unit

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4 Assistant Prosecutors  
17 Investigative Staff  
8 Support Staff



## **COURTS/ADMINISTRATION DIVISION**

### **General Investigations Unit**

The General Investigations Unit (GIU) of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office continues to execute the office's primary mission of preparing cases for the Grand Jury and Petit Jury while simultaneously providing material and investigative support to the office's other units and functions.

The General Investigations Unit is responsible for the review, pre-trial preparation and prosecution of cases from their inception, until their final disposition. The General Investigations Unit consists of the three Trial Teams, as well as the Grand Jury, Bails, Evidence, and Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI) functions. The General Investigations Unit's Trial Teams handle most of the cases in the office. Specifically, in 2023, GIU handled 1,353 cases, which represents an increase of 229 cases over those received in 2022.

After a case is screened by the Supervising Assistant Prosecutor of the Pretrial Services Unit and a determination is made to retain for prosecution, the case is then forwarded to the assigned Detective or Prosecutor's Agent in the General Investigations Unit. Investigative personnel review the cases and order any outstanding discovery from the local municipalities. A discovery packet is then prepared by unit Detectives and support staff. Once completed, the file and discovery are turned over to the assigned Assistant Prosecutor who will make a plea offer in advance of the scheduled Pre-Indictment Conference (PIC) date. In 2023, with the increase in submissions of mandatory Body Worn Camera footage, investigative and support staff personnel were faced with a significant and overwhelming surge in the volume of digital media that needed to be reviewed and appropriately redacted.

If the case is not resolved at the PIC level, it is referred to the Grand Jury for Indictment. The assigned Assistant Prosecutor will determine if a case should be presented to the Grand Jury. All defendants that are subject to pretrial detention as ordered by the Court must have their case presented to the Grand Jury within ninety days, following the date of the defendant's commitment to jail, not counting excludable time for reasonable delays.

The Assistant Prosecutor and the Detective or Prosecutor's Agent assigned to the case will review the file prior to Grand Jury presentment to address any additional investigative and legal issues. Detention files will take priority. The file review will address the necessity of any subpoenas that may be required to obtain additional information and determine which witnesses should be subpoenaed to testify along with confirming their availability. The Assistant Prosecutor and Detective or Prosecutor's Agent will meet with victims and/or witnesses prior to the presentation of a case to the Grand Jury if necessary.

If an Indictment is returned, the Detective or Prosecutor's Agent will prepare Arraignment Discovery. The Assistant Prosecutor will formulate a plea offer in accordance with the Attorney General's Directive on the Escalating Plea Policy. The final proposed offer will be reviewed and require the approval of a Supervising Assistant Prosecutor. In appropriate cases, additional approvals will be required of the Division Chief Assistant Prosecutor, and/or the First Assistant Prosecutor and Prosecutor. If unresolved, the Assistant Prosecutor, Detective or Prosecutor's

Agent will conduct trial preparation meetings with witnesses and victims if the case is scheduled for a hearing or trial.

In 2023, the General Investigations Unit participated in one (1) Jury Trial and litigated several other noteworthy cases including the following:

In State v. Kenyon Esannason, the defendant was charged with 2nd degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon (handgun) as well as 2nd degree Certain Persons Not to Possess a Weapon. Defendant was the passenger in a stolen motor vehicle that crashed on Route 280 after eluding multiple law enforcement agencies. The State successfully litigated a 104 motion, a motion to suppress and a motion to dismiss the indictment. The defendant ultimately pled guilty to 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon and was sentenced to 5 years State Prison with 42 months of parole ineligibility.

In State v. Selvin Hernandez, the defendant attempted to kidnap a young child at the Salvation Army in Dover. Defendant pled guilty in 2022 to 2nd degree Attempted Kidnapping and was sentenced in 2023 to 6 years NJSP subject to the No Early Release Act.

In State v. Joseph Sessa, the defendant was indicted on 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Poss. of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose, 4<sup>th</sup> degree Unlawful Poss. of a Weapon, and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Terroristic Threats after stabbing a victim multiple times, causing a punctured lung and a lacerated diaphragm. Defendant pled guilty to 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault and was sentenced to 7 years NJSP subject to No Early Release Act.

The General Investigations Unit was able to effectively cover Trial Team related duties while simultaneously maintaining the normal operations of Grand Jury, Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI), Bails and the Evidence function. Additional responsibilities include NCIC Terminal Operator training/certification, LiveScan training, establishing eCDR user accounts, NJSP eDiscovery Portal Access, ensuring CODIS/DNA submission compliance, MCPO Detective candidate interviews and the MCPO Field Training and Evaluation Program. All the above was achieved in conjunction with the daily follow-up investigations and case preparation.

Throughout 2023, the General Investigations Unit successfully trained four (4) Detectives in accordance with the Police Training Commission (PTC) Mandated Training Program, as well as the Morris County Prosecutor's Office Field Training and Evaluation Program. Most Detectives hired by this office, whether recent academy graduates or lateral transfers, commence their careers in the General Investigations Unit. Our primary focus remains on providing comprehensive training and guidance to these individuals, ensuring that the General Investigations Unit operates at peak performance levels. Additionally, the unit will continue its ongoing efforts to offer a variety of training opportunities and investigative support across the entire office.

Several members of the General Investigations Unit played a crucial role in the office-wide implementation of Evidence.com. They provided training to Detectives, Assistant Prosecutors, and support staff on utilizing the system, facilitating a seamless transition to disseminating media discovery within the office.

The General Investigation Unit will endeavor to create opportunities for its Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors to collaborate with members from other units and experienced local officers, aiming to broaden their job knowledge and practical operational experience. This includes proficiency in investigative techniques, interviewing skills, and proper procedures for arrest,

search, seizure, and evidence handling. Additionally, the unit will continue to explore ways to streamline the high volume of cases through Infoshare, Promis-Gavel, and related technologies such as AXON/Evidence.com, with a focus on prioritizing over goal lists and early issues identification.

### **Pretrial Services Unit**

The Pretrial Services Unit (PTS) of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office was created to handle cases in accordance with Criminal Justice Reform (CJR) on January 1, 2017. The Pretrial Services Unit is responsible for the investigation and initial prosecution of indictable criminal charges for all non-tactical unit cases from the time of arrest through the First Appearance Hearing and any Pretrial Detention Hearing if a motion for same has been filed. PTS also oversees Intake, Screening, Central Judicial Processing (CJP), subpoena requests from the local municipalities, and review of indictable Citizen Complaints for determining probable cause.

According to CJR, when a defendant is charged with a crime, the charges will be placed on a complaint-summons or a complaint-warrant. In the event a defendant is placed on a complaint-warrant, they are automatically remanded to the Morris County Correctional Facility pending a First Appearance before the Court. Assistant Prosecutors in PTS are responsible for approving or declining complaint-warrants or complaint-summonses during daytime hours, and reviewing decisions made after-hours by the on-call Assistant Prosecutors. Where a complaint-warrant issues, the PTS Unit will make an assessment whether to recommend a defendant's release with appropriate conditions, or whether the State should file a motion for pretrial detention. In doing so, the PTS Unit discusses legal and investigative issues and conducts appropriate follow-up if needed. Where a determination is made to move for pretrial detention, the PTS Unit obtains and ensures that discovery is provided in a timely manner to defense counsel, and the PTS Assistant Prosecutors appear in court to argue the State's position. In the event the court denies the motion, the unit assesses whether to file an appeal and assists in writing same. In 2023, PTS reviewed approximately 370 warrants, and argued 117 detention motions.

In addition, PTS is responsible for screening complaint-summons cases to determine if the case should remain at the Superior Court level or be remanded to Municipal Court. The PTS Intake Staff is responsible for the creation of all criminal complaint case files presented to this office for prosecution and the processing of cases that have been remanded or administratively dismissed. Investigative staff is responsible for reviewing all files assigned to them and prepare the files for prosecution. All members of PTS work together seamlessly to ensure effective prosecution of all defendants.

Further, in accordance with the Administrative Office of the Courts Directive #26-19, on January 1, 2020, prosecutorial review of Citizen Complaints took effect for indictable crimes. The PTS Assistant Prosecutors screen these complaints to determine if there is sufficient probable cause for the charges. Should the Assistant Prosecutors request any further investigation, a PTS Detective and/or Agent is assigned to the case to assist. In 2023, PTS handled approximately 170 Citizen Complaints.

The review of citizen complaints requires ongoing interaction with local Municipal Courts, police departments, and complainants to ensure thorough and proper screening of each received

complaint. Each complaint is carefully considered, and the assigned PTS Assistant Prosecutor communicates with the complainant to discuss the decision to either approve or decline the proposed charges.

In 2024, PTS will prioritize providing training updates on Criminal Justice Reform and ensuring all newly assigned personnel, including Assistant Prosecutors, Detectives, Agents, and support staff, receive training regarding the new mandates concerning Body Worn Cameras for uniformed law enforcement in New Jersey. Additionally, PTS will maintain collaboration with local municipalities to ensure compliance with the timeframes outlined in Office Directives and Policies for the receipt of reports and necessary documentation required for First Appearances and Detention Hearings.

### **Mental Health and Veterans Diversion Programs**

In acknowledgment of the profound impact of mental health issues across society, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO) has broadened its use of alternative dispositions, forged partnerships with community resources, and bolstered law enforcement education. These efforts aim to ensure the best possible treatment and outcomes for individuals with mental illness who become involved with the criminal justice system.



In 2023, with the guidance of the Office of the Attorney General, the MCPO partnered with the Mental Health Association (MHA) and Morris County Police Chiefs in an effort to provide support to law enforcement officers and to enhance services to those suffering from mental illness by introducing the ARRIVE Together – Morris pilot program. ARRIVE Together, which stands for “Alternative Responses to Reduce Instances of Violence and Escalation” partners law enforcement with mental health providers to respond to 911 calls relating to mental and behavioral health emergencies. The program started as a co-response program in Cumberland County and as of December of 2023, had rolled out statewide to all 21 New Jersey Counties with models that include co-response, close in time response, telehealth and follow-up programs. The goal of the program is to increase connections to mental health services while reducing arrests, use of force injuries to civilians and officers and improving trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Morris County’s program consists of both close in time response and follow-up response. When a report of a person in crisis is received by a participating police department, law enforcement will respond and mental health providers will arrive shortly after. Once law enforcement deems the scene safe, the mental health clinician from MHA will speak to the caller to help divert them to appropriate services. Thereafter, MHA will conduct follow up with that individual as well as others who are referred to the program to connect them to services.

The ARRIVE Together – Morris program is coordinated by the MCPO. The pilot program began in eight (8) Morris County towns who share the services of MHA. The first pilot group consists of Madison, Morristown, Morris Plains and Morris Township. The second pilot group consists of Denville, Montville, Parsippany and Roxbury. The program is expected to run Monday through Friday, 7 am through 11 pm. Any calls that law enforcement responds to after these service hours will be referred to MHA as part of their follow-up program, with the intent to ensure that the individuals who were in crisis are linked with services and agencies to assist them in managing their needs. Ultimately, the goal of the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office is to expand the program to all of Morris County so that every resident has the ability to be safely connected to providers to assist them with their behavioral health needs while avoiding criminalizing acts that are driven by mental health conditions.

2023 also saw a continuation of the Morris County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Trainings. CIT is a significant initiative aimed at improving law enforcement interactions with individuals having mental health special needs and strengthening relationships between law enforcement and mental health providers. This 40-hour course offered comprehensive instruction covering various topics such as the identification and overview of mental illnesses, Autism, and Alzheimer’s, along with Tactical Communications, the Effects of Medication, and Legal Issues concerning the mentally ill. Moreover, the course included site visits to the Morris County Correctional Facility, and the Market Street Mission, providing attendees with insights into the diverse situations and circumstances faced by individuals with mental illness. The MCPO introduced the inaugural training in 2021 and presented four (4) classes in 2023. Looking ahead, the MCPO plans to continue to conduct the training four times a year, with the aim of training as many law enforcement officers and mental health professionals as possible.

Additionally, the Chief and Supervising Assistant Prosecutors of the Diversion Unit co-chair the Morris County Mental Health Working Group. Founded in 2021, the Working Group was established in accordance with Attorney General Directive 2020-14, entitled “Countywide

Working Group to Address Mental Health and Special Needs Populations and Creating a Framework for Coordination with State Partners.” In 2023, the Working Group partnered with the Morris County Sheriff’s Office Community Connections to meet quarterly to ensure and encourage communication between law enforcement and mental health providers and advocates. Further, both supervisors and the Recovery Court Assistant Prosecutor are members of the Morris County Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Board, helping to identify and address issues relating to the special needs populations.

The MCPO Diversion Unit continues to work to ensure that defendants whose mental illness are addressed in a manner that is appropriate. Previously, the MCPO reviewed and assessed cases involving individuals whose mental health issues caused them to become involved with the criminal justice system. Depending on the charges, the defendant’s diagnosis, their willingness to obtain treatment, and their status as either a civilian or Veteran, cases could be diverted to the Veterans Diversion Program, which would allow for dismissal of certain charges, or towards the Mental Health Program, which, in appropriate cases, would allow for more serious charges to be amended, and for treatment and probation sentences in lieu of incarceration in jail or state prison.

In 2021, the MCPO enhanced the previously existing Mental Health Program by adding the possibility to divert defendants suffering from mental illness towards treatment and assistance in lieu of charges and/or a criminal record. From the initial contact with a subject, whether it is on the street or in the Morris County Correctional Facility, efforts will be made to identify individuals who are suffering from a mental illness that is causing or impacting that person’s involvement with the criminal justice system, and where appropriate, divert them to services to address their needs. Based upon the circumstances and timing of the interaction, along with a full review of the facts of the case, the individual’s medical and psychological history, their willingness to participate, and a consideration of their safety and the safety of others, a decision will be made to decline or approve charges.

In cases where charges are declined, recommendations will be made to refer the individual to appropriate services through community partners such as the Morris County Sheriff’s Office Hope Hub or Community Connections initiatives.

In cases where charges are approved, a team that includes a legal supervisor from the MCPO, clinician from the Mental Health Association, and experienced Probation Officers will assess the individual and the facts to determine whether the individual is legally appropriate, clinically appropriate and case management appropriate to participate in the Mental Health Program. Depending on the information received, a decision will be made to either divert charges towards a dismissal; recommend a case resolution that calls for supervision on the mental health probation caseload or other course of supervision that will address a defendant’s individual needs; or if an individual is not appropriate, to prosecute the case in the normal course of business. Defendants whose cases are recommended for the Diversion Program will be connected to services and closely supervised to ensure that the defendant does not present a risk to self or others before charges will be considered for dismissal. A past conditional discharge, prior participation in PTI, or prior participation in the Veteran’s Diversionary Program will not be a legal bar to participation in the Mental Health Program. However, defendants charged with violent offenses or those with a history of recidivism that is not connected to the defendant’s diagnosis of



a mental illness may not be eligible for the program.

As part of the Diversion Initiative, the MCPO participates in a pilot program with the Morris County Courts which provides a designated Probation Officer to supervise any defendant whose case is recommended for diversion, and a designated Judge to review defendants on the “Wellness Court” caseload.

In 2023, the Diversion Unit processed thirty (30) applications for its programs. Out of these, twelve (12) defendants were accepted, while fifteen (15) were denied. Some of the reasons for denials included lack of a mental health diagnosis; the nature of the offense; victim’s opposition to entry into the program and/or defendant’s refusal to participate in mental health treatment. Of the remaining three (3) applications, one (1) defendant withdrew their application to pursue traditional prosecution, and two (2) applications were still pending a decision by the end of 2023, either due to incomplete submissions or awaiting final deliberation from the team.

In the future, the Diversion Unit aims to increase the number of municipalities served by the ARRIVE Together – Morris program, train more first-responders and mental health professionals in the CIT program, improve communication with stakeholders in the mental health community, and actively link individuals suffering from mental illness with suitable services. Furthermore, the Diversion Unit will participate in trainings and outreach on the Mental Health Diversion program to ensure that defense attorneys are fully informed about the opportunities it offers to assist their clients.

### **Firearms Regulation Unit**

The Firearms Regulations Unit (“FRU”) was created in April of 2022, after being separated out from the DV Weapon Return Unit. The FRU is responsible for the proper disposition of all confiscated, surrendered and recovered firearms which come into the possession, control, or custody of law enforcement agencies within Morris County in situations not involving domestic violence. The FRU also provides legal advice to local law enforcement officers regarding the issuance of permits to purchase, permits to carry, and the seizure of weapons under the Duty to Warn Law. Additionally, to help ensure public safety, the FRU assists in applications and hearings for orders of protection and seizure of firearms from those who exhibit a significant risk of harm to self or others under the 2019 Extreme Risk Protection Act (ERPO). The Assistant Prosecutors in the FRU handled 15 firearms application/permit appeals, one (1) motion to revoke and 26 weapon return requests in 2023. The FRU Assistant Prosecutors also handled 25 Extreme Risk Protection Order applications and hearings in 2023.

In each of these cases, the unit personnel gather and assess information to make a determination that best ensures a safe and appropriate return, or permanent seizure, of firearms. FRU Assistant Prosecutors appear in Superior Court to argue against appeals of the denial of the return of firearms. The FRU also represents the State of New Jersey on appeals stemming from denials of Firearms ID Card applications and permits to purchase and/or carry handguns. In preparing for those appeals, the FRU reviews the investigations conducted by the local police departments, which include a background check, and a check for a valid firearms ID card to determine if the person

has the proper paperwork and is not subject to any disabilities under New Jersey Statute N.J.S.A. 2C:58-3. Once the court schedules a motion/hearing date, the assigned personnel will forward all information related to the investigation provided in discovery to the Judge assigned to the hearing, as well as the attorney representing the appellant, prior to the hearing taking place.

During the summer of 2022, the landscape of the law changed with the issuance of the US Supreme Court opinion in New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen, which represented a sea of change for the world of firearms regulations. 2023 saw additional challenges to the cases and legislation that govern firearm possession and permitting, accordingly, the unit continues to adjust to rapidly changing laws to assist local law enforcement in reviewing applications for both permits to purchase and permits to carry.

The Firearms Regulations Unit is committed to excellence and professionalism. The primary objective of the Firearms Regulations Unit for 2024 is to continue to help the local Chiefs of Police in navigating the ongoing changes to the law surrounding firearms. The FRU will provide timely legal updates to the Chiefs and their firearm liaisons and will work to issue a directive once the law becomes more settled. Safety for citizens remains the priority.

### **Appellate Unit**

In 2023, the Appellate Unit continued to research and write Superior Court, Appellate Division, N.J. Supreme Court and Federal briefs and motions. The unit prepared oppositions to defendants' briefs, interlocutory appeals, pretrial detention appeals, stays and any other relief. For those cases where oral argument was requested, members of the Appellate Unit argued the appeals before the appropriate court. In addition to appeals to the higher courts, the Appellate Unit was also responsible for coordinating, researching, writing briefs and conducting oral arguments on all municipal appeals and *de minimis* motions to Superior Court, Law Division. The Appellate Unit also handled the assignment of Motions for Post-Conviction Relief.

The unit successfully prosecuted several appeals. In State v. Michael Barisone, the defendant appealed from an amended Law Division order continuing his civil commitment at Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital subject to Krol status periodic review. This appeal was filed after a jury returned a verdict finding the defendant not guilty by reason of insanity of 1<sup>st</sup> degree Attempted Murder and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Possession of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose. The Appellate Division, after considering the State's brief and oral argument, discerned no basis to disturb the judgment of commitment and affirmed the Law Division order. In State v. Tyrell Lansing, defendant had been charged with 1<sup>st</sup> degree Murder and multiple weapons offenses. The defendant appealed the Law Division's order denying his motion to permit his expert to testify remotely. After considering the State's opposition, the Appellate Division denied defendant's motion for leave to appeal. In State v. Michael Figueroa, defendant appealed claiming the motion judge erred in denying his motion to suppress a handgun seized during a motor vehicle stop. After review of the parties' arguments, the record and the applicable legal principles, the Appellate Division affirmed.

The Appellate Unit was also active before the NJ Supreme Court in 2023. The State successfully

opposed petitions for certification in several cases including State v. Powers, State v. Mirasola, State v. Barker and State v. Mims.

The Appellate Unit will continue with its duties and responsibilities stated above. Appellate Unit Assistant Prosecutors will ensure the legal staff is continuously and timely notified of current case law and ensure notification to local law enforcement is made in cases that affect police policy and procedure.

### **Victim Witness Advocacy Unit**

The primary role and mission of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, Victim Witness Advocacy Unit is to ensure that victims and witnesses of crime are treated with fairness, compassion, and respect and that all the rights defined in the New Jersey Constitutional Amendment for Victims' Rights (N.J. Const., art. I, para. 22); the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses (N.J.S.A. § 52:4B-36); and the standards set forth by the Office of the Attorney General are adhered to.

Victim Witness Advocates can assist police officers in making death notifications, and respond in person to police agencies, hospitals, and victims' homes. Victim Witness Advocates provide crisis intervention, conduct needs assessments, help victims contact family and friends during a crisis, explain the criminal court processes, explain the investigative procedures, assist in filing claims with the Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO), assist in preparing Victim Impact Statements and register victims with Victim Information Notification Everyday (VINE). Correspondence to victims concerning parole release eligibility and parole notifications is generated and sent to victims. Emergent funding for funeral expenses is often needed, as well as contacting funeral directors, in major crimes and homicide cases. The Victim Witness Advocacy Unit notifies victims and witnesses of all judicial proceedings by mail and often by telephone and email and further establishes as many personal contacts with victims as possible, given the small number of staff in the Victim Witness Advocacy Unit.

Victim Witness Advocates make referrals to appropriate social service and mental health agencies that provide counseling. Non-profit agencies, as well as government and social services, help victims to recover from problems created by their victimization. Victim Witness Advocates routinely make welfare calls to victims and regularly revise referral lists when new agencies or new programs become available within the county. Victim Witness Advocates often work with other Victim Witness Advocacy Units throughout the State of New Jersey to find appropriate services for those who may have been victimized in Morris County but live and/or work in another county where service providers would be more easily accessed.

Victim Witness Advocates attended many committee meetings such as Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings for Child Abuse and Domestic Violence that took place via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and in person to provide updates on cases. Other agencies such as Audrey Hepburn Children's House and the Division of Child Protection and Permanency are members of these teams and provide updates regarding telehealth visits, psychological evaluations, medical exams, etc.

The Victim Witness Coordinator, in addition to overseeing the unit, has the responsibility of writing and managing grants, and writing the narratives and statistical reports that are due on a

quarterly basis for grants. In addition, to the coordinator's many administrative duties, she carries a caseload of sex crimes, child endangerment and major crimes cases. The Supervising Victim Witness Advocate, in addition to being the primary sex crimes/child endangerment and major crimes Advocate, has the additional responsibilities of the daily operations of the unit which include, but are not limited to, supervising the caseloads, and overseeing the work product of the remaining Victim Witness Advocates.

One of the Victim Witness Advocates is the point person for working with victims in Domestic Violence cases while maintaining a caseload from the Major Crimes Unit, General Investigations Unit, and Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit. This Victim Witness Advocate collaborates with the Morris County Family Justice Center to provide services as needed. The Morris County Family Justice Center provides a community wide approach to delivering services to victims and their families through a comprehensive and coordinated effort among agencies, county government, law enforcement, social service agencies and the court. This facility is a center for victims of domestic violence, dating abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Some services offered are counseling, legal and immigration assistance (restraining orders, housing, etc.), children services, and culturally specific services.

Another Victim Witness Advocate is the point person for working with victims on cases from the Juvenile Unit but also carries a caseload from the Major Crimes Unit, General Investigations Unit, and the Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit. Victim Witness Advocates have been trained in Parole Eligibility and Parole Notifications and have direct contact with the New Jersey State Parole Board. The Victim Witness Advocate notifies victims by telephone, email, and/or mail that the inmate is going to max out his/her sentence on a particular date and that the individual will be released from prison.

Each year, Congress declares one week in April as National Crime Victims' Rights Week to honor and recognize crime victims. National Crime Victims' Rights Week was observed from April 23-29, 2023, marking its 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary in 2023. The theme was "Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change." The theme calls upon communities to amplify the voices of survivors and create environments where survivors have the confidence that they will be heard, believed, and supported.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office hosted a Recognition and Remembrance event on April 26, 2023, in observance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, and joined leaders of law enforcement and the victim advocate community for a conference to acknowledge crime victims. National Crime Victims' Rights Week is intended to raise awareness of victims' rights and services, highlighting programs, celebrating progress achieved, and honoring victims, the professionals, and agencies who serve them.

Morris County Prosecutor Robert J. Carroll was master of ceremonies and introduced all speakers. Speakers for the conference included Rhett Hackett, survivor and President/Co-Founder of the Humanity Preservation Foundation and host of the Hands Off Talk Show (a weekly television show on the RVNTV network); Chief Michael Koroski, Morris Plains Police Chief and Vice President of the Morris County Police Chiefs Association; Alexis Rachel, Coordinator for the Morris County Sexual Assault Response Team and the Forensic Nurse Examiner Program; Maria

Vinci Savettiere, Esq., Executive Director of Deirdre's House and Chairperson of the Morris County Multidisciplinary Team; Senator Anthony Bucco; and Commissioner Director John Krickus, who presented the Proclamation recognizing National Crime Victims' Rights Week approved by the Morris County Board of Commissioners. The Proclamation hangs in the Front Office of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office.

The victims' tree is lit annually during the week to serve as a beacon of hope. In addition, a wreath adorned with a "2023 in Recognition and Remembrance" ribbon was placed next to the tree during the commemorative week.

The Victim Witness Advocacy Unit staff posted daily resources on the Morris County Prosecutor's Office Facebook page with information for victims and survivors of crime during National Crime Victims' Rights Week. This included resources, links, hot line telephone numbers, and contacts for victims and survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, homicides, mental health, suicide prevention and other related topics.

The cases listed below are examples of the quality of victim witness advocacy in 2023, which went above and beyond the normal caseloads and responsibilities.

In State v. Edwin Urbina, all members of the Victim Witness Unit worked collaboratively on a homicide case involving a three-year-old male victim and the convictions of two adult co-defendants. The Assistant Prosecutor and Victim Witness Advocate contacted the victim's biological father to introduce themselves, extend their condolences, and provide a case update. The Victim Witness Advocate advised the victim's father of his right to be present at all court proceedings and provided the court's livestream link so he could watch the initial virtual hearings. The victim's father lived out of state, so the Victim Witness Advocate called the victim's father to update him on any in-person hearings he couldn't attend.

Recognizing that the family would incur significant out-of-pocket expenses, the Victim Witness Advocate discussed the Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO) with the victim's father and explained how to file a claim and how it could alleviate some of the financial costs associated with burial services and loss of income for bereavement time. The victim's father then advised he is not listed on the victim's birth certificate and expressed concern about that affecting eligibility. The Victim Witness Advocate then reached out to the VCCO and was advised they would be willing to compensate the funeral home directly for any costs, thus alleviating that concern. The Victim Witness Advocate assisted the victim's father with filing an emergency funeral claim to ensure compensation was paid out in a timely fashion.

As the trial approached, various members of the Victim Witness Unit worked together to provide information and support to the victim's family and friends. The victim's aunt was able to attend motions and a Victim Witness Advocate accompanied her for each hearing. The victim's seven-year-old sister was required to testify at trial, so the Assistant Prosecutor and Victim Witness Unit was available to provide a tour of the courtroom.

Recognizing the traumatic effect testifying would have on the seven-year-old, on the day of her testimony, a Victim Witness Advocate accompanied the victim's sister, her aunt, with the Assistant Prosecutors to the courtroom. A second Victim Witness Advocate accompanied the rest of the

family to the courtroom. Due to inclement weather, some of the victims' families were unable to attend court but those that attended were accompanied to court by a Victim Witness Advocate.

The Victim Witness Advocate reached out to the victim's family to explain the sentencing hearing and discuss who would be providing a victim impact statement. The victim's sister worked with her therapist to write a victim impact statement and requested that it be read in court. Several other family members gave a victim impact statement as well. Multiple Victim Witness Advocates accompanied the victim's family to court for sentencing to provide support and make sure they were able to be heard. After the sentencing the Victim Witness Advocate registered the victim's father and aunt with the State Parole Board and explained how the process worked. The Victim Witness Advocate advised the family they can reach out to the Victim Witness Unit at any time in the future.

In State v. Raymond Ziesse, the Victim Witness Advocate assisted in a case involving a defendant who sexually assaulted a developmentally disabled 17-year-old female. The Victim Witness Advocate became involved in working with the victim and her mother after the defendant was charged, arrested, and ultimately convicted. The victim preferred that we speak with her mother about the case when possible because she was her direct care giver. The Victim Witness Advocate spent a significant amount of time speaking with the victim's mother about court, the court process, and services for the victim.

The victim contacted the Victim Witness Advocate and the Assistant Prosecutor and advised that her mother had been hospitalized. Although she was now 18 years old, the victim was worried about how she would handle everything without her mother. The Victim Witness Advocate immediately made some emergency calls to find some agencies that could deliver food to the victim's home and made sure she had necessities for the next few days. The Victim Witness Advocate and Assistant Prosecutor were able to speak to the victim's mother in the hospital, along with a family friend. The mother felt the victim would be okay at home alone, but the victim continued to express concern. The Victim Witness Advocate spent several days reaching out to multiple agencies to provide assistance to the victim. The Victim Witness Advocate was able to confirm the victim had a worker from the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) who advised they would have someone go to the victim's home daily and assist her. The Victim Witness Advocate reached out to a worker at DAWN Center for Independent Living and made sure the family was connected to help put together a long-term plan for the victim if her mother had to remain in the hospital. The Victim Witness Advocate also connected with the Morris County Prosecutor's Office Mental Health Liaison who was able to put together a multi-disciplinary email chain with all the involved agencies, including Adult Protective Services so everyone could communicate as to what services were being provided to the victim and provide a continuum of care.

The victim reached out to the Victim Witness Advocate that her mother had passed away while in a medical rehabilitation facility. The Victim Witness Advocate expressed her condolences, provided emotional support, and confirmed she was in touch with some relatives, her DDD Worker, and members of her church for assistance. The Victim Witness Advocate confirmed the victim was still connected with counseling and encouraged her to attend her appointments.

The Victim Witness Advocate reached out to speak to the victim about her victim impact statement and what to expect at sentencing. During one of the phone conversations the victim made some concerning statements about how she missed her mom and wished she was with her. The Victim

Witness Advocate expressed concern and asked the victim if she had any thoughts of harming herself. The victim advised that a family member had already sent a police officer to her house to check on her and she reaffirmed that she did not want to hurt herself. The victim indicated she was still meeting with her counselor. The Victim Witness Advocate contacted the victim's DDD worker and explained the concerns about the victim's wellbeing. The Victim Witness Advocate continues to have contact with the victim and will work with her to make sure she is connected with services.

In 2024, the Victim Witness Advocacy Unit will continue to use coordination, collaboration, and unique problem-solving abilities to continue excellence in victim services to the community of Morris County. The Victim Witness Coordinator and the Supervising Victim Witness Advocate continue to explore emerging ideas of methods to assist all victims of crime. Expanding access to services and ensuring equity and inclusion for all victims is a priority. The standards set forth by the Office of the Attorney General will be adhered to without interruption as they have been since they were defined in the New Jersey Constitutional Amendment for Victims' Rights (N.J. Const., art. I, para. 22), and the Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses (N.J.S.A. § 52:4B-36).

## TACTICAL DIVISION

### **Major Crimes Unit**

It is the responsibility of the Major Crimes Unit to investigate homicides, potential homicides, carjackings, suspicious or unnatural deaths, suicides, fires or explosions involving a fatality or serious bodily injury, bank robberies, kidnappings, barricaded subjects and hostage situations, sudden or unexpected deaths of infants or children less than fourteen years of age and fetal deaths occurring without medical attendance, any violent crime that involves the discharge of a firearm, home invasions, discovery of any human remains, vehicular pursuits involving serious personal injury or property damage, and any enumerated incident requiring the Morris County Sheriff's Emergency Response Team or the New Jersey State Police T.E.A.M.S. Unit.

In addition, the Major Crimes Unit will investigate any matter that has a significant impact on the public or is deemed appropriate by the Prosecutor, Chief of Detectives, or their designee.

Several cases investigated by the Major Crimes Unit were tried before Morris County juries in 2023, most notably State v. Edwin Urbina. The defendant was charged with the August 2021 beating murder of his girlfriend's 3-year-old son in the presence of her 5-year-old daughter. Following a nine-day trial, the defendant was found guilty of all charges, including first degree Murder with an aggravating factor. The defendant was sentenced to Life without Parole plus 20 years with 10 years parole ineligibility. The successful verdict was the result of tireless efforts by the Major Crimes Unit in investigating and prosecuting this case.

As part of the Vehicular Homicide Function, it is the responsibility of the Major Crimes Unit to investigate any motor vehicle crash involving death, any crash involving serious bodily injury which may reasonably result in death, any crash involving injury occurring during a police pursuit or police response to any emergency, any crash where there is clear and reasonable evidence that a conflict of interest exists for the investigating police agency (i.e. police personnel or municipal agency employees involved in a serious injury crash), any hit-and-run crash involving bodily injury, any crash involving serious bodily injury and in which intoxicated driving is involved, and any crash involving the purposeful use of a motor vehicle to inflict injury and where injury results.

In May 2023, the Major Crimes Unit (Vehicular Homicide Function) responded to a fatal motor vehicle crash in Pequannock Township in an effort to further investigate the crash; State v. Angel Carabello-Maldona. As a result of this investigation the at-fault operator of the vehicle was charged with second-degree Vehicular Homicide, among other charges. He pled guilty to second degree Reckless Vehicular Homicide and was subsequently sentenced to four years in state prison subject to parole ineligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act.

As part of the Cold Case Function, it is the responsibility of the Major Crimes Unit to investigate unsolved homicides, equivocal deaths, and suspicious missing persons cases that have occurred in Morris County. An investigation is turned over to the Cold Case Inventory when all leads have been exhausted without an arrest. In 2023, the Major Crimes Unit joined the New Jersey Attorney General's Cold Case Network and made significant progress with several Cold Case homicide investigations. Utilizing scientific advancements, the Major Crimes Unit was able to identify and charge Mary Catherine Crumlich, formerly Mary Catherine Snyder, in connection with the 1984



death of an infant, commonly referred to as the “Baby Mary” Homicide. Crumlich was charged on a juvenile delinquency complaint with one count of Manslaughter, an offense which would be a second-degree crime if committed by an adult. She later entered a guilty plea to Manslaughter and received a disposition of probation conditioned upon 364 days imprisonment at the Morris County Correctional Facility.



In response to the opiate epidemic, the Major Crimes Unit continued to make fatal overdoses a priority. When an apparent fatal overdose is reported to the Major Crimes Unit, a supervisor conducts a thorough screening. If there is any indication that a strict liability case can be pursued, the Major Crimes Unit responds to investigate. At times, the Major Crimes Unit will call on other units to assist, to include the High-Tech Crimes Unit, the Intelligence Unit, and the Special Enforcement Unit. Using this methodology, the Major Crimes Unit was successful in investigating and criminally charging an individual with 2C:35-9a (Strict Liability for Drug-Induced Death) and related drug-distribution charges in the case of State v. Anthony Dello-Russo. This investigation utilized witness interviews, phone record analysis, and tenacious work by Major Crimes Unit Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors to bring criminal complaints against the suspect. The criminal prosecution is ongoing.

The Major Crimes Unit facilitated the 2023 Effective Death Investigation Course at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy. Presenters for the course included Major Crimes Unit Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives, along with guest speakers and subject matter experts. This course provided the Major Crimes Unit an opportunity to expand upon the information and investigative techniques offered to investigators in the field of death investigation, vehicular homicides, and forensic interviewing. This course was attended by 45 individuals from 28 different agencies throughout the state. The course allowed the Major Crimes Unit the opportunity to complement the ongoing initiative taken by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, in conjunction with surrounding counties, in addressing the opiate epidemic through the investigation of overdose deaths and strict liability investigations. It also provided an opportunity for the Major Crimes Unit to provide a case study outlining the successful methodology used when conducting Cold Case investigations.

The Major Crimes Unit continued to expand its technology capabilities. Focusing on training and equipment upgrades, several members of the Major Crimes Unit attended training specific to Call Detail Records and Geolocation Analysis of cellular phones and learned to use new and upgraded software. As a result, Major Crimes Unit Detectives were able to effectively and efficiently analyze a large volume of electronic evidence and records related to an October 2023 armed robbery with a gunshot injury. A fugitive from justice was identified and located in Florida using these methods, resulting in charges being brought in State v. Auraceli Maldonado. The criminal prosecution remains ongoing.

In conjunction with the investigative and legal functions of the Major Crimes Unit, members of the unit actively participate in the New Jersey Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board and the Morris County Overdose Fatality Review Team. The purpose of the Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board is to review fatalities and near fatalities of children in order to identify their causes, relationship to governmental support systems, and methods of prevention. The purpose of the Overdose Fatality Review Team is to review and identify preventable overdose deaths and make recommendations for interventions and prevention strategies.

The Major Crimes Unit will continue to expand on the following objectives: provide training in both the legal and investigative aspects associated with death investigations; expand the technological capabilities of the unit, modernize the methods and tools used for the successful investigation and prosecution of cases; vigorously pursue and prosecute those responsible for

deaths caused by opiates; and partner with local, state, and federal agencies in an effort to make our communities safer from gun violence.

The Major Crimes Unit remains committed to excellence and professionalism. The unit members' high standards and superior work ethic are reflected in the quality investigations and prosecutions that took place during 2023 and will continue forward into the coming year.

### **Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit**

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit is responsible for conducting primary investigations in coordination with Municipal Police Departments, County, State and Federal Agencies, for crimes of sexual violence committed against adult and child victims, physical abuse and neglect of children, human trafficking, clergy abuse and internet crimes against children (ICAC). With respect to crimes of sexual violence, the unit investigates criminal activity including sexual assaults, statutory rape, the production and possession of child pornography, the use of the internet to lure children, stalking, and acts of lewdness as well as abuse reported by the Archdiocese of Paterson. With respect to crimes of physical abuse and neglect of children, acts of assaultive behavior and failure to adequately care for and supervise a child are investigated.

When a child is maltreated, physically harmed, endangered, or neglected by a caretaker, members of the unit will work in tandem with the Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) to ensure the safety of the child and investigate the allegations of abuse to bring the abuser to justice. Both Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors assigned to the unit are on an on-call schedule and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to respond to actively investigate and assist local municipalities with investigations and legal advice. This includes having Detectives respond to interview victims, witnesses and suspects and secure evidence, and having Assistant Prosecutors provide legal input on investigative and charging decisions, search and arrest warrant affidavit preparation and execution.

Investigative and legal staff assigned to the Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit receive specialized training in the forensic interviewing procedures for interviewing children aged 11 and under who are victims of sexual assault. This training enables Detectives to interview children without the use of suggestive, leading or coercive interview techniques, thereby eliciting from the child what happened to them. Children are interviewed by the Unit Detectives/Agents at Deirdre's House, the Morris County Child Advocacy Center. Deirdre's House is an off-site, child friendly environment designed to lessen the stress and trauma for children who will be forensically interviewed regarding the abuse they have suffered.

The unit maintains a high level of training and education to support the investigation and prosecution of all abuse and neglect allegations, to include allegations involving internet crimes against children. The Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors have attended seminars and received on the job training with regards to investigating ICAC cases. In regard to overall unit training, investigative members are in compliance with training mandates set forth by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General.

Members of the Unit are also active and participate in the New Jersey Human Trafficking Task Force. In addition, members of the unit are available and have provided training to various groups, including police academy recruits, sexual assault advocates, and in-service law enforcement personnel, regarding human trafficking. In 2018, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office formed a statewide task force pertaining to allegations of abuse perpetrated by members of the clergy, known as the Clergy Abuse Task Force. Members of the MCPO investigative and legal staff have been sworn in as Special State Investigators to participate in this long-term statewide investigation.

The unit is also committed to the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) program. The SART is comprised of Law Enforcement, Confidential Sexual Victim Advocates from the Morris County Sexual Assault Center (MCSAC) and Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNEs). The Morris County Prosecutor's Office maintains a full-time FNE/SART Coordinator. The SART function is managed through the Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit.

The responsibilities of the FNE/SART Coordinator include recruiting, training and managing the FNEs, assisting in grant preparation and management, and training law enforcement agents, confidential sexual violence advocates, hospital and medical staff and the staff at our local colleges and universities. The FNE/SART Coordinator also serves as an intermediary between the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, Victim/Witness Unit, medical sites and Morris County Sexual Assault Center (MCSAC) to facilitate services to victims of sexual assault.

The FNEs are specifically trained nurses who perform forensic medical examinations, provide medical treatment and collect forensic evidence from victims of sexual assault. The FNEs will also provide courtroom testimony as a fact or expert witness in sexual assault cases as required. The FNEs are responsible for providing services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. During 2023, the FNE program had nine (9) FNEs acting in an on-call capacity and responding to cases as necessary, which was down slightly from 11 in 2022.

During 2023, the Morris County SART was activated and completed 46 Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (S.A.F.E.) Kits. This is statistically similar to the previous year, in which 48 S.A.F.E. Kits were completed. In addition to medical care and forensic evidence collection, victims of sexual assault are provided a multitude of follow up services within our community, including contact and service information for the MCSAC, Morris County Victim/Witness Unit, Jersey Battered Women's Shelter (JBWS), DCP&P, Deirdre's House, Planned Parenthood, Zufall Health and the HIV Counseling Center.

Medical treatment and care for a child who is physically assaulted or sexually abused is provided through the Northern Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Center at the Audrey Hepburn Children's House, located in Hackensack, New Jersey. Specially trained pediatricians conduct medical examinations related to physical and sexual abuse of children. These exams can be scheduled to take place at Deirdre's House, thus enabling the child and family to remain in County and at a facility they have utilized before. The use of such experts helps to minimize any further trauma to these child victims. The FNEs are also trained and available to address the immediate medical concerns of pediatric sex assault victims, in the event a pediatrician is not immediately available.

For 2023, the Sex Crime/Child Endangerment Unit remained statistically similar to past years, receiving and investigating approximately 600 referrals. The Unit assisted in affecting approximately 48 arrests of offenders for crimes involving sexual and/or physical abuse of a juvenile or adult. The ICAC function of the Unit accounted for an additional approximately 169 CyberTip referrals and 27 arrests of individuals for crimes involving the possession and/or distribution of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM).

The year 2023 saw the first year of operation of the ICAC Task Force within the Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit. The Unit Detectives and Task Force Officers (TFOs) received, analyzed and investigated over 100 CyberTips generated from the New Jersey State Police (NSJP) ICAC Task Force of alleged cybercrimes occurring within Morris County. These crimes include the possession, distribution and creation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). In 2023, the unit executed 31 Search Warrant operations, often in conjunction with the Morris County Sheriff's Emergency Response Team (SERT) and surrounding municipal departments, which have resulted in the seizure of thousands of images of CSAM. ICAC handled many significant cases in 2023, some of which are highlighted below.

State v. John Green, the defendant, John Green, was charged with the 1st degree Distribution of CSAM-Maintaining a File Sharing Program (over 1,000 images) and 2nd degree Possession of CSAM. During the subsequent analysis of the defendant's devices, one folder was found to contain over 84,000 images, all of which are believed to be CSAM. The defendant is currently on Parole Supervision for Life for a 2006 conviction on four (4) counts of 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, where he received a 15-year prison sentence. He is also currently a Tier 1 Megan's Law offender.

State v. William Mickel, the defendant, William Mickel, was charged by the Unit in 2022. After months of investigation and analysis of items seized as a result of a search warrant executed on his residence, the FBI was consulted and brought into the investigation. On May 4, 2023, the defendant was charged federally with one (1) count each of Possession and Distribution of CSAM.

The Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit held its annual four (4) day Sex Crimes Investigation Course at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy. The course is designed to train municipal officers both in and outside of Morris County on the topics of adult, adolescent and child sexual assault, internet crimes against children and child physical abuse and maltreatment. Presenters include members of the unit as well as outside professionals from DCP&P, medical personnel specializing in child abuse and the New Jersey State Police. The SC/CEU handled many significant cases throughout the year, of which several are highlighted below.

State v. Michael Figueroa, this originated as a narcotics investigation that was referred to the Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit when videos of the defendant, Michael Figueroa, sexually abusing a child were found on his cellular phone. It was determined that the victim was a boy who, from the age of seven (7) to nine (9) was known to the defendant and left in his care. The

victim was forensically interviewed, where he disclosed his abuse as well as witnessing the defendant sexually assaulting another disabled child while the child was sleeping. Ultimately the defendant was charged with multiple counts of 1st degree Aggravated Sexual Assault, 2nd degree Sexual Assault and Endangering the Welfare of a Child regarding the original victim.

State v. Joseph DeRose, the defendant, Joseph DeRose, was charged with multiple counts of 2nd degree Sexual Assault, Endangering the Welfare of a Child and Criminal Sexual Contact for engaging in sexual acts with a 16-year-old male. The defendant was the victim's high school sports coach during the time of the acts, and therefore had supervisory power over him. At the time of his arrest, the defendant was employed as a teacher and volunteer coach with a youth sports program. Upon a review of his electronics, additional charges were added including 1st degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child-Manufacturing Child Pornography. The defendant accepted a plea offer that will require him to register as a Megan's Law offender with Parole Supervision for Life, as well as surrender his teaching license.

State v. Nicholas Zirpoli, the defendant, Nicholas Zirpoli, was the owner of the consignment store Plato's Closet. It was discovered during an investigation that the defendant was surreptitiously video recording individuals using the restroom at the store, storing the videos and using them for sexual gratification. After an almost yearlong investigation, 11 victims were identified by law enforcement, including one (1) juvenile. The defendant was charged with one (1) count of 1st degree Manufacturing Child Pornography, one count of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Filming a Child in a Prohibited Sexual Act, one count of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Possession of Child Pornography, one count of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, 10 counts of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Invasion of Privacy, and one count of 4<sup>th</sup> degree Destruction of Evidence.

State v. Nafis Wiggins, the defendant, Nafis Wiggins, was engaging in a sexual relationship with a 16-year-old female from the time she was 15 years old. He had also been having a sexual relationship with a second child, a 14-year-old female. An investigation was initiated which culminated in the defendant responding to meet who he believed was the 16-year-old victim for the purpose of engaging in sex, where he was apprehended by law enforcement. The defendant was charged with 2 counts 1<sup>st</sup> degree Human Trafficking, 2 counts 2nd degree Luring, 2 counts 2nd degree Sexual Assault (statutory), and one count 3rd degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child after previously being charged with 3 counts 2nd degree Sexual Assault (Statutory), one count 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, one count 3rd degree Possession of CDS with Intent to Distribute, and one count 3rd degree Possession of CDS (Oxycodone).

The Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit supervisors have been meeting bi-annually with municipal Sex Crimes Liaison Officers to facilitate communication between agencies and to pass on important information set forward by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and the Attorney General's Office. The unit hopes to expand these meetings into possible training sessions for the Liaisons as well as municipal detective bureaus in order to aid in their understanding and handling of cases involving sexual assault or child abuse.

Unit supervisors have been working on changes to internal Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit directives, policies and procedures in an effort to enable unit personnel to more effectively and efficiently assess and respond to active referrals and cases. Unit Detectives work in conjunction

with municipal Detectives, who have also received training specific to the investigation of sexual assaults. A separate area has been designated in the office to assist unit Detectives in the review of complex and voluminous amounts of data that is often extracted from electronic devices in their investigations.

The Sex Crimes/Child Endangerment Unit remains committed to excellence and professionalism. The unit members' high standards and superior work ethic are reflected in the quality investigations that took place during 2023 and will continue forward into the coming years.

### **Megan's Law**

The Megan's Law Unit processes the registrations of sex offenders residing, attending school, or working in Morris County, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2C:7-1 et seq. The unit supervises all Megan's Law Registrants in the County and ensures their compliance with the various laws associated with registration and community supervision for life. The final registrant population in Morris County for 2023 was 312, with 31 being new registrants. This is similar to the previous year, which had 311 registrants.

Members assigned to the unit prepare the paperwork needed to determine the risk registrants pose to the residents of Morris County. This procedure is completed by conducting a thorough investigation of the registrant's criminal and social history, a review of their underlying sexual offense(s), a review of psychological evaluations, as well as a review of any parole or probation information. Once all required documents are prepared, the Assistant Prosecutors draft motions to be filed in Superior Court and the case is scheduled for a Tier Classification hearing in front of a Superior Court Judge.

Registrants are classified as either Tier One offenders, Tier Two offenders, or Tier Three offenders.

Tier One registrants are deemed to pose a low risk of re-offending to the community. Notification on Tier One offenders is limited to Law Enforcement personnel with jurisdiction in an area the registrant resides, is employed, or frequents.

Tier Two registrants are at a moderate risk to re-offend. They are relatively more likely to re-offend in comparison to Tier One offenders and therefore warrant expanded notice to schools and community groups in the public for their protection.

Tier Three offenders encompass those who are found to be at a high risk of re-offending and therefore warrant the highest level of notification. The Tier Three notification includes an in-depth door to door notification to all residents, schools, and businesses within a half (½) mile radius of where the registrant lives and works. A second notification goes to all schools and community groups, including all parents of students enrolled in schools within a 2-mile radius of where the registrant lives and works. This process of registration, classification and notification must be repeated each time a registrant changes his/her residence, place of employment or school.

All Tier One and Tier Two classification notifications are made by the members of the unit. Tier Three notifications are made in conjunction with the local police department(s) with jurisdiction over the area(s) to be notified, and typically requires the utilization of at least 75 police officers.

The unit prosecutes any person who fails to register, fails to notify local law enforcement of a change of residence and any person who violates a sentence of community supervision for life. The unit also provides educational programs upon request to schools, public and private organizations, the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy and any other organization. The Unit is available to the local police departments to answer questions regarding any Megan's Law issue.

The Unit is responsible for ensuring that all regulations pursuant to Attorney General Guidelines for Law Enforcement for the Implementation of Sex Offender Registration and Community Notification Laws are adhered to by all municipalities in the County.

In 2023, the Megan's Law Unit had two (2) complaints filed with two (2) registration violations, and two (2) complaints filed with two (2) parole violations.

On January 6, 2023, defendant Jason Skidmore was charged out of Boonton Township with 4th degree Violation of Parole Supervision for Life (PSL). The defendant was convicted of 3rd degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child in Morris County in 1998. In March of 2021, the defendant's supervision was transferred to Pennsylvania. Since December of 2022, the defendant did not report to his parole officer or inform him of his whereabouts. A bench warrant has since been issued for the defendant.

On May 6, 2023, defendant Richard Barton, was charged with two counts of 3rd degree Failure to Register. On May 5, 2023, a detective out of Long Hill received a call of a suicidal person, defendant, of whom he was familiar. The detective arrived at the scene (the registered residence of the registrant) and convinced him to seek medical attention. The defendant's ex-father-in-law, and owner of the residence, stated that defendant has not lived at this residence for four (4) years. Law enforcement later ascertained that the defendant had been staying with a friend in Montclair but failed to register. This matter was resolved with a probationary sentence.

In 2024, the Megan's Law Unit will continue to effectively and efficiently monitor the compliance of all registrants residing and working in Morris County, thus ensuring that registrants who are released from prison or who move into Morris County continue to get tiered in a timely fashion.



## SPECIAL OPERATIONS DIVISION

### **Special Enforcement Unit**

The Special Enforcement Unit (SEU) operates as part of the Special Operations Division (SOD) and is responsible for conducting covert and overt investigations into criminal activities involving: Controlled Dangerous Substances and other abused substances, money laundering, firearms trafficking, and illegal activity as it relates to organized crime and criminal street gang activity.

The focus of the Special Enforcement Unit is to: provide an expertise in the above-mentioned fields; train and deploy undercover agents; assist municipal, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies with cooperative investigations and focus the investigative and prosecutorial efforts on targeting high level offenders of the above-mentioned crimes. The unit consists of legal, investigative and analytical personnel and utilizes municipal, county and state law enforcement officers as Task Force Officers (TFOs) who are temporarily assigned to the Narcotics Task Force within the Special Enforcement Unit, to supplement, assist and partner with the Unit Prosecutor's Detectives.

Individuals of investigations are identified through both proactive and reactive police methods. The resulting intelligence is either forwarded to the municipalities for their action or pursued directly by SEU by applying investigative resources and utilizing proactive and undercover/covert investigative strategies to develop the best possible evidence. Once arrests are made, a strong prosecution model follows to obtain maximum sentences for the offenders.

A Tactical Narcotics Team (TNT) in 2023 consisted of seven members, including one commander and one Tactical Emergency Medical Technician (TEMS). The team is responsible for tactically entering structures to execute high-risk search warrants and arrest warrants, providing officer rescue personnel for undercover operations and conducting vehicle assaults/high risk arrests. SEU members also provide education through lectures and training pertaining to controlled dangerous substances and drug enforcement investigations to law enforcement officers, academy recruits, civil groups and legal staff. This includes providing faculty members for the Top Gun and Undercover Narcotics Investigation Training.

During 2023, the unit successfully recruited several Task Force Officers from municipal and county agencies, enhancing the Unit's capabilities and increasing partnerships with other agencies.

During an investigation in early 2023, in State v. Lexine Zuzunaga, Jordan Saravia, Alberto Herrera and Jamel McNeal, law enforcement conducted an undercover investigation, resulting in the purchase of firearms and CDS. This investigation culminated with numerous search warrants and the arrest of 4 individuals with the seizure of approximately 1100 grams of fentanyl, 200 grams of cocaine, 6lbs of marijuana, 10 bricks of suspected heroin, 5 handguns, 1 rifle and \$7,000 in US currency.

In April of 2023, in State v. Michael Figueroa, an investigation led to the arrest and seizure of 15 bricks of heroin, 6 grams of cocaine, 2 handguns and 1 long gun/rifle. The defendant, Mr. Figueroa, was additionally charged with sexual assault on a minor, after further investigation revealed a victim of this assault. Mr. Figueroa pled guilty and was sentenced to twenty-three (23) years in state prison with parole ineligibility.

In July 2023, in State v. Eldridge Cruzado and Nelly Solano, an investigation led to a search warrant and the arrest of 2 defendants. The search resulted in the seizure of 100 tabs of LSD, 250 Xanax pills, 5 pounds of marijuana, 70 grams of meth, 5 pounds of cocaine and \$336,662.

During 2023, the Special Enforcement Unit conducted numerous Operation Helping Hand details, inclusive of arrest, proactive enforcement and non-arrest/outreach in order to assist persons saved by Narcan into the recovery process.

In 2024, SEU will continue to pursue high-level narcotics investigations and money laundering investigations in addition to pursuing lower-level narcotic investigations, to build larger cases while also assisting local departments. The unit will also solicit local municipalities to send officers to the MCPO SEU as Task Force Officers. SEU will continue to work with addiction assistance programs such as Morris County Prevention is Key (MCPIK) and the Center for Addiction and Recovery Education and Success (CARES) to assist persons struggling with addiction within Morris County. Lastly, the unit will seek to create and implement a training program, taught by the MCPO and MCPIK, to aid law enforcement in assisting individuals contacted by officers with the help they may need through CARES. The SEU saw high seizures of CDS, US currency and firearms during 2023 and will continue to recruit officers to assist with the Task Force to continue to obtain these numbers.

### **Fugitive Unit**

The Fugitive Unit is responsible for locating and apprehending fugitives wanted by this agency and, when necessary, extraditing them from asylum jurisdictions. This unit also investigates escapes from the Morris County Correctional Facility, the Morris County Youth Detention Center and Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital. It is the responsibility of the Fugitive Unit to process and investigate all pre-sentence and failure to appear sentencing warrants issued by the Morris County Superior Court Judges in the Criminal and Family Part Sections. The unit processes all Governors' Warrants for fugitives wanted by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office who have refused to waive extradition from asylum states. Additionally, the unit handles all Interstate Agreement on Detainers (IAD) requests and processes all interstate witness and subpoena requests in accordance with the Interstate Witness and Subpoena Act. The Fugitive Unit facilitates the return of fugitives in custody in Morris County who are wanted by other states.

During 2023, the Fugitive Unit members continued to assist local police departments with the extradition of subjects from states surrounding New Jersey on complaint warrants not served. The unit continued a bench warrant review process in order to review warrants from older, less

violent/serious charges, that could be cleared through case review. This resulted in a large number of warrants being dismissed.

The Fugitive Unit will continue with the bench warrant review project, in order to allocate time and resources to fugitive investigations of a more serious and violent nature. The unit will identify those cases where a Communications Data Warrant (CDW)/Cell Phone Tracking Warrant will assist the unit in locating and apprehending subjects on more serious/violent charges. Additionally, the unit will work with Assistant Prosecutors and Detectives to file bail jumping complaints for defendants who repeatedly fail to appear for their court dates which results in multiple warrants issued and repeat extraditions carried out. On top of the Fugitive Unit's daily duties, they often assist other units of the Special Operations Division with operational and investigative needs.

### **Forfeiture Unit**

The main function of the Asset Forfeiture Unit is to coordinate all seizures and potential forfeiture of assets seized in Morris County. This includes seizures made by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, the thirty-eight (38) Municipal Police Departments in Morris County, the New Jersey State Police, and at times, the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice. The Asset Forfeiture Unit also provides assistance to all Morris County Law Enforcement agencies.

The Forfeiture Unit monitors the expenditure of forfeited assets by all the law enforcement agencies within Morris County. By policy, all municipal agencies are directed to seek authorization in writing for any expenditure they wish to make utilizing forfeited funds. A municipal agency's forfeiture expenditure request is submitted to the Forfeiture Unit on the form designed for this purpose and titled the "Morris County Prosecutor's Municipal Request for Use of Forfeited Funds." An Assistant Prosecutor assigned to the Asset Forfeiture Unit determines if the request complies with the New Jersey Attorney General's Guidelines and then passes it through the chain of command for final approval by the Prosecutor. A written response as to the final decision is made to the requesting agency.

In addition to monitoring the municipalities, the unit monitors and reports all expenditures made from the Morris County Prosecutor's forfeiture accounts. During 2023, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office spent \$5,076.34 in expenses relating to the operation of the forfeiture program. These funds were taken from the Asset Maintenance Account (AMA). Non-forfeiture program expenditures made with forfeited funds totaled \$218,958.49. These funds were acquired from the County Law Enforcement Trust Account (CLETA), Federal Law Enforcement Trust Account - Treasury (FLETA-T), and the Federal Law Enforcement Trust Account – Justice (FLETA-J) All expenditures made from these accounts comply with the New Jersey Attorney General's Guidelines.

The Asset Forfeiture Unit also oversees the distribution of forfeited funds and property to the participating Law Enforcement agencies. The Forfeiture Distribution Committee is comprised of the Morris County Prosecutor or his designee, the Morris County Prosecutor's Chief of Detectives or his designee, the Assistant Prosecutor in charge of forfeitures, the President of the Morris

County Police Chiefs' Association, and the President of the Morris County Detectives' Association. The committee approves the distribution of forfeited assets to the participating agencies annually.

Thirty-three forfeiture investigations were opened during 2023. Thirty-seven forfeiture cases were closed in 2022. One forfeiture case report was reviewed by this unit and either did not meet the criteria established to open a forfeiture file or was not opened because of weak proofs.

The following assets were **seized** by law enforcement in Morris County during 2023:

|                           |                                  |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| United States Currency    | \$729,058.43                     |
| 18 Vehicles, 1 Motorcycle | \$140,405.00 (approximate value) |

The following assets were **forfeited** to the Morris County Prosecutor's Office in 2023:

|                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| United States Currency | \$511,360.37        |
| 7 Vehicles, 2 Trailers | \$78,317.00 (value) |

In 2023, the Asset Forfeiture Unit continued its effort to keep this office in full compliance with the New Jersey Unclaimed Property statute. Currently there are no funds to be returned from 2023 regarding unclaimed property.

During 2023, an independent auditor presented a favorable 2022 audit report after reviewing the Asset Forfeiture Unit accounts. An audit for calendar year 2023 will be scheduled in the Spring of 2024.

Lastly, two members of the unit have continued their positions as members of a sub-committee formed by the Office of the Attorney General regarding new forfeiture legislation that is being implemented statewide.

The unit will continue to review its present procedures to effectively increase its efficiency and productivity. As soon as the new Standard Operating Procedures for Forfeiture are implemented by the Office of the Attorney General, this Unit will begin to update our own SOP and Forfeiture Directive.

This office has been completely compliant with the Unclaimed Property statute for a sixth successive year. The Unit will continue its efforts to comply with the New Jersey Unclaimed Property statute in 2024.

**Arson/Environmental Crimes Unit**

The Arson/Environmental Crimes Unit (A/EUCU) is responsible for investigating crimes related to suspicious fires as well as violations of New Jersey Environmental laws. Through a countywide Directive, the unit is tasked to investigate all fires, regardless of cause, involving a fatality, suspected fatality or serious bodily injury, all fires known to be intentionally set or considered suspicious in origin, all fires causing damage to government buildings, schools or colleges, churches, synagogues or other houses of worship, health care facilities, multiple family dwellings

(more than three units), industrial complexes, shopping centers, malls or other commercial properties (i.e. places of public assembly, restaurants, etc.) and ethnic social clubs. In addition, the unit investigates the release, discharge, abandonment or dumping of any suspected hazardous or toxic materials, any hazardous or toxic material incidents resulting in death or serious bodily injury or in the damage to a substantial quantity of property, and any violations of the environmental statutes.

The Arson/Environmental Crimes Unit is a function within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and the personnel are spread across different divisions and units within the office, to include Detectives and Investigative Supervision in the Special Operations Division, Detectives and Legal Supervision in the Tactical Division, and on-call Detectives in the Family Division and in the Courts and Administrative Division. As such, the Detectives and Legal Staff assigned to the A/ECU are primarily responsible for handling other assignments within the office in addition to their assignments within the A/ECU.

In 2023, the Arson/Environmental Crimes Unit was notified of seventy-five (75) fires, of which the Arson Unit responded to five (5). These included three (3) fatal fire scenes, one (1) large scale fire in Dover, and one (1) incendiary fire of a motor vehicle. In this case, State v. Michael Sapp, members of the Morristown Police and Fire Departments, along with the MCPO A/ECU responded to a vehicle fire in the area of Clyde Potts Drive, Morristown, NJ on the morning of July 16, 2023. Through various investigative means, including review of multiple surveillance videos, footage was obtained showing an individual pouring a liquid onto and around a vehicle and subsequently igniting the liquid causing a fire on and around the vehicle. Additional surveillance footage was obtained tracking the individual's movements before and after the fire including from and to the area.

During a search conducted on July 20, 2023, of the suspect's residence, clothing, footwear, and a bag matching those worn by the suspect on surveillance were seized. Inside the bag that was seized, a portion of a plastic gas can spout was found. Additionally, clothing matching the clothing seen in body worn camera footage of police interactions with Michael Sapp both shortly before and after the fire were found. Michael Sapp was subsequently charged with Aggravated Arson, a crime of the second degree.

In 2023, the A/ECU provided in-service training to various Police Departments and personnel, to include the Morris County Sheriff's Office Crime Scene Investigation Detectives. These training courses focused on fire patterns, collection and preservation of evidence, and legal topics and relevant case law.

For 2024, the A/ECU will work to get all members of the unit to attend the DCJ Basic Arson Investigators Course, International Association of Arson Investigators Certified Fire Investigator trainer courses and obtain training to the Hazardous Material Technician Level. The A/ECU will focus on creating an Arson Task Force that will rely on many of the highly trained fire officials throughout Morris County to help supplement the need for resources and to relieve the members of A/ECU with non-directive calls or notification only calls.

The A/ECU will continue to provide in-service training to the police, fire and emergency services agencies in Morris County in the subject of Fire and Arson related topics.

### **Intelligence Unit**

The Intelligence Unit gathers useful and relevant information from an array of public and law enforcement sources and databases for the purpose of identifying patterns of crime and the individuals associated with criminal activity. The information can also be utilized to predict and prevent crime, ensure an efficient use of law enforcement resources, and assist law enforcement agencies in determining similarities or patterns that can assist with investigations. The mission of the Intelligence Unit is to use these tools to reduce crime, thereby improving the quality of life in Morris County. The Intelligence Unit also works closely with other units within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and assists with providing valuable information through subject profile background reports and at times operating as a real time crime center.

The Intelligence Unit is also responsible for the collection of all documentation for the 75 consensual intercepts that were requested in 2023, to include cataloging and recording each document for the year end Attorney General Report. To accompany these requests, the equipment needed for the intercepts is inventoried, tested, and improved throughout the year.

The Morris County Auto Theft Task Force (ATTF) is an additional investigative responsibility of the Intelligence Unit. In 2023, there were 191 motor vehicle thefts in Morris County. In 2022, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office recorded 273 motor vehicle thefts, a reduction of approximately 30%. The Morris County Auto Theft Task Force in conjunction with the Intelligence Unit, works diligently with local and state law enforcement to combat motor vehicle thefts, thoroughly investigate all crimes, and successfully prosecute offenders.

The Intelligence Unit will continue to not only be an asset to the Special Operations Division, but also to all units within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and a resource for the local municipalities we serve. The investigative focus for the unit remains high-end auto theft and organized burglary groups.

The following are notable cases investigated by the Intelligence Unit/ATTF in 2023:

State v Luis Martinez and Leila Acevedo: On January 6, 2023, unknown actors burglarized the FSS Armory store in Montville and stole approximately 20 guns from the business. After an extensive investigation, Luis Martinez was identified as a suspect through a combination of law enforcement efforts, which included electronic surveillance, DNA, and other technological capabilities. He was arrested and charged with 9 counts of first-degree unlawful possession of a weapon (handgun), 11 counts of first-degree unlawful possession of a weapon (rifle/shotgun), and various conspiracy/burglary/theft charges. Martinez pled guilty to 10 counts of first-degree unlawful possession of a weapon and was sentenced to 11 years in New Jersey State Prison. Additionally, Leila Acevedo was identified as another suspect and charged with 9 counts of first-degree unlawful possession of a weapon (handgun), 11 counts of first-degree unlawful possession of a weapon (rifle/shotgun), and various conspiracy/burglary/theft charges. Acevedo pled guilty

and was sentenced to 2 years probation, 134 days in jail and 30 hours of community service. The investigation is ongoing.

State v Graham/Holmes/Dalton/Talmadge/Moses: On July 9, 2023, Lincoln Park Police Department observed a stolen motor vehicle travelling in their jurisdiction. A pursuit was initiated and later ended when the suspect vehicle stopped on Interstate 287 in Montville and five actors exited the vehicle and ran into the wooded area near the highway. Four individuals were apprehended on scene, but the driver was not identified or located. After continued follow up investigation by the MCPO Intelligence Unit/ATTF, the fifth suspect/driver was identified. All suspects involved were arrested and charged with multiple auto-theft related offenses/resisting arrest.

### **Homeland Security Unit**

The primary mission of the Homeland Security Unit is to protect the citizens, government, and infrastructure of Morris County and the State of New Jersey against any attack, foreign or domestic. This mission is accomplished by maintaining readiness, conducting investigations to identify and disrupt a potential attack, planning and preparing to respond to an incident to defend against an ongoing attack, and to investigate any terrorism related incident to ensure the prosecution of the responsible parties and to protect the citizens of Morris County and the State of New Jersey.

The unit is responsible for counter-terrorism planning, preparation, response, and investigative efforts. The unit strives to identify potential threats, coordinate available resources for the preparation and response to large-scale criminal incidents, develop plans and work with local, county and regional agencies to increase the preparedness and ability to protect the government and infrastructure of Morris County, the State of New Jersey, and cooperate to protect the New York Metropolitan Area.

Additionally, the unit investigates all potential threats to religious facilities/houses of worship, educational facilities and healthcare facilities. The Homeland Security Unit works closely with the MCPO Juvenile and the Pre-Trial Services/Mental Health Diversion Units, as well as several state agencies, to ensure (1) the threat against the educational facility is mitigated; and (2) the student, oftentimes a juvenile, receives all necessary services to ensure they obtain the help they may need.

According to the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP), Morris County has 60 recognized assets that meet National or State Assets criteria.

The Homeland Security Unit staffs a Director of County Critical Infrastructure. The primary responsibility of this position is to coordinate all activities as they relate to critical infrastructure and the security of the residents within the County of Morris, while maintaining open lines of communication between Federal agencies, State agencies, County agencies and departments such as the Office of Emergency Management, the Office of the Superintendent of Schools, and the Office of Health Management. The Director also serves as a member of the County Multi Disciplinary Working Group with respect to the allocation of federal, state, and county Homeland

Security funding that is used within the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) Region and the County of Morris. Additionally, the Director is a County representative to the Morris County Chamber of Commerce and the Infrastructure Advisory Group.

Director Owens also assists organizations and houses of worship with the application process of federal and state grants for targeted hardening of assets. In 2023, the breakdown of the grants are as follows:

- **Federal - FY-2023 State Homeland Security Program – (SHSP funding):**
  - Morris County was awarded \$297,370.05 for approved projects from the FY-2023 SHSP Local Share Grant Program.
  
- **Federal - FY-2023 Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Federal Grant**
  - Funded Project for Morris County - Hospital Security Upgrades.  
All hospitals in Morris County have been funded for security upgrades. NJOHSP reprogrammed the 2023 funding to complete the remaining hospitals in the UASI region.
  
- **Federal - FY-2023 Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP)**

Each year, the Federal government funds nonprofit organizations to purchase and install security equipment (Target Hardening) on property owned or leased by the nonprofit organization. Twenty-eight organizations in Morris County submitted applications for the competitive NSGP program. The following eleven organizations received grants equaling \$1.65 million. These numbers reflect the most applicants and awards we have ever received.

  1. Adath Shalom - Morristown
  2. Chevra Agudas Achim Anshe Pine Brook – Montville
  3. Congregation Ahavath Yisrael – Morristown
  4. Islamic Center of Morris County Inc. – Rockaway
  5. Islamic Society of North Jersey – Mount Olive
  6. Jam-E-Masjid-Islamic Center Inc. – Boonton
  7. White Meadow Temple (Changing the name to Or Hadash, Inc.) – Rockaway
  8. Rabbinical College of America – Morristown
  9. Rabbinical College of America – Morristown
  10. Saint Elizabeth University – Morristown
  11. Saint Rose of Lima RC Church – East Hanover
  
- **State - SFY-2024 New Jersey - Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NJ NPSGP)**
  - The State of New Jersey offered two separate grants for target hardening and security personnel. Recipients could only receive one of the state grants. One hundred thousand dollars was the maximum award for target hardening. Twenty thousand dollars was the total amount for security personnel. NJOHSP received more than 600 submissions. The following six Morris County organizations received the grant:



- **Security Personnel**  
None
  
- **Target Hardening:**
  1. Drew University – Madison
  2. Gottesman RTW Academy – Randolph
  3. Chabad Center of Northwest NJ
  4. JCC MetroWest Camp Deeny Riback – Mount Olive
  5. Islamic Community Cultural Center – Parsippany
  6. Holy Spirit Catholic Church – Pequannock

In addition to the 101 investigative cases opened during the reporting period, the Homeland Security and Intelligence Units generated 42 Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) to the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Of those, 57% of Morris County SARs were pursued federally.

During 2023, the Homeland Security Unit completed 17 security assessments for Morris County nonprofit organizations. Additionally, The Homeland Security Unit assisted other Risk Mitigation Planners (RMPs) in the UASI region and the NJ State Police with 9 security assessments, totaling the number of security assessments to 26. Additionally, numerous training sessions were provided to faith based and educational communities.

In 2024, the Homeland Security Unit will continue to take proactive and reactive roles in Homeland Security investigations, working with our municipal, county, state and federal law enforcement partners to combat homegrown violent extremism. The unit will work cohesively with the Juvenile Unit and NJOHSP to ensure school threats are handled according to prescribed protocols and directives to ensure the safety of our educational facilities. Similarly, we will continue providing our evaluation services to our faith-based facilities and provide threat assessments and remedial recommendations as appropriate.

The below investigation is a notable case conducted by the Homeland Security Unit:

State v Dwayne Allen: On March 23, 2023, two juvenile students who attended the Morris Knolls High School were arrested for bringing a loaded Glock 43X handgun into school. After a lengthy investigation that consisted of a review of historical data, the analysis of forensically extracted cellular devices, open-source social media searches, searches of law enforcement databases by the MCPO Juvenile Unit, MCPO Homeland Security Unit, and the Denville Police Department, it was revealed that the two juveniles purchased the firearm from an adult individual later identified as Dwayne Allen. As a result, Allen was arrested and charged with multiple weapons offenses by the Homeland Security Unit. Allen pled guilty to second-degree unlawful possession of a weapon for his involvement in the sale of the firearm to the two juveniles. Allen was sentenced to 42 months in New Jersey State Prison.

## **High Tech Crimes Unit**

Over the past year, the High Tech Crimes Unit (HTCU) within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office has made significant strides in enhancing its capabilities and effectiveness in support of criminal investigations that rely on digital evidence. With a multifaceted approach, the HTCU has prioritized internal improvement through advanced training programs, fostering a culture of continuous learning and skill development among its members. Moreover, the unit has actively engaged in networking initiatives, forging valuable partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and industry experts to share best practices and stay at the forefront of technological advancements in digital forensics and investigation. A key highlight of the year has been the HTCU's proficiency in conducting digital extractions of advanced and everchanging devices, enabling thorough and precise evidence collection in complex cases. With the ever-evolving growth of technology, all members of the HTCU continue to keep pace with all technological advances and maintain all forensic and training certifications. Through these efforts, the HTCU has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to staying ahead of evolving digital threats while providing the best available product to Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors that can be used in court proceedings to ensure convictions.

Throughout the year, the High Tech Crimes Unit has conducted digital and multimedia examinations for a spectrum of local, county, state, and federal agencies. This incorporated the comprehensive data extraction of various electronic devices, from cellphones to computers to digital storage devices, while employing forensically sound tools to extract both accessible and sometimes otherwise inaccessible data. In select cases, detailed case and analysis reports were generated and members of the HTCU trained Detectives and Assistant Prosecutors on their findings and how this data fits into the global investigation. Notably, members of the High Tech Crimes Unit have provided expert testimony in court, underscoring their expertise and credibility. Additionally, the unit extended its support to agencies by offering device triage, on-scene previews, identification of devices, and ensuring proper evidence collection and transportation during Search Warrants. Moreover, the HTCU played a pivotal role in assisting multiple state, county, and municipal agencies in the implementation, installation, support, and analysis of various technological tools and methods.

In 2023, the High Tech Crimes Unit (HTCU) advanced our initiatives aimed at addressing the escalating volume and complexity of digital data stored on cellphones, computers, and tablets. Recognizing the critical need to bolster storage capabilities while safeguarding evidentiary data, the HTCU meticulously managed and maintained a forensic server, creating a duplicate backup system in case of failure while ensuring retention. In the coming year, the HTCU will be expanding our server by at least 300-terabytes since over the course of the year, the unit conducted reviews of more than 700 devices, with approximately 500 undergoing forensic extractions. Consequently, to accommodate the mounting evidence storage requirements, investments were made in server storage, slated for implementation in 2024. Furthermore, after extensive research and collaboration within the law enforcement networking community, the HTCU procured a forensic software package—a cutting-edge solution encompassing case and evidence management, alongside digital data distribution. This transformative project, set to roll out in the summer of 2024, will revolutionize the submission, review, and dissemination of evidence, albeit requiring several months for implementation and comprehensive training of agency personnel.

Throughout the year, our unit has continued to provide educational opportunities within the Morris County Law Enforcement Community, delivering presentations at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy, Top Gun, and other agency specific locations. These classes have been tailored to meet the evolving needs of law enforcement personnel, including a comprehensive two-hour "Internet Investigations" segment designed for newly promoted detectives, and a day-long "Introduction to Computer Crime Investigations" course accessible to all members of law enforcement, and multiple day-long and hour-long trainings on Communication Data Warrants and Law Enforcement Technology. These foundational classes equip first-responding officers and Detectives with essential strategies for effectively handling computer-related evidence and investigations. Furthermore, our unit's expertise has been sought after beyond county lines, with requests for questions about software, best standards, and inquiries to conduct full-day classes throughout the state of New Jersey—an affirmation of our role as trusted educators and partners in advancing digital crime investigation techniques statewide.

Looking ahead to the upcoming year, the High Tech Crimes Unit is committed to furthering its mission of excellence in digital crime investigation and education. Building upon the foundation laid in 2023, our primary goal is to expand our training initiatives to reach even more law enforcement agencies across Morris County and the State, empowering officers with the latest tools and techniques for combating digital crime effectively. Additionally, we aim to enhance our internal capacity by investing in advanced technologies and resources, to include the rearrangement of the layout of our lab to one that provides furniture and workspaces that are more suitable for a lab setting, while ensuring that we remain at the forefront of forensic analysis and evidence management. Through these endeavors, the HTCUC is poised to continue its pivotal role in safeguarding communities and upholding justice in the digital age.

## **SPECIALIZED CRIMES DIVISION**

### **Professional Standards Unit**

It is the responsibility of the Professional Standards Unit (PSU) to conduct investigations and work in conjunction with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies on investigations involving criminal violations committed by elected or appointed public officials and public employees, when such conduct is related to their public duties. The unit is also responsible for investigating violations regarding: Perjury, N.J.S.A Title 19 (Election laws), N.J.S.A. Title 40 and 40A (Municipalities and Counties), conflicts of interests involving Public Officials and N.J.S.A. Title 18 (Education). In addition, the Professional Standards Unit will conduct any investigation that the Prosecutor, First Assistant Prosecutor, or Chief of Detectives designates as sensitive or confidential in nature, which includes office Internal Affairs investigations. In 2023, members of the unit also conducted pre-employment background investigations for all legal, investigative, support staff, and intern applicants. The Early Warning System notifications, Extreme Risk Protection Orders involving Police Officers, Use of Force and Brady/Giglio checks are also reviewed within the Professional Standards Unit.

The Professional Standards Unit is unique in the fact that it only investigates violations of specific statutes where certain elements must be met to substantiate a charge; however, it also investigates “improper behavior” on the part of public officials. The unique nature of these investigations separates the Professional Standards Unit from other units in the office. In some cases, the findings often reveal an “appearance of improper behavior,” even though a specific violation of a criminal statute cannot be substantiated. As a result of this appearance of “improper behavior,” recommendations are made for corrective action to prevent such conduct from occurring in the future and the results of the investigation are sent to the proper authority for any corrective action deemed appropriate.

In addition, often the targets of these investigations are either high-ranking public officials or law enforcement officers, and the investigations are therefore highly sensitive. For these reasons, the Unit Detectives must make a concentrated effort to ensure the integrity of all investigations and maintain the high level of professionalism that this office established. In those instances where a public official or law enforcement officer may not have violated a specific criminal statute, the Professional Standards Unit is committed to ensure that the public trust is not broken and that the matter or allegation is appropriately addressed administratively.

The Professional Standards Unit is responsible for accepting referrals from the New Jersey Office of Public Integrity and Accountability. Upon completion of the investigation, the Professional Standards Unit will report back to the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability with the appropriate findings. The Professional Standards Unit is responsible for monitoring and reporting that all county and municipal law enforcement agencies are in compliance with the required reporting guidelines of the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General.

When necessary, Detectives of the Professional Standards Unit are available to aid and assist all other units of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, either in their assigned capacity or otherwise, as a situation may require. Members of the Professional Standards Unit maintain good working relations with all law enforcement and governmental agencies. When appropriate, Detectives will prepare or assist in the preparation of reports necessary for the functioning of this unit or the Morris County Prosecutor's Office as a whole.

From January 1, 2023, through July 1, 2023, PSU detectives were responsible for conducting thirteen pre-employment background investigations, examining the criminal, personal, professional and educational background of the candidates. These investigations involve a concentrated effort on the part of the assigned Detective to conduct personal interviews and obtain, review and confirm pertinent information/documentation that is provided by the candidate. All information is memorialized in a detailed report which is reviewed and signed off through the office chain-of-command up to the Prosecutor. All the positions within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office require either a full or limited background investigation.

In 2023, the Professional Standards Unit continued to maintain productive communication with various state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies either by way of referral or acceptance of new investigations. Specifically, the Professional Standards Unit provided guidance and assistance by way of personnel, investigative advice, or legal/technical advice to the municipal police departments to conduct their internal affairs investigations. These types of investigations are normally sensitive in nature and therefore, it is crucial that an amicable relationship exist between the municipal police departments and this office. The Professional Standards Unit strives daily to maintain professionalism and integrity when interacting with the local agencies in order to keep this relationship.

On September 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2023, members of the MCPO PSU conducted a successful two-day Basic Internal Affairs training course at the Morris County Public Safety Academy. In attendance were approximately seventy (70) internal affairs investigators from within the Morris County area.

Brady/Giglio reviews are conducted by the Professional Standards Unit as it relates to court related matters. Brady/Giglio material is any information favorable to the accused which may reduce a defendant's potential sentence, go against the credibility of an unfavorable witness, or otherwise allow a jury to infer against the defendant's guilt.

In 2023, the Professional Standards Unit opened two hundred twenty-seven PSU investigations and forty-six internal affairs investigations. The following is an example of a case handled by the PSU in 2023 and is highlighted based on the significant outcome, investigative effort and resources dedicated to same.

In State v. Nassar, in November of 2022, the MCPO PSU opened a criminal investigation involving an allegation of theft by a Morris Township Police Officer from a Home Depot Store. An employee of the Home Depot Store assisted the Morris Township Police Officer with the theft of merchandise. After multiple interviews, review of subpoena return material and video surveillance, both individuals were arrested. On September 20, 2023, the Morris Township Police Officer was arrested and charged for Shoplifting and Criminal Conspiracy. On September 28, 2023, the Home

Depot employee was arrested and charged for Shoplifting and Criminal Conspiracy. On December 20, 2023, both defendants were approved for the Pretrial Intervention Program.

In 2024, the Professional Standards Unit will continue to provide leadership and guidance to the law enforcement community regarding Internal Affairs investigations. In 2024, the Professional Standards Unit will again host a two-day Basic Internal Affairs seminar, as well as provide a block of instruction on Internal Affairs to the new police recruits attending the police academy. The unit will continue to train departments on the InfoShare Internal Affairs module as new Internal Affairs officers are assigned. The unit will also ensure that Morris County police departments comply with the use of the IA Module within InfoShare as per MCPO Directives. The unit will also adhere to the Attorney General Guidelines on reporting of Internal Affairs Investigations including Discipline, Early Warning System Notifications, Use of Force Reporting, Random Drug Testing, Brady/Giglio Notifications and ensure compliance from the local police departments.

The philosophy of the personnel assigned to the Professional Standards Unit is that education is important for personal and professional growth. As such, members of the Professional Standards Unit will continue to attend training opportunities in specialized areas often addressed by the unit, to include interviewing techniques, Miranda issues, leadership, supervision, evidence processing, ethics in law enforcement and Internal Affairs policy and procedures.

A continued objective of the unit will be to make certain that regular inventory meetings are held to ensure the active caseload is maintained efficiently. Investigations that are initiated in PSU need to move expeditiously through the internal acceptance and review process while maintaining the highest integrity level in completing a proper and thorough investigation.

In 2024, it is the objective of the Professional Standards Unit to educate and train the municipal police departments within Morris County regarding the assessment of a Professional Standards/Internal Affairs complaint. Municipal police department's Internal Affairs units will be directed on how to assess and differentiate allegations directed against their officers, whether there are internal administrative violations compared to potential criminal misconduct allegations. The goals and objectives are to educate the municipal internal affairs officers to identify an internal administrative violation and conduct an appropriate administrative investigation. The municipal internal affairs officers will be capable of assessing an allegation of potential criminal misconduct and refer that specific complaint to the Morris County Prosecutor's Office for review. The objective is for the Morris County Municipal Police Departments to be more independent in assessing the elements and substance of a professional standards allegation.

### **Insurance Fraud Unit**

It is the responsibility of the Insurance Fraud Unit to conduct investigations within the purview of the New Jersey Insurance Fraud Prevention Act, N.J.S.A. 17:33A-1 through 17:33A-15, and the New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice – Title 2C, specifically: Chapter 20 (Theft and related offenses); Chapter 21 (Insurance Fraud and related Fraudulent Practices); Chapter 25 (Perjury and other Falsification in Official Matters); and Chapter 17 (Arson and property related crimes including, fraudulent residential burglaries and auto related crimes where potential insurance fraud is indicated).

In 2023, the members of the Insurance Fraud Unit continued to conduct investigations that the Prosecutor, First Assistant Prosecutor, Chief of Detectives, or their designee, as well as the New Jersey Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor (OIFP) deemed appropriate. As of 2023, the investigative members of this unit were available to assist all units of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, as well as other Federal, State, County, and Municipal agencies as required.

Members of the Insurance Fraud Unit have maintained and will continue to maintain positive working relationships with all law enforcement and government agencies. Detectives will prepare or assist in the preparation of reports necessary for the functioning of this unit or the Morris County Prosecutor's Office.

The Insurance Fraud Unit has one assistant prosecutor and two detectives assigned to the unit, who are also responsible for conducting Financial Crimes and C.A.R.E. (Crimes Against the Retired and Elderly) investigations.

In 2023, the Insurance Fraud Unit opened twenty-six new criminal investigations that resulted in three suspects being charged. The aforementioned investigations involve insurance fraud claims, insurance application fraud, rate evasion, health care fraud and identity theft. The following are examples of 2023 Insurance Fraud Unit investigations:

Velocity Insurance Multi Services, based out of North Bergen is known throughout the state for creating fraudulent insurance documents for truck drivers and submitting them to the New Jersey Automobile Insurance Plan Service Office (NJ AIPSO). The fraud is when the Velocity corporation places the garaging location of the trucks, generally in areas where there are lower premiums. By reference, NJ AIPSO is a state agency that is mandated to provide insurance for all truckers, regardless of prior criminal history and/or driving record. They are not permitted to deny insurance coverage to any truck driver. The purpose of NJ AIPSO is to provide insurance for those truckers who cannot obtain coverage through the commercial market, such as through Geico or Progressive. In 2023, Velocity corporation, with the knowledge and/or agreement of their truckers, places truckers in less expensive rated areas to get them better rates; essentially it is a rate evasion but on a larger scale as it involves thousands and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars difference in policies. For example, one of our 5 defendants was listed as garaging in Morristown yet admitted to garaging in Linden, a rate differential of \$106,000. Two of the five defendants have entered PTI.

In State v. Nicole Phillips, the defendant was charged in June 2023 and indicted in October 2023 for second-degree insurance fraud, second-degree health care claims fraud, third-degree theft by deception, third-degree forgery, fourth-degree tampering. The defendant had surgery in February 2021 and was scheduled to return to work in April 2021. The defendant never returned to work and subsequently filed six disability claims benefits for October 2021 thru December 2021. The defendant provided fictitious documentation and forged the physician's signature on the disability forms and was paid out over \$6,000 in disability funds. Disposition is presently pending.

The Insurance Fraud Unit will continue to combat insurance fraud by identifying trends in the industry through media and intelligence. When warranted, the unit will continue to empower the

local municipalities to conduct investigations with our guidance, expertise and assistance. The unit will continue to work closely with special investigations units within private sector insurance companies to identify cases which are worthy of additional investigation. In addition, in 2024 the Insurance Fraud Unit will be working with the Automobile Insurance Plan Service Office (AIPSO) regarding the allegations of significant financial loss to AIPSO from commercial trucks committing rate evasion. The Insurance Fraud Unit will continue to work with the New Jersey Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor (OIFP). OIFP will continue to reimburse the MCPO Insurance Fraud Unit regarding the allocated hours dedicated to OIFP referrals including AIPSO investigations.

### **Financial Crimes Unit**

It is the responsibility of the Financial Crimes Unit to conduct investigations and work in conjunction with local, county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies and financial institutions involving criminal violations that are contained within the New Jersey Code of Criminal Justice, Title 2C, specifically, Chapter 20 (Theft and related offenses), Chapter 21 (Forgery and Fraudulent Practices) and Chapter 28 (Perjury and other Falsification in Official Matters). The Financial Crimes Unit also coordinates investigations which may overlap several jurisdictions. These investigations vary in their degree of complexity in and of themselves; therefore, they are generally time consuming, requiring some degree of financial investigative expertise, and present jurisdictional problems to local authorities. In addition, members of the Financial Crimes Unit provide their expertise in financial matters to other units within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO). It is noteworthy that members of the Financial Crimes Unit on a regular basis provide advice, guidance and direction to municipal police officers who are conducting investigations into financial crimes.

The members of the Financial Crimes Unit also conduct any investigation that the Prosecutor, First Assistant Prosecutor, Chief of Detectives or their designee deem appropriate. Members of the Financial Crimes Unit conduct background investigations for all personnel employed by the MCPO. The members of the unit also assist all other units of the MCPO as circumstances may require. Members of the Financial Crimes Unit maintain positive working relations with all law enforcement and government agencies. In addition, members of the Financial Crimes Unit continue to stay abreast of the latest trends and developments in fraudulent schemes and organized scams, which have continued to proliferate with increasing levels of sophistication.

The Financial Crimes Unit continued to be available to other law enforcement agencies throughout the County and State for investigative, technical, and legal support for issues such as: Search Warrants, Financial Statement Analysis, Grand Jury subpoenas, Credit Histories, FinCEN Queries, Bank Seizure Orders and investigative direction and guidance. Unit members were also available for general guidance in conducting financial/fraud investigations. The Financial Crimes Unit continues to utilize the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCen) to initiate and further investigations. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Financial Crimes Unit hosted a one day "Basic Financial Crimes Investigations" course at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy.



In 2023, the Financial Crimes Unit opened forty criminal investigations that resulted in nine suspects being charged in addition to providing guidance to law enforcement agencies and/or civilians regarding sixty-two financial crimes inquiries. The following are examples of 2023 Financial Crimes Unit investigations:

In State v. Gerald Castellano, the above named defendant was charged and indicted in October 2023 for second-degree theft for stealing over \$100,000 from the Denville Blue Angels Football Club ("DBA") over the course of at least 5 years. The money stolen was funneled into the defendant's Big C Motors account, a used car dealership located in Linden, NJ. The defendant owns the car dealership and has a joint business investment account with an associate. The majority of the money stolen from the DBA was used to renovate an investment property that the defendant and his associate owned in Belleville, NJ, that they sold. Defendant insisted that his associate was unaware of the source of his funds and that he, the defendant, acted on his own. The disposition is presently pending.

In State v. Maureen Denman, this defendant was charged with theft by unlawful taking of moveable property, valued between \$500 and \$75,000, a crime of the third-degree, and credit card theft, also a crime of the third-degree. Maureen Denman was the Chairwoman/Executive Director of the Morristown Community Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Morristown Housing Authority. She was found to have conducted numerous ATM withdrawals, totaling \$24,860, using a credit/debit card that was associated with a Morristown Housing Authority Bank Account. Defendant was admitted into PTI for a term of 36 months, to pay restitution, forfeit her current and any future public employment, and all other standard conditions of PTI.

The Financial Crimes Unit will continue to provide assistance and guidance to all Morris County law enforcement agencies on a daily basis, in both legal and investigative matters. These include but are not limited to the preparation of search warrants, Grand Jury Subpoenas with a loss greater than \$75,000.00, credit histories, financial analysis, FinCen inquiries and other inquiries/requests regarding current types of frauds, scams and financial crimes. The Financial Crimes Unit will continue to provide training and lectures to the various community groups in the areas of Identity Theft, Financial Scams and Elderly Fraud. In addition, the Financial Crimes Unit will again host a "Basic Financial Crimes Investigation" course at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy on October 24, 2024. Financial Crimes Unit members will continue their efforts to attend new training programs which will ensure that all members of the Unit receive basic and advanced training in the methods of financial crimes related to law enforcement. This training includes programs offered by the National White Collar Crime Center; the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy; MAGLOCLLEN; the Northeast Counterdrug Training Center at Fort Indiantown Gap, PA; the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners; the Association of Certified Anti Money Laundering Specialists; and other area police training academies. Members will also continue to work with the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies regarding training programs concentrating on Cryptocurrencies and learning the investigative process in conducting Cryptocurrency investigations. The Financial Crimes Unit will encourage its assigned staff to take the CFE (Certified Fraud Examiner) exam and the CAMS (Certified Anti Money Laundering Specialist) exam, the two premier certifications in the Financial Crimes Industry. In 2023, one

detective assigned to the Financial Crimes Unit received his Certified Fraud Examiner certification and one assistant prosecutor received his Certified Anti Money Laundering Specialist certification. In addition to the aforementioned certifications, in December of 2023, one assistant prosecutor and one detective initiated the process for the CAMS certification.

### **Crimes Against the Retired and Elderly (C.A.R.E.) Unit**

The C.A.R.E. Unit was created with two purposes. First, to educate senior citizens about the types of crimes they may be targeted for, in hopes that they will be able to recognize them, and thereby prevent their own victimization. Second, to investigate and vigorously prosecute those who commit financial crimes against the senior citizen community. A proactive and a strong commitment towards C.A.R.E. investigations will send a resounding message to those who have chosen to victimize one of the most vulnerable segments of society that their activities will not be tolerated.

In 2023, the C.A.R.E. Unit opened fourteen criminal investigations, regarding crimes against the elder community resulting in two suspects being charged. With the increase of cyber communications, the elder community has become a primary target of predators worldwide and are increasingly becoming victims of cybercrimes.



*CAREs Outreach program, December 2023 in Morris Township.*

In State v. Barbara Raketich, the defendant was charged in 2022 and indicted in June 2023 for second-degree computer crimes, third-degree theft, and fourth degree securing the execution of documents by deception. The victim was a 93-year-old widow that required some assistance in managing her financial matters. In the course of assisting the victim with her finances, the defendant stole approximately \$22,000 from the victim's bank accounts. The defendant also deceived the victim into signing as a co-owner of a car for the defendant. The defendant subsequently used the funds to pay her Verizon Wireless Cellular Phone Bill, her Capital One Credit Card, and the loan on the car that the victim co-owned. The defendant entered into PTI on September 19, 2023, with full restitution to be paid back to the victim.

In 2024, the C.A.R.E. Unit intends to present various educational/awareness programs to senior groups throughout Morris County. The purpose of these presentations is to ensure that the senior population and law enforcement agencies are made aware of criminal organizations, unsavory or questionable contractors, the latest lottery scams, phone scams and cybercrimes scams, which are the most prominent crimes targeting seniors.

### **Community Outreach and Recruitment**

The Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit is pro-active, placing a strong emphasis on prevention, early identification, and timely intervention to deal with issues before they become potential problems. By collaborating with community leaders, religious and civic organizations, business communities, and schools, the unit has helped to create solutions to trending issues (i.e., cyber-bullying, school violence, human trafficking and child safety.) The Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit initiatives have become an integral part of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office strategy to raise community awareness through outreach and public service programs.

In 2023, the Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit conducted several initiatives inclusive of the Bias Education and Outreach to the Morris County Law Enforcement Community and the Morris School District educational programs. These were designed to train law enforcement and school administrators to identify and investigate bias-related incidents, increase awareness of bias incidents versus bias crimes, and discuss legal ramifications. The Morris County Prosecutor's Office completed 21 of these programs in 2023.



*Operation Take Back Spring 2023 in Morris Township.*

Additionally, Operation Take Back – DEA Partnership is a national initiative that encourages individuals to bring unused or expired prescriptions, controlled substances, and over-the-counter medications to predetermined locations for safe disposal. In 2023, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, on two separate occasions, in partnership with the Morris Plains, Randolph, and Morris Township Police Departments, co-hosted collection sites for medications disposal. In 2023, Operation Take Back resulted in four hundred and eighty-eighty (488) pounds of narcotics being collected.

The Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit also participated in career fairs at Seton Hall University, Caldwell University, and Kean University. The unit participated in National Night Out, which enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community. This event provides a great opportunity to bring police and neighbors together under positive circumstances.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office also participated in the Turkey Give Away at the County College of Morris where we donated 20 cases of turkeys and assisted in giving them out to the community to enjoy at the Thanksgiving holiday. We also participated in the Backpack Giveaway, where we handed out backpacks and school supplies to members of the community with the Table of Hope Organization and the Bethel Church of Morristown.

A Clergy Outreach Program was formed, to defuse potential confrontations between police and citizens. The goal of this program is to establish relationships between law enforcement and community leaders so there can be a constructive, friendly and positive dialogue if problems should arise. Moreover, the Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit arranges meetings

throughout the year with MCPO Administration and the Executive members of the Morris County NAACP to foster open communication and to discuss local issues of mutual importance.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office also hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Community Unity Festival to Combat Bias, Hate, and Violence. In 2023, the Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit and other members of the MCPO staff presented 92 educational programs as listed above to various audiences in and out of our County.

In 2024, the objective of the Community Outreach and Recruitment Unit is to continue to educate citizens of Morris County and develop relationships with community partners. Through positive interaction, we can continue to build rapport with local citizens and agencies, making it possible to better utilize their assistance in future investigations and events and strengthen their trust in Morris County Law Enforcement.

### **Bias Crimes Unit**

The mission of the Bias Crime Unit is to eliminate crimes motivated by prejudice against others based on race, color, religion, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, gender identity or expression and national origin. The unit ensures compliance with the New Jersey Attorney General's Bias Incident Investigation Standards-Policy and Procedures for New Jersey Law Enforcement (1991); with all applicable supplemental directives; as well as with the Office of the Morris County Prosecutor's Standard Operating Procedure regarding Bias Crime Investigations.

The unit ensures that all bias incidents and bias crimes that occur within Morris County are properly investigated and reported to the Attorney General's Office and State Police for review via NJ Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR). The legal and investigative staff of the unit review all bias incident reports and/or complaints forwarded to the unit. After each review, all reports are maintained in the office's Infoshare computer system.

The Bias Crimes Unit is available to inform local police departments regarding the way bias-related crimes should be handled. The unit is always available to answer questions or review bias related situations. When appropriate, the unit will assist with bias investigations alongside the police departments or agencies located within the County of Morris.

In 2023, there were one hundred-one (101) bias incidents reported. The unit assisted municipal police departments within the County of Morris with these bias investigations. Although no one was formally charged with a bias crime, each incident was thoroughly investigated and when appropriate, individuals involved in a bias incident were required to attend bias programs to educate themselves on making better behavioral choices.

This year there was an increase of bias incidents involving adolescent juvenile offenders. In most of those cases, the incidents involved harassment type behavior, but did not meet the elements for a bias intimidation charge. In an effort to deter future bias incidents, the recommended resolution when there is a bias undertone is for the local enforcement agencies to issue a Station House Adjustment and require the juvenile to attend a bias education class, counseling services and/or community service.

In 2023, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Community Unity Festival to Combat Bias, Hate, and Violence. The Bias Crimes Unit conducted Bias Crimes Education and Outreach to the Morris County Law Enforcement Community and the Morris County School Districts. The Bias Crimes Unit conducted presentations to over 4000 students in Morris County on bias incidents/crimes. We also launched a new bias crimes presentation that included several video vignettes. The video vignettes provided examples of bias incidents and bias crimes. The new presentation was very impactful, and it was a great tool to engage the students in conversation. After our presentations this year, we had numerous students approach the presenters and provide information of incidents of bullying, cyber harassment, and thoughts of harming themselves. The MCPO presenters provided those individuals with assistance and made the proper notifications.

In 2024 the Bias Crime Unit will continue to monitor bias-related incidents occurring within Morris County. Research shows that many biased incidents go unreported and of the ones that do get reported, often witnesses or victims are hesitant to have law enforcement involved in handling these situations. In 2024, our efforts will continue to focus on enhancing this office's community outreach programs to provide the public with information and a safe environment to report bias incidents. Through education in community-based programs, we hope to enhance the public's trust in reporting these incidents to law enforcement and encourage those individuals to participate in the prosecution of these crimes. Members of the unit will attend advanced training opportunities relevant to the Bias Crimes Unit and attend all updates given by the Division of Criminal Justice. The Morris County Bias Crimes Unit will continue to assist the other 20 County Prosecutor's Offices on how to conduct bias crimes training presentations in schools.

### **Firearms Unit**

The Firearms Unit is responsible for conducting the firearms training for the Investigative Staff of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and to ensure that the training complies with the New Jersey Attorney General's Directive concerning firearms qualifications. The unit also maintains a list of all weapons owned by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and personally owned weapons of the Investigative Staff. Additionally, the Firearms Unit assists other law enforcement agencies within Morris County regarding their firearms qualification program and their annual firearms report, as mandated by the New Jersey Attorney General.

The personnel who comprise the Firearms Unit do so on a part-time basis and are assigned to other areas of responsibility within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office full time.

The Supervising Firearms Instructor oversees the following: firearms training, maintenance of firearms, ammunition, and ballistic vest purchases, MCPO Armory, non-lethal and chemical weapons, defensive tactics. An Assistant Prosecutor provided Use of Force updates.

Members of the Firearms Unit are responsible for MCPO investigative personnel firearms training and qualifications, as well as recruits in the Basic Police Class, Basic Corrections Class and the Division of Criminal Justice Basic Course for Investigators. Additionally, MCPO Firearms Instructors teach two blocks of Tactical Handgun at the Morris County Public Safety Training

Academy. All Police Training Commission (PTC) Certified Instructors successfully completed the three-year required forty hours of firearms instruction to maintain their respective certifications.

The 2023 Spring Firearms Qualification Program was conducted with Nighttime Qualifications and Tactical Training, at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy. The 2023 Daytime Firearms Qualifications/Defensive Tactics Training was conducted at the Florham Park Police Department Range.

The 2023 Fall Firearms Qualification Program was conducted with Daytime and Nighttime Qualifications and Tactical Training, at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy. The 2023 Defensive Tactics Training was conducted at the Florham Park Police Department Range. The Defensive Tactics Program was completely revised in an effort to increase Officer Safety and to address the imminent PTC Police Licensing requirements.

In 2023, members of the Firearms Unit participated in the Firearms Orientation for the new Grand Jury panels. Members of the unit lectured on basic weapon nomenclature and ballistics as well as answered questions the panel members had regarding firearms and other types of cutting weapons and instruments.

In 2023, members of the Firearms Unit assisted with the firearms training and qualifications of the recruits in the Basic Course for Investigators at the Division of Criminal Justice Academy in Sea Girt, New Jersey.

In 2023, Members of the Firearms Unit taught two sessions of the Tactical Handgun Course at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy.

The Firearms Unit experienced a successful completion of semi-annual qualifications for all members of the sworn investigative staff in 2023.

The 2023 Firearms Qualifications Program was conducted in accordance with the New Jersey Attorney General's Directives.

The assigned weapons and qualifying scores were reviewed by members of the Firearms Unit for accuracy. The Firearms Unit Supervisor maintains the weapon inventory and updates the inventory in the event of retired/newly hired personnel. The weapon inventory is dated, to reflect the chronology of the inventory review.

In 2023, the Armory was cleaned and re-organized. The ammunition and targets are labeled with the respective year and rotated to avoid languish. All weapons have been inventoried and properly tagged in accordance with NJSACOP Accreditation standards. The Firearms Unit Supervisor updates the weapon inventory in accordance with retirements or resignations.

The Firearms Unit has in the past and will continue in the future, meet the minimum qualification standards set forth by the New Jersey Attorney General and will provide additional training that is both innovative and contemporary. This training program will remain committed to meeting the needs of the sworn investigative personnel and the office.

## **Training Unit**

It is the responsibility of the Training Unit to carry out the Prosecutor's goals of ensuring that all legal and investigative personnel of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office receive the mandated in-service training required of them by statute, Attorney General's directives or Prosecutor's directives, as well as any training necessary to perform the primary function of the office at the highest professional level possible. Additionally, the Training Unit schedules and maintains records of all in-service training received, to include training mandated by the Attorney General's Office, as well as training given by members of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office. The Training Unit identifies areas of necessary training specific to the various sections and units within the Prosecutor's Office and addresses those needs, as well as assist any individual needs of members of the office. The Training Unit continues to support the Prosecutor's function concerning Law Enforcement training in Morris County. The unit will continue to address training needs within the office, as well as the training needs of the Morris County Law Enforcement community.

The Training Unit is responsible for preparing and submitting all forms related to newly hired detectives. These forms are provided to the State of New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice and the New Jersey Police Training Commission. The unit is also responsible for providing Agency Training as required by the New Jersey Police Training Commission, as part of the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice Training Academy's Basic Course for Investigators (BCI) and the Modified Basic Course for Investigators (MBCI). The unit is also tasked with enrolling new detectives into the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice Training Academy when required.

The Training Unit has the responsibility of implementing the Prosecutor's initiative in the area of local law enforcement training programs, policy standardization and development for Morris County, as well as research and development pertaining to addressing the needs of local law enforcement. The Firearms Unit will also operate under the auspices of the Training Unit.

The Training Unit works closely with the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy in scheduling office personnel to instruct courses for local law enforcement and legal staff on various topics.

The Training Unit was responsible for conducting the Mandated Agency Training as required by the Police Training Commission for all the newly hired detectives. The Training Unit also worked with newly hired detectives to complete the requirements of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office Field Training and Evaluation Program.

As a result, the Training Unit complied with the New Jersey Police Training Commission's requirements by completing the required forms, (State of New Jersey Notice of New Appointment for Law Enforcement and Corrections Officers, State of New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice and County Prosecutor's Office Law Enforcement New Hire Report, Police Training Commission Waiver of Training Form, Morris County Prosecutor's Office Pre-Employment Review Certification for Assistant Prosecutors and Investigators/Detectives and the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice Training Academy Registration Forms), outfitting the new detectives for the



academy, scheduling psychological evaluations and completion of the Police Training Commission Mandated Agency Training prior to the start of the Basic Course for Investigators and the Modified Basic Course for Investigators.

During 2023, the Training Unit ensured that all investigative personnel completed annual mandatory training as required by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office Directives pertaining to Firearms Qualifications, Domestic Violence, Bloodborne Pathogens and Bi-annual Use of Force/Vehicular Pursuit. In addition, the unit ensured that training in the areas of the O'Neill Decision, Incident Command System-100, 200, 300 & 700, Right to Know, Counter-Terrorism Parts 1 through 9, HAZMAT and CBRNE Training were completed as needed. This training is monitored and documented through the use of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office Training Unit Spreadsheet. As part of the Attorney General Initiative, the C.L.E.A.R. Institute required 2023 CLEAR Institute, Law Enforcement and the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Community Training. There were additional requirements for both Resiliency training as well as Use of Force revisions.

The Prosecutor's Office continues to educate and/or support the legal staff on a variety of different levels and does so in conjunction with the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy, Division of Criminal Justice, CPANJ, On-Line courses, as well as unit driven training within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office.

Members of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office were called upon as instructors for both In Service training and the Basic Course for Police Officers at the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy. Members instructed on Community Affairs, Baton Training, Youth Relations, Missing Persons, Cultural Diversity, Firearms, De-Escalation and Defensive Tactics. All sworn law enforcement officers within the county were taught Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (A.B.L.E.) and Integrative Communications and Tactics (I.C.A.T.) as per A.G. Directive 2020-7. All Training Completion Notification Letters were submitted to the Office of the Attorney General on or before the designated deadlines. Records of the submission were also maintained.

In 2023, members of the Training Unit provided instruction for the Basic Course for Investigators at the Division of Criminal Justice Academy for the week-long firearms training for recruits.

As in previous years, in 2023, members of the Training Unit supervised the Body Armor Replacement Program, which ensures all sworn investigative staff receive new body armor every five (5) years. All members of the Investigative Staff received their new vests.

The Training Unit Supervisor is the regional training coordinator for the web-based Domestic Security Preparedness training, also known as NJ Learn, established by Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive No. 2004-2. The Training Unit Supervisor coordinated that training for the Prosecutor's Office, as well as aided local law enforcement in meeting their training requirements and updating officers' accounts. The Training Unit Supervisor acts as a back-up Accreditation Manager. In addition, the Training Unit Supervisor maintains the weapons/ammunition and Office Armory. The Training Unit Supervisor attended the NJSACOP Re-Accreditation and fielded

training questions by the NJSACOP Executive Board. The MCPO was successfully Re-Accredited in 2022.

In March 2020, the Training Unit Supervisor attended and became the Morris County Master Resiliency Trainer and was selected as the North Region Master Resiliency Liaison to the Office of the Attorney General. As part of Directive 2016-05, the Training Unit Supervisor facilitated the AG Directive Mental Health & Special Needs and De-Escalation & Crisis Stabilization Training for the investigative staff of the MCPO, as well as disseminated the training materials for all members of law enforcement within Morris County. Additionally, in 2023, as in the previous year, the Training Unit Supervisor crafted the Master Resiliency Training Cadre and spearheaded the Attorney General Directive 2020-6, Law Enforcement Resiliency Program. This was a two-day training course and was conducted in accordance with Attorney General Guidelines. Morris County was one of the first counties to conduct the training statewide, which garnered positive attention by the Division of Criminal Justice and COP2COP and has continued to be the model for the State.

Due to the changes in both New Jersey case law and statutes that occurred in 2023, the Morris County Prosecutor, Chief Assistant Prosecutor and Supervising Firearms Instructor initiated a revision to the 2017 Police Training Commission, AP/DAG Firearms Carry Certification. The personnel began a coordinated effort with members of both the Police Training Commission and the Director of the Morris County Public Safety Training Academy, to move the new program through the Police Training Commission in 2024. In 2023, the Training Coordinator and Deputy Chief assumed oversight of the ACADIS system in anticipation of Police Licensing through the Police Training Commission (PTC). The Training Coordinator will be responsible for the MCPO Investigative Staff's licensing in accordance with the PTC standards.

### **Animal Cruelty Unit**

It is the responsibility of the Animal Cruelty Function to ensure that all animal cruelty complaints that occur within Morris County are properly investigated and later reported to the NJ Attorney General's Office. The MCPO's Chief Humane Law Enforcement Officer is responsible for the training of municipal police departments within Morris County and coordinates the efforts of personnel during animal cruelty investigations. The Assistant Prosecutor assigned to the function is responsible for the ultimate charging decisions and prosecutions of indictable crimes charged under Title 4.

In 2023, the Animal Cruelty Function investigated ten (10) allegations of animal cruelty and signed criminal complaints on two (2) of those matters. Each of these cases were initially reported to the local police department and were forwarded to the Chief Humane Law Enforcement Officer. Assistance was provided to the local departments, which included both investigative and charging advice.

The Animal Cruelty Unit will continue to work cooperatively with outside agencies to ensure that timely and thorough investigations are being completed. The unit will also attempt to enhance its communication with outside agencies to ensure that proper protocols are being followed. Finally,

the unit will continue to practice fair and effective prosecutions of offenders who violate the laws set forth in Title 4.

### **Open Public Records Act (OPRA) Unit**

The OPRA Unit was created with the twin purposes of balancing the interests of agency transparency and protecting records which are deemed inaccessible and confidential. Records requests are made to the Office under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) or under the common law. The unit is guided by OPRA, which is codified in N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.1 et seq., case law and decisions issued by the Government Records Council (GRC).

A designated Custodian of Records is responsible for the initial search for the existence of requested records and analysis concerning their accessibility. Responsive records which are not exempt from production are processed, with redactions if required by statute, and then sent to the requestor. Should access to the desired records be denied, the custodian provides the requestor with a legal basis for the denial.

In 2023, the OPRA Unit averaged approximately fifteen (15) public records requests a month, amassing a total of one hundred eighty-five (185) requests by year's end. January alone accounted for thirty (30) of the requests made in 2023. Two (2) civil actions were taken against the agency in response to denials of access to the records requested. One (1) matter was resolved with it being dismissed and the other resulted in a Law Division decision affirming the denial of access.

One of the more complex matters handled by the OPRA Unit in 2023 involved a request made by a former criminal defendant who sought production of documents related to his conviction.

#### **Craig Szemple v. Morris County Prosecutor's Office (MRS-L-560-22)**

Craig Szemple, the Requestor/Appellant, made an OPRA and common law request seeking certain records of the investigation into the 1975 murder of Nicholas Mirov. On July 14, 1994, a Morris County jury convicted Szemple of the first-degree murder of Mr. Mirov. Following his conviction, Szemple made several unsuccessful post-conviction relief motions. In December of 2018, Szemple filed a motion he titled "Notice of Motion to Compel Disclosure of Exculpatory Evidence Necessary for Defendant to File a Motion for a New Trial," therein, alleging that the State failed to abide by its continuing obligation to produce exculpatory evidence. Contrary to existing caselaw, which has provided relief for newly discovered evidence, Szemple sought exculpatory evidence which he speculated was in the prosecution's case file. Agreeing with the position of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO), the New Jersey Supreme Court held that the State was not obligated to search its case files for records which would have been provided in discovery, had they existed prior to Szemple's conviction. Attempting to circumvent the Supreme Court's decision, Szemple submitted an OPRA and common law request for the same records. MCPO's custodian denied the request primarily on the grounds that a criminal defendant is unable "to invoke the common-law right to inspect in an effort to obtain additional discovery." State v. Marshall, 148 N.J. 89, 275 (1997)." Additional grounds for the denial were founded on the criminal investigatory records exception, N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.1, and the Supreme Court's decision in Szemple. The Law

Division Court agreed with the custodian's denial on all grounds and dismissed the civil complaint in its entirety. The matter is presently before the Appellate Division.

### **Expungement Unit**

The Expungement Unit is part of the Professional Standards Unit within the Specialized Crimes Division. The unit's primary function and responsibility is the review and processing of expungement petitions to determine a petitioner's eligibility in accordance with N.J.S.A. 2C: 52–1 et seq. and N.J.S.A. 2C: 35–14 et seq. (Recovery Court).

In carrying out its mission, the Expungement Unit responds to and provides guidance to defense attorneys, the Public Defender's Office and pro se petitioners regarding eligibility and evolving "eCourts" filing issues. The Expungement Unit also responds to municipal police departments and municipal court administrators regarding expungement procedures.

In addition to its primary function, the Expungement Unit bears the responsibility of ensuring the confidentiality of criminal records subject to an Expungement Order. In addition, the Expungement Unit reviews administrative dismissals and municipal court expedited expungements for compliance with applicable laws.

Personnel assigned to the Expungement Unit work closely with the New Jersey Attorney General's Office (NJAG), its state-wide expungement working group, and the New Jersey State Police Expungement Unit.

In 2023, the unit received approximately 1495 total expungement petitions and processed 1512. Approximately 600 of these required attorney responses to "Regular" and "Clean Slate" petitions via the eCourts portal and 98 responses via Recovery Court expungements.

Additionally, 193 administrative dismissals and 735 municipal court expedited expungements were processed.

In 2024, the Expungement Unit and additional agency personnel, under the direction of the First Assistant Prosecutor, will participate with the Morris County Bar Association and its volunteer private attorneys and public defenders in a one-day expungement clinic. This program will provide an opportunity for potential petitioners to meet with volunteer defense attorneys to process expungement petitions.

## **FAMILY DIVISION**

### **Domestic Violence Unit**

The Domestic Violence Unit's mission is to provide maximum protection to victims of domestic violence and hold perpetrators accountable for their abuse. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act Legislative declaration provides that domestic violence is a serious crime against society and that there are thousands of people subject to abuse, beaten and often murdered by their spouses, significant other or household members. Domestic Violence are crimes that should not be tolerated or treated differently because they occur in a domestic context. Law enforcement investigation of these crimes and the response to protect the victim is critical to these investigations. To accomplish our mission of enforcing the laws and providing the maximum protection to victims, the Domestic Violence Unit detectives and assistant prosecutors work collaboratively to investigate these cases and provide victims with a voice to end the abuse inflicted upon them. The focus of domestic violence investigations is evidence-based prosecutions, which includes interviewing victims and witnesses, gathering evidence and obtaining any documentary evidence that is relevant and that will support a successful prosecution of these crimes or offenses.

The Morris County Prosecutor's Office is a partner and works collaboratively with the Morris County Family Justice Center to provide survivors of domestic violence and their children with the services that they will need to support them through the civil and/or criminal justice process. The Morris County Family Justice center provides a safe place for survivors to access counseling, legal, financial and law enforcement services all in one place. This collaboration allows law enforcement and the community to come together to provide support to domestic violence survivors and their families.

In 2023, the Domestic Violence Unit continued to handle a high volume of cases which often involved very serious incidents of assaults, terroristic threats, the use of deadly weapons and other criminal activity. There were 384 new cases opened this year, an increase of 91 more cases than in 2022. The DV Unit handled a total case load of approximately 980 cases. Additionally, the unit handled 401 First Appearance hearings for charges filed in Morris County. Over the past several years, there has been a steady and sharp increase in the number of Aggravated Assault Strangulation cases. In response to the increased number of strangulation cases, development of a Non-Fatal Strangulation Response Team occurred in 2023 and was implemented by the Morris County Prosecutor's Office in 2024, along with a strangulation training program as part of the 2024 annual domestic violence training.

The DV In-Service training program focuses on how to identify the signs and symptoms of strangulation, how to document those injuries in police reports and photographs and to encourage victims to seek medical attention. The Morris County Prosecutor's Office along with our Sexual Assault Forensic Nurse Coordinator implemented the Non-Fatal Strangulation Forensic Nurse Examination Program. This new program allows victims to be seen at the hospital by a Forensic Nurse Examiner who will perform a forensic examination of the victim and document any internal and external signs of injury and symptoms of strangulation. The forensic nurse examiner will also be utilized as an expert witness in the criminal prosecution of non-fatal strangulation cases. The

implementation of Non-Fatal Strangulation Forensic Examinations will be a critical piece of evidence in the prosecution of strangulation cases.

The Domestic Violence Unit is responsible for the vertical prosecution of indictable criminal complaints and all contempt of court charges arising from a violation of a domestic violence restraining order. Although most of the cases handled by the Domestic Violence Unit generally originate from municipalities within the County of Morris, there are circumstances where the Unit originates their own investigations and complaints. The following significant cases were handled by the DV Unit this year:

State v. Jermel Pledger, the defendant was charged with two counts of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Burglary, two counts of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Possession of a Weapon for Unlawful Purpose, 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon, 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, two counts of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, two counts of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Endangering Another Person, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Terroristic Threats, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Witness Tampering, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Certain Persons Not to Have Weapons, and 4<sup>th</sup> degree Contempt – Violation of a DV Restraining Order. The defendant fired a handgun at the victim's cellphone while inside the residence when children were present. The investigation later revealed he contacted the victim from the Morris County Correctional Facility in order to tamper with her testimony. The defendant ultimately pled guilty to 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon (handgun) and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Witness Tampering. He was sentenced to an aggregate term of 8 years in New Jersey State Prison with 42 months of parole ineligibility pursuant to the Graves Act. He was also permanently barred from owning or possessing a firearm.

State v. Shamell Beal, the defendant was charged with 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault – DV Strangulation, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Terroristic Threats, 4<sup>th</sup> degree Criminal Coercion, 4<sup>th</sup> degree Criminal Mischief, and Disorderly Persons Simple Assault. This investigation initiated when a witness called 911 to report that she observed an individual later identified as the defendant punch the driver's side window of a car and drag the victim, his girlfriend, out of the vehicle. Further investigation revealed the defendant had assaulted her during the vehicle incident, and also on multiple occasions over the previous few days, including strangling her, dragging her down a staircase, and pulling out her hair extensions. The defendant ultimately pled guilty to 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Terroristic Threats, DP False Imprisonment and DP Obstruction. He was sentenced to an aggregate term of 5 years in New Jersey State Prison with 2 years of parole ineligibility and barred from future firearms possession.

State v. Christopher Rovinsky, the defendant was charged with multiple domestic violence offenses, including 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault–Strangulation, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Criminal Restraint, and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault. The defendant was alleged to have restrained his girlfriend in a hotel room and strangled her repeatedly to the point of unconsciousness. Following her flight from the room, law enforcement responded to the hotel and apprehended the defendant. The defendant pled guilty to 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Aggravated Assault and was sentenced in the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree range to 3 years New Jersey State Prison subject to the No Early Release Act.

## **Domestic Violence Weapon Return Unit**

In domestic violence cases, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (PDVA) authorizes the search and seizure of firearms, weapons, ammunition, and firearms paperwork for safekeeping. Under the PDVA safekeeping statute, when firearms and weapons are seized for safekeeping, the State has 45 days to determine whether to seek civil forfeiture of the firearms and weapons or authorize the return of said weapons. The DV Weapon Return Unit is responsible for conducting the background investigations on these cases to determine if an individual is subject to any of the firearm's disabilities under New Jersey Statute N.J.S.A. 2C:58-3. These investigations include obtaining all police reports associated with the domestic violence incident, any domestic violence restraining orders issued in the case, checking for a valid firearms purchaser identification card or firearms permit to purchase a handgun, confirming that the firearms are legally compliant with New Jersey law, obtaining a criminal case history, a check of the domestic violence central registry and contacting the victim regarding any prior unreported domestic violence history or other pertinent information that may make it unsafe for the defendant to have access to firearms. When a decision is made by the Assistant Prosecutor to file for civil forfeiture, a Notice of Motion is filed in Superior Court, Family Part where a hearing may be held within 45 days for the court to decide whether to re-arm that individual.

In 2023, the DV Weapon Return Unit opened approximately 82 new weapons return cases. The yearly caseload numbers, which includes cases that were carried over from the prior year, have remained relatively consistent from year to year. However, recently there is a noticeable trend in the increase of cases where the DV Weapon Return Unit reviewed files and thereafter filed criminal charges in situations where law enforcement officers recovered illegal contraband including, but not limited to, illegal firearms, assault rifles, large capacity magazines or other illegal weapons that are immediately recognized by the officer as illegal contraband during the execution of a TRO search warrant. Additionally, this unit has also seen an increase in charges of 4<sup>th</sup> degree Contempt and 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Certain Person Not to Possess Firearms. These charges involve situations where after a TRO is served on a defendant which orders the defendant to surrender any/all firearms and prohibits the ownership, possession, or control of firearms and thereafter, a law enforcement officer learns of information that the defendant is in possession of firearms never surrendered or defendant has other weapons in his/her possession in violation of the TRO. One example of this situation occurred in a matter where the defendant was initially charged with 2<sup>nd</sup> deg. Strangulation; 2<sup>nd</sup> deg. PWUP (handgun); 3<sup>rd</sup> deg. Threats and 2 counts of Possession of High-Capacity Magazines. On December 30, 2023, the victim and defendant were engaged and living together. The victim reported the incident to Roxbury Police Department after being discharged from Hackettstown Hospital. She stated that she was strangled by the defendant at their residence after she observed the defendant in possession of a handgun and told him that she wanted the gun out of the house. She was able to escape from him and ran to neighbor's house to get help. During the investigation, police located the silver handgun inside a wardrobe box in the hallway.

On the same date, it was learned there were criminal charges filed against the defendant in that incident and the defendant was not to be in possession of any firearms due to his pending weapon forfeiture matter that was filed on January 1, 2023. This information necessitated a further investigation by MCPO to determine if additional charges were warranted against the Defendant.

MCPO worked collaboratively with Roxbury Township Police Department. The MCPO investigation revealed that the Defendant was charged with Simple Assault in August 2022 involving a different victim. In that case, police seized other firearms, ammunition, and the defendant's Firearms Purchaser Identification Card for safekeeping under the PDVA. A criminal complaint and probable cause affidavit was prepared charging the defendant with one count of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Certain Persons Not to Possess a Firearm. The matter is pending in criminal court.

### **Juvenile Unit**

The Juvenile Unit's mission is to rehabilitate youth and stop delinquent behavior prior to them becoming adults. We have implemented several educational programs to try and educate our youth about dangerous online behaviors. Currently, we have a Cyber-Harassment Class, Sexting Class, Fire-Setters Program, and a Bias Education class. In keeping with the Juvenile Justice Reform Directive that was implemented in 2021, we continue to divert juveniles away from formal court proceedings towards rehabilitative and familial support options. In this regard, we are increasingly using the SmartLink at Home Detention Application, in lieu of detention whenever the Juvenile can safely be supervised within the home.

The Juvenile Unit is responsible for the preparation and prosecution of all juvenile delinquency cases presented in the Superior Court, Chancery Division-Family Part. Juvenile cases are received from local law enforcement and the Supervising Assistant Prosecutor reviews all juvenile delinquency complaints signed in Morris County, including those scheduled to be heard by the Juvenile Conference Committee (J.C.C.) or the Intake Services Conference (I.S.C.) to decide as to which venue the charges will be heard. The Juvenile Unit also provides investigative assistance to local and state law enforcement agencies, as well as assisting other units within the Morris County Prosecutor's Office. The Juvenile Unit works closely with the Family Case Manager's Office, the Family Court Judges, the Probation Department, the Morris County Juvenile Detention Center and the Morris County Youth Shelter. In 2023, the Juvenile Unit opened 176 new cases, which is 41 more cases than in 2022.

The Juvenile Unit also maintains all records pertaining to Stationhouse Adjustments that occur in each municipality within Morris County. A Stationhouse Adjustment is a mechanism that allows for law enforcement agencies to resolve a juvenile's unlawful conduct without formal court proceedings. This information is required to be forwarded to the Attorney General's Office on a quarterly basis. The Juvenile Unit maintains a cooperative relationship with all area schools and police agencies using the "Uniform State Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Education and Law Enforcement Officials." This agreement provides a detailed protocol in dealing with criminal activity by juveniles in and out of school. There were 161 Stationhouse Adjustments in Morris County in 2023.

The vast majority of juvenile delinquent cases stem from on-line behavior, school threats, sexting, and cyber-harassment. The Community Affairs Unit provides programs at numerous middle schools and high schools in Morris County regarding these behaviors. They educate the students on the consequences of engaging in these types of behaviors as well as reinforce with the school administration the need to communicate with law enforcement to follow the MOA. We have received positive feedback from our presentations and there has been a



correlation with the students' behavior decreasing at the schools where they have presented this information.

As school threats continue to be a priority concern, one of the goals of the Juvenile Unit, in conjunction with the MCPO Homeland Security Unit, is to ensure everyone's safety in the community and our schools. To that end, when a juvenile makes any type of school threat, there is a requirement that the juvenile undergo a mental health evaluation and follow any treatment recommendations. The Juvenile Unit regularly communicates with school principals when incidents arise to ensure that the juvenile is not permitted to return to school unless and until a medical professional has deemed them safe. Once the immediacy of the threat has been addressed, the Juvenile Unit handles charging decisions and prosecution of these cases.

In 2023, the Juvenile Unit handled a significant case, described below, which involved a student bringing a firearm into a school. The investigation evolved into a multi-agency investigation into the sale of illegal firearms to juveniles, which resulted in charges being filed against the juvenile and other adult co-defendants.

State in the interest of A.B. (15 yrs. old), A.B. was charged with 2<sup>nd</sup> deg. Unlawful Possession of a Weapon (handgun), 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Possession of a Handgun on School Property, and 4<sup>th</sup> degree Poss. of High-Capacity Magazine. A.B. was also charged with 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Poss. of a Handgun for Possessing the handgun in a Walmart bathroom on a separate date. On 3-23-23, A.B. was observed by a teacher with a Louis Vuitton bag leaving the classroom. When he returned to the classroom, he did not have the bag. The teacher became concerned and advised the school administrators of the incident. School surveillance video showed A.B. entered a bathroom with another juvenile. A search of the bag revealed a Glock Handgun with an extended magazine. There were no threats to harm any students or faculty. While conducting a forensic examination on A.B.'s cellphone, a text conversation was located between the juvenile and an unknown phone number. The conversation appeared to be in reference to the sale of a firearm. The phone number was positively identified through numerous Law Enforcement databases as belonging to Dwayne Allen. An investigation pursued and it was learned that Dwayne Allen sold the gun to A.B. With the assistance of other agencies, a search warrant was executed at Mr. Allen's home located in Burlington County. A.B. pled guilty to 3<sup>rd</sup> degree Possession of a Handgun on School Property and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon, was sentenced to 18 months probation, 60 days Morris County Juvenile Detention Center (MCJDC), 2 years Jamesburg Youth Prison suspended, and was ordered not to possess any weapon, and comply with a mental health evaluation recommendation.

Mr. Allen pled guilty to 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon for the gun he sold to A.B. He was sentenced to 42 months in prison, which must be served without parole.

## **Missing Persons Unit**

The Missing Persons Unit is responsible for coordinating missing person investigations with local law enforcement agencies. There is an on-call Missing Persons detective and supervisor available 24 hours a day, to assist with missing person cases. These joint investigations involve those reported missing under suspicious circumstances, missing juveniles, Interference with Custody cases, mentally and physically disabled individuals and reported missing and unidentified living victims. Local police agencies are required to make immediate notification to the Morris County Prosecutor's Office Missing Persons Unit when: the missing person is age 13 or younger; the missing person is suspected of being a victim of foul play; or if the victim is disabled or endangered.

In 2023, the Missing Persons Unit assisted several local police departments with conducting missing persons investigations and advised on the proper procedure regarding NCIC entries, AMBER and SILVER alerts. In 2023, the Missing Persons Unit received approximately 170 missing persons investigations, which was 56 more than from 2022.

In many missing persons cases, the investigation involves the local police department and a coordinated response with multiple other agencies. In 2023, the Missing Person's Unit handled the investigation of a missing female, Ms. Lara Emanuele from Roxbury Township. Ms. Emanuele was reported missing on June 8, 2023. The investigation involved working with multiple agencies, coordinating hundreds of law enforcement officers to conduct extensive searches on foot, in the air, and in the waterways. The local community's outpouring of support for Ms. Emanuele's family was immense. Daily searches were conducted in the wooded area where Ms. Emanuele was last seen. The search teams continued their efforts to locate Ms. Emanuele for nearly 6 months until November 19, 2023, when her remains were located in a wooded area off Interstate Route 80 East.

The Missing Persons Unit is responsible for updating the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) plan and in certain circumstances activating a CART response in cases involving missing children aged 13 and younger.

In 2023, Morris County had four (4) CART activations. For those activations, we utilized mutual aid from the Morris County Sheriff's Office, New Jersey State Police, and local agencies. All four (4) CART activations had a successful outcome with the missing children being located. The Missing Persons Unit will continue to educate law enforcement officers by providing a yearly in-service missing persons training program that includes CART activations, Amber Alerts and any legal updates or policy changes.