



2021 Annual Report

SAN DIEGO COUNTY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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A Message from San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan



We are excited to share with you this annual report that provides a glimpse into the dedicated service that our team is honored to provide to our community. I hope that you will share in my gratitude for the talented and diverse 1,000-member DA team that I have the privilege to lead and serve alongside, as we serve the more than 3.3 million people of San Diego County with integrity and passion. Our team is dedicated to fighting for justice on behalf of crime victims and is responsible for prosecuting all felony crimes that occur in the county, including murders, sexual assaults, and DUI fatalities; and all misdemeanor crimes that occur outside the San Diego city limits. We work with all nine police departments in the county and the Sheriff's Department to make sure those who harm others and terrorize neighborhoods are held accountable under the law.

The team at the District Attorney's Office reflects the diverse cultures, races, religions, gender and sexual orientation of the communities we serve. While we cherish our unique experiences, we are united by our unwavering mission to pursue fair and equal justice for all and to build safe neighborhoods in partnership with the community we serve through the ethical prosecution of crime, protection of victims and crime prevention. Our enhanced focus on preventing harm by interrupting cycles of violence and reducing recidivism is producing positive results that we are closely tracking and transparently sharing.

There is nothing more central to our responsibility to protect public safety than the sanctity of human life and our duty to stand with the voiceless and most vulnerable in the pursuit of fair and equal justice.

In this 2021 annual report, you will read about the excellence and expertise with which we brought murder and other cases before a jury, about the innovative juvenile diversion program that is restoring the lives of youth and setting them onto a healthy path for the future, about the fight to expand reporting and triple hate crimes prosecutions, about the opening of the North County Family Justice Center – One Safe Place, about the expansion of mental health services through Crisis Stabilization Centers, about fighting the fentanyl epidemic, bringing down organized retail crime rings and how we tested all sexual assault kits in San Diego County. Working with our community and law enforcement, these efforts have kept San Diego County one of the safest urban counties in America. We will keep fighting for every child, adult and senior to live safely and with dignity.

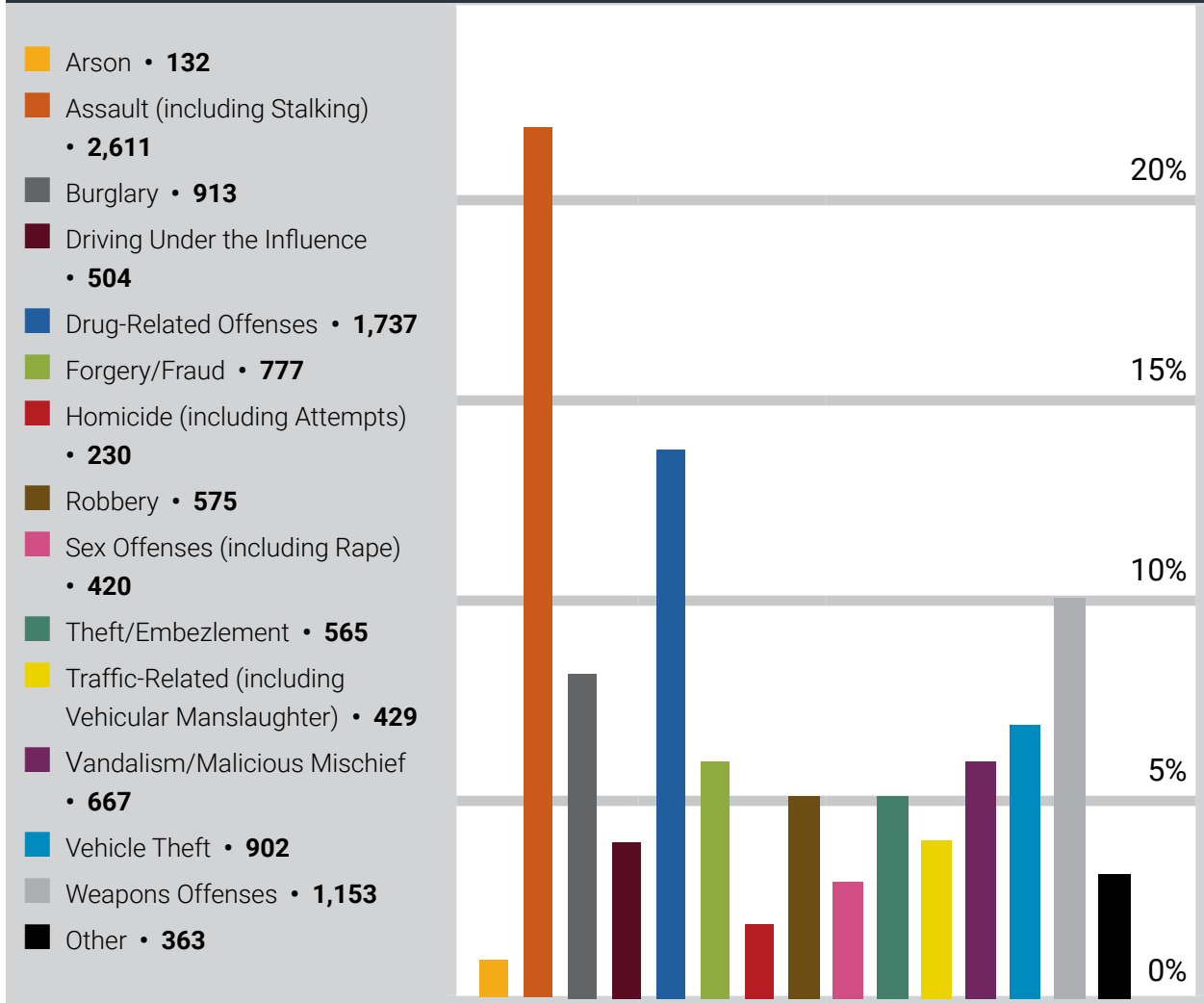
Overview

of the District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County District Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecuting felony crimes committed in the county. It also prosecutes misdemeanor offenses that occur outside the City of San Diego. Each year, the more than 300 prosecutors in the DA's Office file about 40,000 criminal cases on behalf of the county's 3.3 million residents.




2021 Felony Prosecutions by Type of Crime



What Does the District Attorney Do?

The mission of the District Attorney's Office is to pursue equal and fair justice for all and to build safe neighborhoods in partnership with the communities we serve, by ethically prosecuting those who commit crime, protecting victims and preventing future harm.

More than 1,000 DA employees work across 22 divisions, branch offices, specialized units, a community center, and a family justice center, each carrying out specialized work on behalf of the people of San Diego County. The easiest way to understand what the District Attorney's Office does is by watching this video, which explains the work we do.



Watch our video to learn more about what the District Attorney's Office does.

High Profile Prosecutions

By the time a case resolves, so many employees of the District Attorney's Office have a hand in achieving justice for the crime victim. Prosecutors, investigators, paralegals, victim advocates, support staff, an IT team and even court dogs. Some of distinguished cases are included here.



People v. Gomez – San Diego Police Officer Murdered on Duty

A jury convicted Jesse Gomez of killing San Diego Police Officer Jonathan “J.D.” De Guzman and attempting to kill officer Wade Irwin during a Southcrest traffic stop. The officers were members of the San Diego Police Department’s gang suppression team. They were doing one final patrol for the night when Gomez opened fire. He was found guilty of murder, attempted murder and being a felon in possession of a firearm. Gomez was sentenced to death plus 65 years-to-life in prison.

People v. Samoata – Drug Deal Turns Deadly



Matatoa Samoata tried to purchase marijuana with counterfeit money after setting up a deal through social media but ended up killing one person and attempting to kill another when the transaction took a bad turn because of the counterfeit money. Erik Sandoval was shot in the eye and injured, and Andrew Briseno was shot twice in the back of the head and died. A jury convicted the Samoata of murder and attempted voluntary manslaughter and he was sentenced in April of 2021 to 60 years-to-life in prison.

People v. John Earnest – Synagogue Targeted in Hate Crime

Violent crime is devastating to its victims and their families. But when the target of that violence is an entire religion, race, culture or sexual identity, the crime also tears apart the wider community. Hate tore through the Chabad of Poway on April 27, 2019, when defendant John Earnest walked into the synagogue and began shooting. One person was killed and three others wounded. The DA’s Victim Services team worked around the clock to support and assist victims throughout the community. In 2021, Earnest pleaded guilty to all counts and allegations, including murder with a special circumstance of hate crime as well as arson. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole plus 137 years.



People v. Sean McManus and Jason Schrock – Public Corruption



Defendants Sean McManus and Jason Schrock masterminded an elaborate scheme to fraudulently collect funding for charter schools from 2016 to 2019. The resulting theft amounted to millions of dollars. This is likely the largest the educational fraud in the nation. The defendants pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit theft of public funds in February 2021 and more than \$240 million in restitution has been recovered so far, some of which will be used to support underserved K through 12 students in San Diego County.



The DA Gangs Division prosecutes the most serious gang crimes committed in San Diego County.

People v. George T. Rouston – Rival Gang War in San Diego

During a turbulent gang war in and around the Logan Heights and Sherman Heights areas, there was a series of back-to-back homicides. George Rouston and a co-defendant conspired to murder a rival gang member. Their immediate motivation was retaliation for the murder of a young member of their own gang. Rouston and the co-defendant followed the victim home from a vigil and opened fire in front of his home in broad daylight. At least 15 gunshots were fired. One struck the victim in the face, and the rest struck several vehicles nearby. The victim survived the gunshot to his face but was left permanently disfigured. In April 2021, Rouston pleaded guilty to attempted murder and in May he was sentenced to 50 years-to-life in prison.

People v. Daren Andrew Lee – Fentanyl Overdose Prosecution

Defendant Darren Lee was convicted of supplying drugs containing deadly fentanyl to two victims who overdosed and died. One victim was a 21-year-old woman and the other a 19-year-old man. Lee was convicted of two counts of voluntary manslaughter for supplying the fentanyl that resulted in two deaths and he was sentenced to eight years in state prison.

People v. Henry Cowan – Domestic Violence Murder

Henry Cowan and his victim lived together and had a tumultuous relationship marred by domestic abuse. During the week of the crime, neighbors heard Cowan yelling on several occasions and saw the victim with injuries to her face. Two weeks later, police were called to investigate a suspicious odor at Cowan's home. They found the victim's decomposed body in the couple's shared apartment. Forensic evidence determined that defendant had beaten and strangled the victim to death. A jury found Henry Cowan guilty of first-degree murder and he was sentenced to 55 years-to-life in prison.

People v. Ryan Kubista, Maereichelle Marquez and Stacy Wright – Unemployment Fraud

These Defendants used the information of more than 60 prison inmates to apply for unemployment benefits through the Employment Development Department and fraudulently obtained \$1.2 million. Each defendant was convicted of unemployment benefit fraud. The two principal defendants, Maereichelle Marquez and Ryan Kubista, received six years and four months, and five years in state prison respectively. Defendant Wright was granted probation. Full restitution was ordered by a judge and more than \$390,000 was seized from the defendants.



People v. Albert Lee Blake – Murder at Church’s Chicken

Albert Blake tried to purchase food with counterfeit money at Church’s Chicken in November 2019. When cashier Maribel Ibanez refused to accept the bill, the defendant walked out of the restaurant then returned with a gun and stood in line behind a 12-year-old girl. Once he reached the register, he began shooting at the employees. Maribel Ibanez was killed and two other employees were also shot but survived. In September 2021, a jury found Blake guilty of first-degree murder, three counts of attempted murder and cruelty to a child by inflicting injury. He was sentenced to 146 years-to-life in prison.

People v. Joel Cardona – A Cousin is Murdered

In June 2021, homicide defendant Joel Cardona was sentenced to 35 years-to-life in prison for viciously beating his cousin to death in the front yard of the family home in Oceanside. During the brawl, Cardona got on top of his cousin while slamming the victim’s head into the ground. A horrified neighbor called 911 and screamed for help as she watched Cardona beat the victim until he died.

People v. Edgar Garzon – Woman Stabbed in the Neck in El Cajon Park



Edgar Garzon stabbed a female acquaintance in the neck at Wells Park in El Cajon after an argument. Witnesses heard the two arguing over \$8, then heard the victim scream, and saw her holding her neck. Garzon fled and was chased for some distance by a fellow observer. A nurse, who was nearby, called 911 and applied pressure to victim’s neck. The victim later identified Garzon before being transported to a hospital where she underwent emergency surgery and was placed in a medically induced coma on a ventilator. The victim eventually recovered.

In September 2021, a jury found Garzon guilty of attempted murder with a great bodily injury allegation, robbery and other charges. He was sentenced to 29 years-to-life in prison.

People v. Brenda Spencer – Elementary School Shooter Denied Parole


Brenda Spencer became infamous in January of 1979 when she opened fire at Cleveland Elementary School in City Heights. Eight children, the school's principal, and a police officer were shot. She explained her actions by stating, "I don't like Mondays," which gained national attention. The DA's Lifer Unit was able to postpone her planned 2021 parole hearing for a year after submitting their litigation packet to the Board of Parole Hearings. The DA's Lifer Unit never forgets about victims of crime and stands with them to represent the people and families during the parole process.

People v. Rojas and Juarez – DA Stops Organized Retail Theft

Two thieves were prosecuted on 42 felony counts of looting, grand theft, and burglary for breaking into ULTA Beauty, Nordstrom Rack and other stores during nighttime hours over a four-month period. These defendants caused over \$700,000 in losses after destroying locked glass doors. Despite excellent video footage from the retailers, the defendants were covered in hoodies and masks, making identification seem impossible. Eventually, they were identified and were also prosecuted for crimes occurring in four additional counties. In 2021, Rojas was sentenced to six years and eight months in custody and Juarez was sentenced to two years and eight months. Both were ordered to pay thousands in restitution.

People v. Synchrony Bank – Consumer Protection

This case involved a statewide civil enforcement action brought jointly by the San Diego District Attorney's Office and three other prosecution offices for unreasonable and abusive debt collection practices prohibited by California's Rosenthal Fair Debt Collection Act, including making debt collection calls to each debtor up to eight to 10 times per day. Tens of thousands of California consumers were subjected to these and other unfair debt collection practices. An injunction prohibiting the unlawful conduct was obtained and the bank was also ordered to pay a total of \$3.5 million in agency costs, civil penalties, and *cy pres* restitution.



**California's Rosenthal
Fair Debt Collection Act
protects consumers
from abusive debt
collection practices.**

In the News





Taking a Stand for Justice

Early in 2021, DA Summer Stephan took the unprecedented step of filing a motion in Los Angeles Superior Court to revoke authorization for Los Angeles County's prosecution of a defendant who committed five San Diego County robberies with a gun before heading to Los Angeles and executing two innocent victims within hours of each other. DA Stephan took this unusual action because the District Attorney in Los Angeles announced that he planned to dismiss the gun allegations and the double murder special circumstance allegation against the defendant, which would result in the killer being eligible for parole in 20 years. The DA told the court that the change in prosecution was not in the interest of justice and violated the constitutionally mandated protection of victims' rights under Marsy's Law. The judge returned jurisdiction of prosecution of the robberies to the San Diego DA's Office.

Stopping Human Trafficking During the Pandemic

Human Traffickers ramped up their efforts in 2021 to recruit young victims online while they had a captive audience because the COVID-19 pandemic forced so many people to stay home. DA Stephan urged parents to be more aware of the increased online human trafficking recruitment. Pre-pandemic, law enforcement relied on teachers and other school mandated reporters to notice the signs that a student is being abused at home or sexually exploited by a trafficker. Reports of technology-based exploitation tripled at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Local reports also increased – in 2019, the San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC) received 3,058 cyber tips and in 2020 the numbers almost doubled to 5,885. They were even higher in 2021 with the task force receiving 8,161 tips.







Children who experience trauma in the home often don't complete homework, do poorly on tests, and are withdrawn.

Supporting Children who Experience Trauma

When children encounter police because they were a witness to violence or a traumatic event, they can sometimes show up to school the next few days feeling upset, setting off a cycle of poor school performance or acting out, whether in school in person or virtually. Unless a teacher



 Watch our video to learn more about how we support children who suffered trauma.

knows the student experienced recent trauma, the child could end up in trouble instead of receiving support. The District Attorney's Office, the San Diego County Office of Education, local law enforcement and local school districts are addressing this issue through an app called ['Handle with Care.'](#) which was developed just before the pandemic shuttered schools. When in-person classes resumed in 2021, the program debuted in several school districts and quickly expanded. Now, when police come into contact with a child during a traumatic event such as domestic violence in the home, a neighborhood shooting, arrest of a family member or violent crime, police use the app to alert the child's school and school district that the child should be handled with care. No other details about the incident are given to the school.

Alarming Spike in Fentanyl Overdose Deaths

More than 800 people across San Diego County died because of a fentanyl overdose in 2021. Addressing the ongoing increase in such deaths, the District Attorney's Office engaged the community on several occasions with warnings about the deadly drug's prevalence in street drugs. The DA's Office is part of the Narcotics Task Force Team 10, which responds to an average of five to six calls per week, most which are fatal overdoses involving fentanyl. The deaths occur in every part of the county and affect every demographic. Although the District Attorney's Office has been sounding the alarm for years, the problem is getting worse. During 2021, the DA's office re-launched a public awareness and outreach campaign called the San Diego Opioid Project which resulted in 4.4 million social media impressions. At the same time, we continue stepping up the prosecutions of street dealers who know their product is suspect. Unless the drug comes from a pharmacy, the public should assume that street drugs are laced with fentanyl.

URGENT COMMUNITY ALERT

Law enforcement officials from across the county are warning the public about a sharp increase in overdose deaths connected to the highly potent and often deadly drug, fentanyl.

FROM THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

More than 700 people died last year in San Diego County.

Fentanyl Powder can be found in any pill you buy on the street... or in cocaine... and can KILL you almost instantly.

Fake Oxy/Perc pills contain Fentanyl and are DEADLY. ONE PILL CAN KILL.

Pills aren't made in pharmacies. There's NO quality control; you stop breathing. Then you die.

SAN DIEGO ACCESS & CRISIS LINE: 1-888-724-7240 FREE ASSISTANCE 24/7





Every voice counts.

Empowering Crime Victims and Survivors

In 2021, it became increasingly clear that crime victims were becoming invisible in important discussions around funding priorities, community programs, and criminal justice reform. To that end, the District Attorney released a detailed plan that recommends 12 specific solutions in support of crime victim services and improved support of crime survivors. [The DA’s Blueprint for Transforming Victim and Survivor Care: A Strategic Approach for Empowering Crime Victims, Preventing Harm, and Reducing Violence](#) is the culmination of input from hundreds of stakeholders, victims, survivors, and community members. The blueprint is a call to action for elected officials, community leaders, and policy makers to always consider the victim’s voice in implementing laws that affect them. Keeping the victim and survivor perspective at the core of law enforcement work is the best way to interrupt cycles of poverty, disrupt pipelines to prison and prevent generational violence born of childhood trauma and the normalization of crime.



A Standard for Healthcare Response to Domestic Violence

In October of 2021, the District Attorney’s Office announced the release of a collective [set of guidelines](#) for healthcare organizations on how to screen for and respond to domestic violence. The first-of-its kind standards provide a countywide roadmap for medical professionals, who are often the only individuals able to see domestic violence victims alone away from their abusers. This effort builds on the steps taken by the District Attorney’s Office and the County Health and Human Services Agency over the past five years in the Strangulation Protocol under which training was provided to over 5,000 peace officers on how to detect strangulation signs and symptoms. Domestic violence, including strangulation, goes largely underreported by survivors. Healthcare staff can be a critical point of intervention and connection to help in a safe and private setting.



DA Takes Stand Against Early Release of Violent Prisoners

District Attorney Summer Stephan, along with 27 elected District Attorneys across California, were granted a temporary restraining order, by a Sacramento Superior Court Judge preventing the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) from enacting an increase from 50% “good time” custody credits to 66% credits for inmates who have been previously convicted of one or more serious and violent crimes. The court order comes in the wake of CDCR’s “emergency” regulations that allow for additional custody credits to be awarded to serious and violent felons, leading to their earlier release from prison, including credits that are not based upon completing any rehabilitation programs. The new class of credits would include providing additional custody credits for inmates convicted of domestic violence, residential burglary, assault with a deadly weapon, human trafficking and possession of weapons, who also have previous convictions for serious and violent felonies. Releasing inmates early who have committed atrocious crimes after only serving a fraction of their sentence threatens the safety of communities and is a slap in the face to crime victims who are still suffering.



Tough Stance on Organized Retail Theft

The District Attorney explored additional ways to hold criminals accountable amid high-profile ‘smash and grab’ thefts across California. In late 2021, DA Summer Stephan and her team met with retailers, business association representatives, retail industry employee representatives, law enforcement and others to discuss the scope of the problem in San Diego County, steps law enforcement is taking to stop and prosecute these types of crimes and to talk about possible future prevention strategies. The meeting was also held to develop a deeper understanding of the issues and possible solutions. Beginning in 2019, with the passage of California’s Organized Retail Theft Law (PC 490.4), the San Diego DA’s Office began a partnership with the California Highway Patrol’s Organized Retail Theft team of special investigators. Since that time, a number of successful prosecutions have occurred. Crews of thieves coming to San Diego from other parts of the California have been prosecuted in a single case for all crimes they committed against retail stores up and down the state. San Diego County has been a leader in the state when it comes to holding organized crime rings accountable.

Accountability in San Diego.



Supporting Victims and Restoring Lives

One of the main roles of the District Attorney's Office is to support victims of crime. We do that in several ways, including assisting victims through the court process, informing them of their rights in the criminal justice system and advocating for them through each step of a criminal case. In addition, our [Victim Assistance Program](#) offers comprehensive services free of charge, even if a suspect is not identified or if criminal charges have not been filed.



The Victim Services Division assists victims with their recovery from the effects of crime and provides services, which include crisis intervention, referrals to community resources, court support, and Victim Compensation Board assistance.

In 2021 the Victim Assistance Program:

- ▶ Assisted **13,487** crime victims.
- ▶ Provided **867** crisis interventions.
- ▶ Made **17,380** referrals to community resources.
- ▶ Provided **6,887** case status updates.
- ▶ Made **776** court accompaniments.



The Joint Powers Claims Unit:

- ▶ Processed **1,217** claims from victims of violent crime.
- ▶ Processed **2,354** bills from victims and service providers.
- ▶ Issued more than **\$1.1 million** in payments from California Victim Compensation Board.

17,380
referrals to
community
resources

The Criminal Restitution Compact Unit:

- ▶ Facilitated the completion of **1,104** restitution orders.
- ▶ Secured **\$362,527** in restitution payable to the Victim Compensation Board.

The Victim Assistance Program:

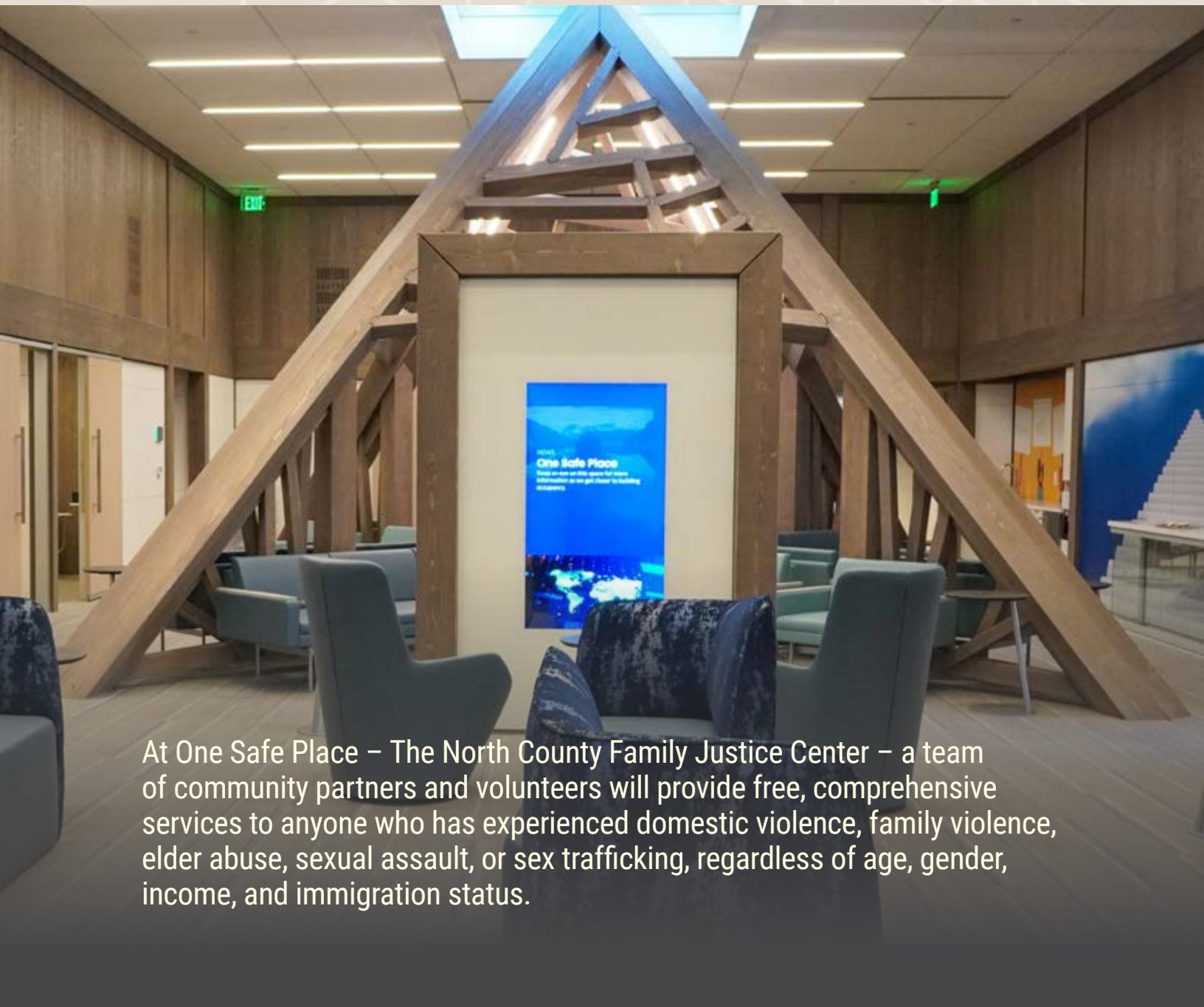
- ▶ Provided **\$39,709** in emergency assistance for immediate needs, such as medical, housing, relocation, food, and personal items.

Victim advocates continue to provide outreach and education by participating in numerous community events. They also provide trainings and presentations to local police academies, law enforcement agencies, and community agencies. Ollie, the North County Facility Dog, provided support for 67 crime victims during interviews and court hearings.

The Victim Services Division maintains a Crisis Response Team (CRT) which responds when a mass violence incident occurs. For example, in 2021, an impaired driver drove onto the sidewalk and into a homeless encampment, killing three men and injuring seven others. Many others lost all their possessions. The CRT partnered with the San Diego Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team to go into the field to meet with the surviving victims. Services included crisis intervention, needs assessments, assistance with Victim Compensation Board applications, and emergency assistance. Backpacks containing clothing and hygiene items were also provided.

New Crime Prevention and Public Safety Initiatives

Each year, the District Attorney's Office implements new initiatives and looks for ways we can advance our mission. Here are some of the new programs rolled out in 2021 that support safe and healthy neighborhoods.



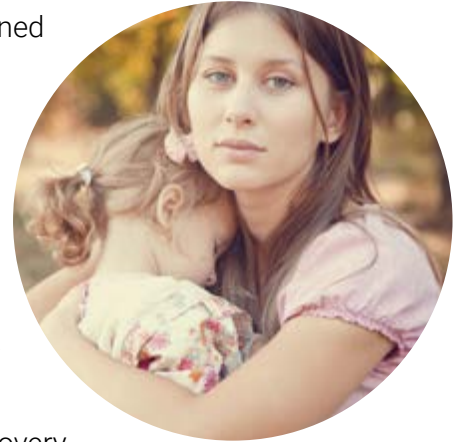
At One Safe Place – The North County Family Justice Center – a team of community partners and volunteers will provide free, comprehensive services to anyone who has experienced domestic violence, family violence, elder abuse, sexual assault, or sex trafficking, regardless of age, gender, income, and immigration status.

One Safe Place: The North County Family Justice Center

Trauma survivors in North County now have a safe place to receive free support services all under one roof to anyone who has experienced family violence, child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, hate crimes, elder abuse, human trafficking, violent loss, or other crimes. At One Safe Place – the North County Family Justice Center – we provide comprehensive help in a safe and judgment-free environment that empowers people to move forward with their lives.

Construction began on the 40,000 square foot center in 2021 and it opened on July 5, 2022.

The Family Justice Center model has been identified as a best practice in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention services by the United States Department of Justice. It is a multi-agency service center that focuses on reducing the number of times victims tell their story, the number of places victims must go for help, and increasing access to services and support for victims and their children.



One Safe Place is uniquely prepared to serve children and adults who have experienced trauma and abuse and was designated a Trauma Recovery Center by California’s Victim Compensation Board in addition to being a nationally accredited Child Advocacy Center.

Prior to One Safe Place, trauma victims had to travel across North County to receive these services, which can be exhausting and a barrier to getting help. One Safe Place is revolutionizing victim services in San Diego County, because, for the first time, a nationally accredited child advocacy center will be located under the same roof as a nationally known health care provider, along with law enforcement and other general crime victim services. This is important because we know that children who suffer abuse are more likely to have unhealthy outcomes later in life. The vision of One Safe Place is grounded in research such as the landmark 1995 – 1997 ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) study and seeks to prevent a next generation of abuse by intervening early in one’s trauma lifespan.



**Once Safe Place
for hope, healing
and justice.**

Juvenile Diversion Initiative

In 2021, the District Attorney's Office began a juvenile justice reform initiative designed to keep young people completely out of the criminal justice system while addressing the underlying cause of their harmful behavior. The National Conflict Resolution Center is a key community partner on this project.

The Juvenile Diversion Initiative (JDI) is a countywide early intervention program that prioritizes diversion options for youth instead of filing criminal charges. The goal is to reduce the number of young people who enter the juvenile justice system, to engage the community and stakeholders in the youth's rehabilitation and address the causes of the youth's unsafe behaviors while also fostering accountability. The scope of this project included higher level misdemeanors and non-violent felonies.

Youth in JDI who successfully complete the program leave with an understanding of the impact of their choices and avoid permanent and negative outcomes related to the formal criminal justice system, including stigma, labeling and having a criminal record. In 2021, 81 youth were diverted from the criminal justice system by participating in the program.



Keeping young people out of the criminal justice system.

Crisis Stabilization Center

After more than two years of planning, the county opened a community center in North County where people experiencing a mental health crisis can get assistance 24-hours-a day. The District Attorney's Office worked collaboratively to address the intersection of mental health, homelessness and the criminal justice system through our Blueprint for Mental Health Reform. One of the recommendations in the blueprint was a 24/7 community-based Crisis Stabilization Care Centers that offer walk-in mental health services as well as a safe place for a police officer to drop off a person in a mental health crisis so they can get back to patrolling their beat within minutes.



The center provides acute crisis stabilization, medication, and a direct connection to appropriate levels of care in an environment that is more conducive to stabilization than an emergency room or jail. The goal is to balance the compassionate treatment of people with mental health issues while protecting the rights of victims of crime.

North County Crisis Stabilization Care Center Opens in Vista



Watch our video to learn more about services provided at the Crisis Stabilization Center, supporting people suffering from mental health issues, as well as police officers interacting with them and possible victims of crime.

Mental Health Diversion Court Expanded

Mental Health Diversion Court is an initiative that diverts people with serious mental illness away from the justice system and into treatment. California law allows a court to postpone criminal prosecution for up to two years under certain circumstances and instead refer individuals to community-based treatment that meets their specialized mental health needs.

Those eligible include people charged with felonies who have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder or bipolar disorder, and who are at risk of being ruled incompetent to stand trial. The District Attorney’s Office partners with the Sheriff’s Department, the Public Defender, the Health and Human Services Agency, the Probation Department, and the Superior Court on this initiative. The program provides, among other things, Assertive Community Treatment, wraparound services, case management, life skills, medication management, benefits assistance, peer support and community linkages. Mental Health Diversion Court is a new approach that is improving the way the criminal justice system handles individuals with serious mental illness, while keeping our neighborhoods safe.



Elder Justice Task Force



In May 2021, the first-of-its-kind Elder Justice Task Force (EJTF) officially launched in San Diego County to combat the rampant problem of financial scams against elders. There are at least 1,000 elderly victims per year who fall prey to financial scams across San Diego County, losing \$20 to 30 million combined to international scammers and their network of money launderers in the U.S. The Elder Justice Task Force is an innovative and collaborative effort that includes the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office, the FBI, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, all local law enforcement agencies, Adult Protective Services, and the San Diego Law Enforcement Coordination Center. The goal of the task force is to share information and actively work to connect the dots between different investigations to reveal patterns that lead to successful prosecutions both at the state and federal level. The EJTF is the culmination of years of work and is the first-of-its-kind approach that creates a coordinated law enforcement response to fight financial elder abuse. The task force is already seeing positive results with the 2021 local investigation, arrest, and conviction of a local money launderer leading to a widespread federal RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) indictment of eight co-conspirators by the San Diego U.S. Attorney’s Office. That case involved a conspiracy of defendants committing the all-to-common grandma/grandpa scam, in which elderly victims were led to believe their grandchildren were in great peril unless they paid “bail money” to help them.



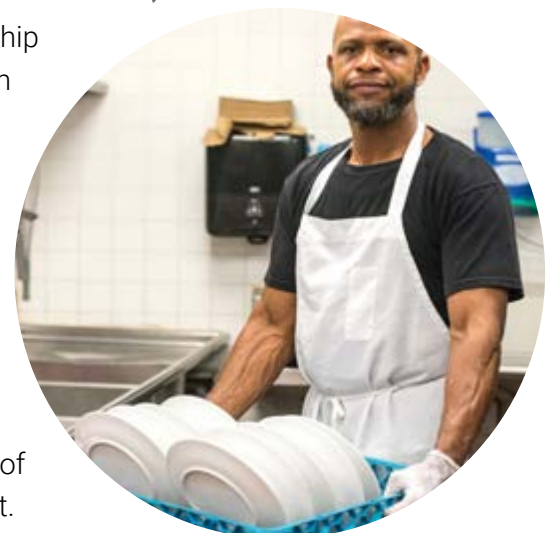
Our texting program provides victims with information about their case and links to resources.

Using Technology to Protect Victims of Domestic Violence

The DA's Family Protection Division initiated a texting program to provide victims of domestic violence with immediate updates on the status of their cases. The system sends automated text messages to a victim's cell phone with case updates, links to domestic violence resources and other pertinent information, including the status of the case review, the name and contact number of the assigned prosecutor and victim advocate, whether charges are being filed or not, and other case status updates. Thousands of text messages have been successfully sent and received. This gives victims the information they need with links to obtain additional information on their own time as they choose. The program started as a pilot in the DA's North County Branch and is now being adopted countywide in domestic violence cases after receiving a nearly 90% approval rating by those receiving text messages.

Multidisciplinary Team (Post Release Community Supervision)

In November of 2021, the District Attorney's Office – in partnership with criminal justice stakeholders – took an innovative approach to the issues posed by individuals on Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS) who engage in repeated violations. In order to slow down this revolving door to custody, we joined forces with community justice partners to create a Multidisciplinary Team to look at alternative solutions to traditional incarceration. By bringing together treatment professionals, Probation Officers, County Health and Human Services professionals and legal experts, this multidisciplinary approach has seen an increase in individuals not committing new crimes of over 40% compared to the traditional approach taken in the past.



Ghost Gun Task Force

In 2021, The District Attorney's Office prosecuted more than 150 cases involving ghost guns or illegal ghost gun possession, many of which involved violent crimes such as murder and attempted murder. So, when the San Diego Police Department formed a Ghost Gun Task Force in 2021, the DA's Gangs Division was ready to assist in order to get ghost guns out of the hands of gang members and prevent gang violence. A ghost gun is an un-serialized and unregistered firearm, made from parts that are easily assembled. This process creates loopholes in background check requirements and state law, which requires that guns be marked with serial numbers. Without serial numbers, law enforcement agencies are unable to trace the weapons when they investigate crimes. Ghost guns often end up in the hands of criminals, gang members or others who are legally prohibited from having them. Violent crime, in which ghost guns are used is on the rise across San Diego. In 2020 for example, San Diego Police Department gang officers recovered 100 ghost guns. In 2021, that number soared by 118% with 218 ghost guns recovered from San Diego streets. The District Attorney's Office has been at the forefront of the ghost gun issue from the prosecution standpoint. Altogether, our office has seen a 96% increase in ghost gun cases in San Diego County since 2018.



Workplace Justice Unit

The District Attorney's Office created a new Workplace Justice Unit in 2021, which is dedicated to protecting workers' rights, prosecuting criminal wage theft cases and stopping labor trafficking. Although the DA's Office has long prosecuted wage theft cases, it would only do so if an accompanying workers compensation fraud charge was included. In order to more effectively protect workers and seek equitable workplace justice, the DA's Office is using new funding to tackle this problem on a larger scale. Wage theft and labor trafficking are serious problems that should be addressed whether workers' compensation insurance is involved or not. Many forms of workplace injustice are civil in nature, such as sexual harassment, discrimination or retaliation. But wage theft and labor trafficking are acts that may warrant criminal prosecution. Wage theft is when employers do not pay workers according to the law. This could be not paying wages, paying less than minimum wage, not paying overtime, not allowing workers to take meal and rest breaks, requiring off-the-clock work, taking tips, or misclassifying employees as self-employed independent contractors. Labor trafficking is when a person is forced to provide labor or services through coercion, such as violence, threats, lies, fraud, confiscating legal documents, or to pay a debt. Prosecuting these types of criminal workplace justice cases require special care and expertise.





Milestones in the Community

A key part of the DA's mission in addition to ethically prosecuting crime is preventing harm from happening in the first place by reducing recidivism and addressing the root causes of crime such as mental health and addiction.



Care Center

The [CARE Center](#) is a satellite office of the District Attorney's Office located in National City that provides crime prevention and intervention services for the community. Due to COVID, the CARE Center pivoted to address the community need of food insecurity by doing weekly food distributions in 2021. The center served 5,521 families and 25,541 individuals thanks to our partnership with Feeding San Diego. The CARE Center partnered with community-based organizations who delivered the food to families who had transportation or childcare barriers, and were unable to go to food drives. In addition, staff at the center conducted needs assessments and helped 79 adults and 24 youth by referring them to 164 services, including mental health, employment, clothing, and family mediation. We connected 32 families to housing services, including domestic violence shelters, transitional living, rental assistance programs, and long-term housing. The doors reopened in June 2021 and 676 community members were welcomed during the last half of the year. In November, the CARE Center hosted a homeless resource fair in Imperial Beach, where more than 50 people attended and 18 cases were reviewed by the Homeless Court.



In partnership with the North Coastal Prevention Coalition, the CARE Center coordinated the 420 Remix/Smoking is Not Coping social media campaign where youth submitted artwork or videos about how marijuana is not an effective way to cope with mental health or emotional issues.

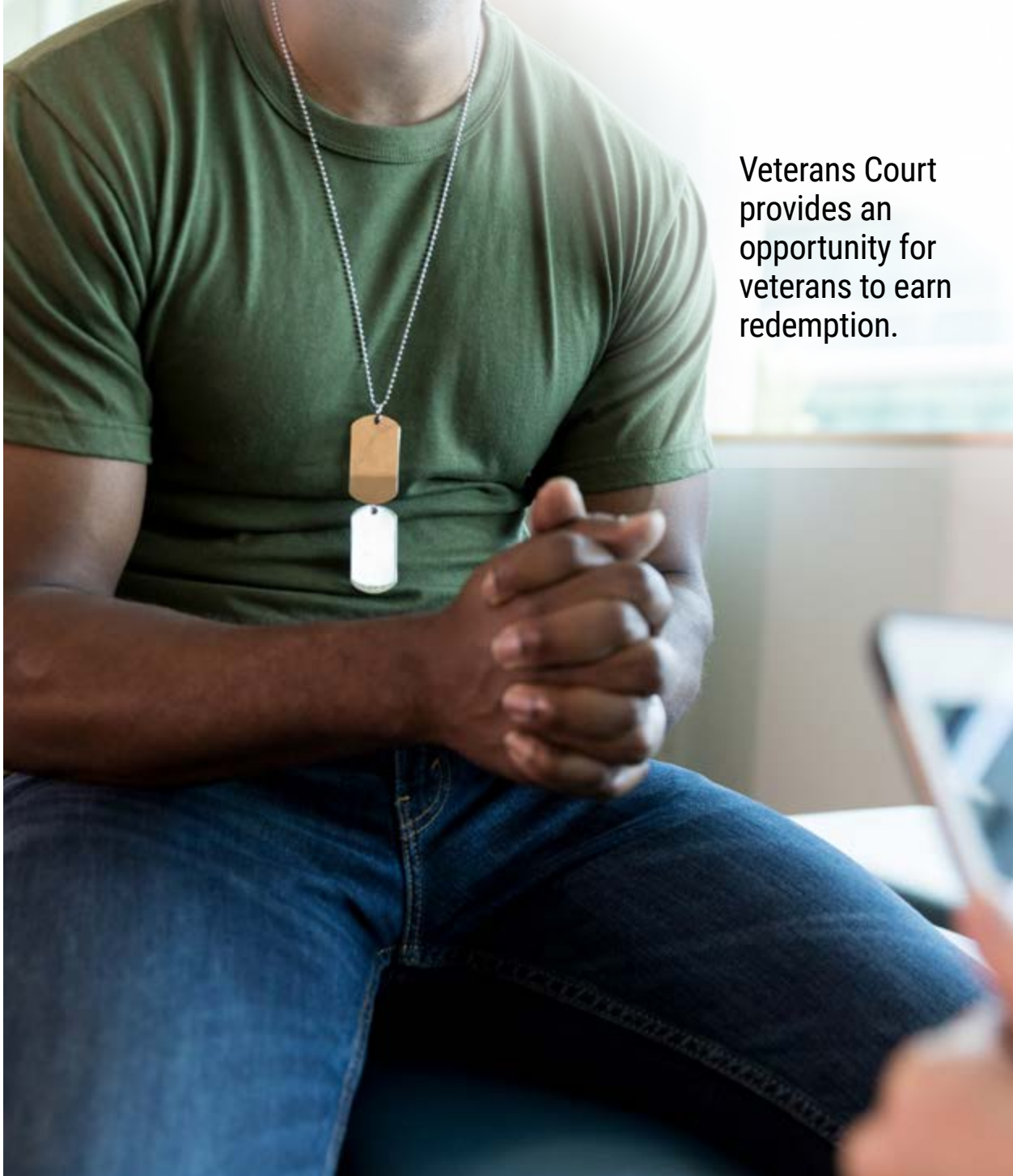
Smoking is Not Coping



Watch our video to learn about the dangers and negative effects of using marijuana to cope with mental health or emotional issues.

Don't lose your head in the clouds





Veterans Court provides an opportunity for veterans to earn redemption.

10-Year Anniversary of Veterans Treatment Court

Veterans Treatment Court celebrated 10 years of providing an opportunity for veterans to earn redemption in our community on February 23, 2021. Since its inception in 2011, Veterans Treatment Court has been a nationally recognized model for treating duty related mental illness, restoring rights of justice-involved veterans, and improving public safety through evidence-based practices. The Veterans Treatment Court program takes participants with criminal convictions and places them on a separate and specialized track of treatment and rehabilitation rather than incarceration. Most participants are in the program for 18 to 24 months. If all treatment, supervision, and community service commitments are met, their case can be dismissed and sealed.

Facts and Figures

Measuring outcomes of the work of the District Attorney's Office and providing data to the public is an important part of embracing transparency and building trust with the community we serve.



All Rape Kits Tested

In June 2021, DA Summer Stephan announced that all 2,030 untested sexual assault kits (SAKs) from 12 police agencies across the county have been tested after being sent to an independent lab, culminating in the completion of the three-year project.

2,030 Estimated Total SAKs to be tested

TESTED

2,030 SAKs sent to be tested to Bode Labs

777 Sheriff	303 Oceanside PD	141 Chula Vista PD	134 El Cajon PD	21 La Mesa PD	101 Carlsbad PD
16 UCSD PD	3 Coronado PD	414 Escondido PD	23 SDSU PD	4 CSUSM PD	93 National City PD

COMPLETED: TESTING RESULTS

2,030 Number of SAKs tested by Bode Labs (as of May 2021)

36% of the kits tested by Bode had DNA which is foreign to the victim.



IN PROGRESS: UPLOAD STATUS



COMBINED DNA INDEX SYSTEM (CODIS) DATA

219 Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) Hits



100 Conviction Matches

De-Escalation Training

Because the District Attorney's Office works directly with all police agencies in San Diego County and reviews officer-involved shooting incidents, it was a natural fit for the DA to collaborate on a new curriculum for de-escalation training for peace officers across the county. The DA's Office is committed to engaging in the development and implementation of effective, evidence-based crisis intervention and de-escalation programming by providing access to tools in support of law enforcement officers, dispatchers, first responders, and others who may come into contact with people in crisis. Since this training began in 2019, about 4,341 officers, community members and various individuals have received de-escalation training.



Providing Safe Shelter for Victims of Crime

Victims of domestic violence and other trauma no longer have to spend hours or days trying to find safe shelter thanks to the [SoCal Safe Shelter Collaborative](#), which locates available space within minutes. The program leverages technology to more quickly connect survivors with available space in a shelter so abuse victims can expeditiously be removed from dangerous situations and begin receiving support services.



CURRENT ACTIVE PARTNERS

- ▶ **34** total participating
- ▶ **9** Sheltering agencies (**300** beds)
- ▶ **25** Referral only organizations
- ▶ **175** requests submitted
- ▶ **83%** "possible" match or available shelter

DA Community Justice Initiative (CJI): Stopping the Revolving Door to Jail

The DA's Community Justice Initiative is an innovative program which allows participants to have misdemeanor criminal charges dismissed if they participate in a diversion program that provides cognitive behavioral therapy and requires four hours of community service. The behavioral therapy helps individuals identify the underlying cause of their criminal behavior as well as change beliefs, thoughts, and patterns that contribute to problematic behaviors. The therapy emphasizes individual accountability and helps individuals understand thought processes and the consequences of the choices they make. After completing the cognitive behavioral therapy course, the participant can choose to be connected to services in lieu of the community service. Referrals can be made for housing assistance, job training, mental health or substance use disorder treatment, food, clothing and more. After completing the program, the case is dismissed, and the individual's record is sealed. Since its inception in 2019, 612 participants successfully completed the program.





Office of the DA 2021 Permanent Staff

328 Prosecutors

123 Investigators

127 Paralegals

282 Support Staff

61 Administration

921 TOTAL



[Each figure shown represents 10 staff members]

Our Budget

Revenues and Expenditures

FISCAL YEAR 2021 TO 2022	Expenditures
Salaries/Benefits	\$197,974,000
Supplies/Services	33,631,000
To Other Agencies	2,211,000
Assets	532,000
Public Assistance Fraud Reimbursement	(571,000)
Other Expenditures	—
TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURES	\$233,777,000

FISCAL YEAR 2021 TO 2022	Revenues
Proposition 172	\$ 68,976,000
General Revenues	118,382,000
Federal Funds	3,514,000
State Funds	20,600,000
Other Funds	22,305,000
TOTAL BUDGETED REVENUES	\$233,777,000

Specialized Units and Divisions



Bureau of Investigation

The Bureau of Investigation is the law enforcement arm of the San Diego County District Attorney's Office. In 2021, it was made up of 123 District Attorney Investigators, 12 Investigative Specialists and nine Trial Support Specialists and two Crime Analysts. The Bureau of Investigation has earned the reputation of having some of the most experienced and highly trained investigators among its ranks who have been recruited from law enforcement agencies across California. The Bureau provides a wide range of skilled investigative services to support the District Attorney's prosecutorial and crime prevention mission, including victim and witness protection in serious drug cartel cases so witnesses can safely testify. They are also responsible for original investigations across specialized units such as public corruption, insurance fraud, economic crimes, and cold case homicide.

Accomplishments include handling more than 65,607 investigative tasks, executing 393 warrants and arresting 63 defendants.

Conviction Review and Resentencing Unit

The Conviction and Sentence Review Unit is committed to the highest standard of professional integrity, expeditious and thorough review of post-conviction cases, prevention of wrongful convictions, and collaboration with all our criminal justice partners, including those who seek the exoneration of the wrongfully convicted. The unit reviews convictions in which credible and verifiable evidence of innocence exists or new technology can be used to test or re-test remaining evidence. The public, attorneys, or convicted persons can apply to have a conviction reviewed via a page on the [DA's public website](#). In 2021, the Conviction Review Unit received 20 cases for review. This has provided unprecedented communication between the public the DA's Office regarding claims of innocence. The DA's Office also reviews past sentences to determine whether continued incarceration of the defendant is in the interests of justice. In 2021, DA's Office recommended that the court revisit 21 of its original sentencing decisions in view of criminal justice reforms and the inmate's exemplary rehabilitation.

A New Sentence, A Second Chance

As part of ongoing responsible criminal justice reform initiatives, the District Attorney's Office ramped up efforts in 2021 to review prison sentences, as authorized by a newer law. The goal was to review sentences that may have been unduly harsh and identify people who can safely be released from prison early and re-integrated back into the community. Prosecutors have a duty to seek the truth and justice before, during, and after someone is convicted, which includes making sure that prison sentences are proportionate with the harm that the crime produced. This new law allows prosecutors to repair past inequities by correcting unjust sentences while still considering crime victims and public safety. An example of a resentencing includes Rogelio Espinoza, who had been convicted of assault with a firearm and received a sentence of 29 years-to-life in prison. In April 2021, a judge resentenced Espinoza to 13 years, allowing his immediate release from prison.



The Gangs Division prosecuted more than 110 gang members for homicide in 2021.

Gangs Division

The District Attorney's Office successfully prosecutes multiple complex murder cases perpetrated by violent gang members who terrorize neighborhoods. These cases are handled by one prosecutor from beginning to end – vertical prosecution – by our Gangs Division. Cases in this division are expertly navigated to bring justice to families left in the wake of violence. In 2021, the Gangs Division filed 50 murder or attempted murder cases and more than 400 ranging from murder, assault with great bodily injury, robbery, carjacking and many other serious charges including possession of illegal firearms, such as ghost guns, by gang members.



Family Protection Division

Each year, about 17,000 incidents of domestic violence are reported to police in San Diego County. Domestic violence is still the number one killer of women when it comes to violent crime in U.S. and it causes a ripple effect that directly harms children, takes a toll on victims' mental



health and can shake a community. The San Diego County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team tracks all domestic violence-related homicides and the county, of which there are about 13 a year. With the mantra that even one homicide is too many, the District Attorney's Office is committed to protecting victims, prosecuting defendants and providing life-saving resources and public service awareness campaigns to prevent family violence through its Family Protection Division.

Consumer Protection Unit (CPU)

The District Attorney's Office has a unit dedicating to stopping unfair, fraudulent and deceptive business practices. The Consumer Protection Unit is comprised of Deputy District Attorneys, Investigators and Paralegals dedicated to protecting consumers and law-abiding businesses. An example of this in 2021 includes a statewide civil enforcement action against Synchrony Bank brought jointly by the San Diego District Attorney's Office and three other prosecution offices for unreasonable and abusive debt collection practices prohibited by California's Rosenthal Fair Debt Collection Act. The unreasonable practices including making debt collection calls to each debtor 8 to 10 times per day. Tens of thousands of California consumers were subjected to these and other unfair debt collection practices. An injunction prohibiting the unlawful conduct was obtained and the bank was also ordered to pay \$3.5 million in agency costs, civil penalties, and restitution. To report a consumer complaint, you can call (619) 531-3507 or email consumer@sdcdca.org.

CPU worked to stop unreasonable debt collection calls.



Economic Crimes Division

Economic crimes often have dire consequences, from destroying family equity in a property to rendering corporate stocks worthless to shareholders. These crimes may be committed by individuals against institutions or other individuals. The Economic Crimes Division is responsible for prosecuting a wide variety of wrongdoing, including elder financial abuse, computer intrusion, complex identity theft, investment scams, embezzlements, real estate matters, counterfeit goods, environmental crimes and the theft of public assistance funds.

Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division

Some of the most sensitive criminal cases are handled in the District Attorney's Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division. A team of prosecutors, investigators, victim advocates, paralegals and professional staff come together in this unit to protect victims and prosecute those who sexually assault or sell human beings. This team also promotes awareness in schools and in the community so young people have the tools they need to recognize the red flags of human trafficking. In 2021, District Attorney Summer Stephan urged parents to be more aware of the increased online human trafficking dangers that children faced while they were mostly at home and online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pre-pandemic, law enforcement relied on teachers and other school mandated reporters to notice the signs that a student is being abused at home or sexually exploited by a trafficker



Special Operations Division

This division investigates cases involving misuse of public funds, public corruption, hate crimes, threats and other crimes impacting the integrity of the justice system such as perjury and filing of falsified documents, and criminal misconduct of government officials, including peace officers and other public employees. The Special Operations Division also reviews officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths.

Major Narcotics Division

The District Attorney's Major Narcotics Division handles the most serious drug offenses in San Diego County, and it is on the forefront of drug trends throughout the state. The primary objectives of the Major Narcotics Division are to investigate and prosecute large-scale narcotics traffickers, dealers who furnish controlled substances leading to overdose and death, and cases involving drug endangered children, drug-related violence, clandestine drug labs, and illegal



dispensaries. Members of the division work with law enforcement officers to investigate and prosecute these crimes, including the sale of controlled substances that have resulted in an unprecedented number of overdose deaths caused primarily by illicit opioids, such as fentanyl. As part of the DA's effort of crime prevention, prosecutors in this division perform community outreach, which includes participating in drug awareness and anti-smuggling presentations in schools. They also educate the public on the dangers of illicit drug use and the resources available for those seeking help with a substance use disorder.

Insurance Fraud and Workplace Justice Division

The average person doesn't give insurance fraud or workplace justice a second thought. But the fact is insurance fraud costs U.S. consumers an estimated \$80 to \$90 billion per year. In California, it's a \$15 billion-a-year problem. It's the second largest economic crime in America, exceeded only by tax evasion. The San Diego County District Attorney's Office combats this problem by using experienced specialists to confront the insurance fraud epidemic. Within this division is the new Workplace Justice Unit, which is comprised of a dedicated prosecutor, DA investigator and paralegal. The Unit prosecutes unfair business practices, wage and hour violations, payroll tax evasion, wage theft and labor trafficking cases. As part of the formation of the Unit, the DA's Insurance Fraud Division was renamed the Insurance Fraud and Workplace Justice Division.

Extraditions Unit

Criminals often flee San Diego after committing a crime here, attempting to hide in foreign countries such as Mexico. The DA's Extradition Unit successfully brings fugitives from abroad or from other states to face criminal prosecution in San Diego and seeks justice for crime victims. International extradition is complex and varies from nation to nation with very specific legal requirements involving multiple agencies. We work with local and federal law enforcement organizations as well as the U.S. Department of Justice and foreign governments to extradite, deport or expel fugitives back to San Diego, within the parameters of extradition treaties and foreign immigration laws.



Cold Case Homicide Unit

Since it was established in 2003, the Cold Case Homicide Unit has played a role in solving and prosecuting numerous murders. The victims have come from all walks of life and from all areas of the county. The victims have included children and the elderly. The oldest case solved and prosecuted by the unit involves the 1969 rape and murder of Mary Scott. The District Attorney's Office prioritizes solving old cases through its Cold Case Unit, which has dedicated and experienced investigators and prosecutors that use the latest forensic evidence technology to deliver justice to victims. In 2021, the Cold Case Unit was awarded a 3-year grant for \$470,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice to use investigative genetic genealogy to solve more cold case homicides. The San Diego District Attorney's Office was one of only 10 prosecutor's offices nationwide to receive this grant. The project is called CHARGE – Cold Homicide and Research Genealogy Effort.





HALL OF JUSTICE
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