



WARREN COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE 2024 Annual Report



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WARREN COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE
2024 Annual Report

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Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office to commit its resources and leadership, in partnership with the law enforcement community, to create and preserve an environment of safety and security for all of the citizens of and visitors to Warren County. The Office is dedicated to providing our citizens with the most skilled and professional investigation and prosecution of criminal offenders, by using all available resources, while minimizing the impact on victims of crime.

Message from Acting Prosecutor Jessica L. Cardone



It is my honor to present the 2024 Annual Report of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office. We prepared this report in accordance with N.J.S.A. 52:17B-111. Our 2024 Annual Report is the first of our kind that Warren County submits to both Attorney General Matthew Platkin and the public. Recognizing the importance of transparency and building trust with those we serve, I am pleased to share this report with our community on the Warren County Prosecutor's Office website. My hope is that by sharing this important information with our citizens, there can be a better understanding of our roles, responsibilities and duties. In this report you will learn about each of our units, some notable cases as well as services we provide to our victim survivors.

On September 30, 2024, I was sworn in as Acting Warren County Prosecutor. I am grateful to serve the community I call home with a deep commitment to integrity, justice and public safety. My first priority was ensuring that every decision made by this office reflects the highest ethical standards. With that, the Professional Standards Unit was established in late 2024. This Unit maintains the integrity of our office by conducting Internal Affairs investigations, WCPO law enforcement licensing reviews, background checks, law enforcement and legal training for the local law enforcement officers, reporting statistics required by the Office of the Attorney General and WCPO policy review.

Public safety will remain at the heart of our mission. The Warren County Prosecutor's Office has for many years implemented specialized units and task forces to enforce the law and investigate crimes. However, safety is not achieved through enforcement alone. It also requires prevention, education and building strong community relationships. The Warren County Prosecutor's Office connects with law enforcement, community partners, and school districts to maintain a county that continues to be a safe place to live, work and visit for our citizens, children and guests alike.

Moving into 2025, this office will remain open, accountable and accessible. It is my goal to inspire public confidence and encourage community involvement in keeping Warren County a safe, inclusive and just place for all.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Cardone', written over a horizontal line.

Jessica L. Cardone
Acting Warren County Prosecutor

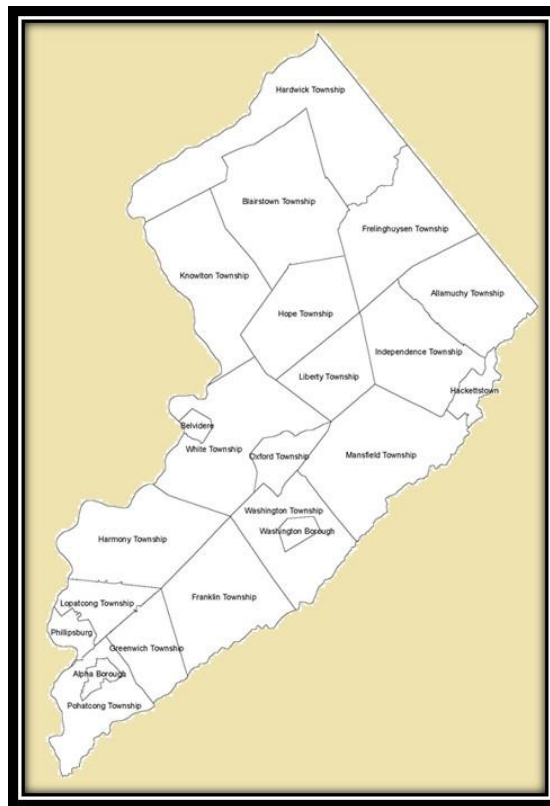


Warren County Overview

Located in the northwest region of the state, Warren County is predominantly rural, and spans 364.55 square miles. The county is home to 22 municipalities, ranging in size from 1.35 to 37.80 square miles, with a population of 109,632 as of the 2020 census. There are approximately forty-five (45) public schools in Warren County, including six public high schools.

The County Seat is located in Belvidere, New Jersey. The Warren County Courthouse, Warren County Sheriff's Office and Warren County Prosecutor's Office are also located in Belvidere. Just outside of Belvidere, in White Township, the Warren County Correctional Center is housed.

Warren County is served by ten local police departments as well as the New Jersey State Police. There are approximately 200 sworn officers staffing those ten departments, eight of which support active detective bureaus. The remaining municipalities are patrolled by two (2) New Jersey State Police stations.



Map from www.warrencountynjheritage.com

Law Enforcement of Warren County

Jessica L. Cardone, Acting County Prosecutor

Brenton S. Warne, Acting Chief of Detectives

POLICE DEPARTMENTS	
Belvidere Police Department	Chief Matthew Scott
Blairstown Police Department	Chief Scott Johnsen
Greenwich Township Police Department	Chief Richard Hummer
Hackettstown Police Department	Chief Aaron Perkins
Independence Township Police Department	Chief Christopher Prell
Lopatcong Township Police Department	Chief Jason Garcia
Mansfield Township Police Department	Chief Michael MacDonough
Phillipsburg Police Department	Chief Robert Stettner (ret)
Pohatcong Township Police Department	Chief Scott Robb (ret)
Washington Township Police Department	Chief Christopher Jones
Warren County Sheriff's Department	Sheriff James McDonald Sr.
Warren County Department of Corrections	Warden Kenneth J. McCarthy (ret) Warden Daniel M. Broesder
New Jersey State Police- Washington Barracks	Station Commander- Lt. James Harrison
New Jersey State Police- Hope Barracks	Station Commander- Lt. Gregory Lewis



Structure of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office

2024 UNIT ORGANIZATION

Administrative Division

Professional Integrity Section

Professional Standards Unit
Forfeiture Unit
Evidence Unit
Appellate Unit

Community Support Section

Victim Witness Unit
Community Initiatives
Recruitment

Legal Division

Trial Unit
Domestic Violence Unit
Megan's Law Unit
Juvenile Unit
Expungement Unit
Bias Crimes
Animal Cruelty
Recovery Court
Mental Health/Veterans Diversion

Special Investigations Division

Major Crimes Unit
Special Victims Unit
Narcotic Task Force
Cyber Crimes Unit

2024 SWORN STAFF

County Prosecutor
Chief of Detectives

Legal

First Assistant Prosecutor
1 Chief Assistant Prosecutor
12 Assistant Prosecutors

Detectives

Deputy Chief
3 Lieutenants
3 Sergeants
10 Detectives

Special Investigations Division

Major Crimes Unit

Staff:

- 1 Assistant Prosecutor
- 1 Detective; 1 Detective Sergeant
- 1 Clerk Transcriber

The Major Crime Unit is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of all death and near death cases including criminal homicides, attempted homicides, suicides, manslaughter, overdose deaths and death by auto. The Major Crimes Unit is also responsible for certain violent crimes including arson, robbery and home invasion burglaries. Additionally, the unit assists investigations and prosecutions involving significant firearms offenses. Finally, the unit is responsible for significant financial crimes, insurance fraud and related offenses, and crimes that have a significant impact on the public such as public corruption.

The Major Crimes Unit works closely with law enforcement partners at the local, state and federal level to coordinate multi-agency action targeting the most serious and violent offenders. The Major Crimes Unit also supervises and coordinates several specialty units including the Crime Scene Investigation Team (CSI), Serious Collision Analysis Response Team (SCART), and Child Abduction Response Team (CART). The unit also reviews every car accident that resulted in injuries to anyone other than the driver for possible criminal prosecution.

In 2024 the Major Crimes Unit opened 35 investigations six (6) of which were charged by complaint. Significant prosecutions that resolved in 2024 include State v. Jeffrey Carthens and State v. Justin Singh.

2024 Major Crimes Unit Notable Cases

State v. Jeffrey Carthens

In February Jeffrey Carthens was sentenced following an investigation into shots fired in the Phillipsburg Housing Authority. Evidence showed Carthens was the driver of a vehicle that opened fire on a group of individuals, although none were struck. As part of the investigation local law enforcement, the WCPO Major Crime Unit and assisting agencies executed a search warrant on Carthens' vehicle where fentanyl was located. Following a guilty plea Carthens was sentenced to eight (8) years New Jersey State Prison subject to the No Early Release Act on the shooting consecutive to six (6) years New Jersey State Prison on the narcotics charges.

State v. Justin Singh

In July, Justin Singh was sentenced to a term of New Jersey State Prison following a guilty plea on a charge of Death by Auto. Evidence showed that Singh had attempted to pass a vehicle on the shoulder of the road at a high rate of speed causing him to lose control. As a result of the collision the passenger in his vehicle passed away. Singh will now serve five (5) years in New Jersey State Prison subject to the No Early Release Act.

Special Victims Unit

Staff:

- 2 Assistant Prosecutors
- 3 Detectives; 1 Detective Sergeant
- 1 SART Coordinator
- 1 MDT Coordinator/Victim Witness Advocate
- 2 Clerk Transcribers

2024 Statistics:

- New Referrals 85
- Investigations Completed 101
- Filed Criminal Charges 13
- Defendants Indicted 12

The Special Victims Unit, more commonly referred to as SVU, is an acutely profound unit of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office. It is a dedicated division responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes of a sensitive and deeply personal nature, that being, sexual violence and child abuse. The unit is made up of dedicated detectives, prosecutors, and victim advocates who regularly collaborate with other law enforcement agencies such as local police departments and the New Jersey State Police to investigate, apprehend, and prosecute sexually violent perpetrators. In addition, members of the unit also join forces with hospitals, schools, and social service agencies to gather valuable evidence and assure that survivors are given all the necessary support they need and deserve. By combining their efforts with compassionate support, the Special Victims Unit holds offenders accountable while also providing justice for victims.

The Multi-Disciplinary Team

Established in 1991, the Multidisciplinary Team, also known as MDT, meets once a month to review all child abuse investigations and prosecution files. MDT is a dedicated group of individuals seeking to ensure that the needs of child victims are being met and that all service providers are working together in the best interest of the child victims. The Team is typically made up of many individuals from an array of professions such as, law enforcement, prosecutors, social workers, doctors, therapists, and victim advocates. Each member of the team serves a critical purpose. By uniting a group of like-minded and committed professionals, the team is able to better serve victims, their families, and the public. The MDT Coordinator is responsible for all MDT related job responsibilities.

Sexual Assault Response Team

New Jersey's Sexual Assault Response Team, better known as SART, represents a pioneering, victim-centered approach to addressing sexual violence. Every county in the State has a Response Team and the unit generally has three key members. One, the Forensic Nurse Examiner who conducts examinations and assists with collecting valuable evidence. Two, the Sexual Violence Advocate who provides emotional support and guidance to survivors. And three, trained detectives who investigate the matter, facilitate the legal process, and ensure the safety of the victim. All members of this multi-disciplinary team coordinate their efforts to develop and ensure a victim-centered approach that focuses on the needs and concerns of the survivor. Together, they create an environment in which sexual assault victims will choose to report incidents of sexual violence and feel confident that they will be provided much needed support throughout the criminal justice process.

2024 Special Victims Unit Notable Cases

State v. Cameron Scrudato

The defendant in this case pleaded guilty to second degree sexual assault for sexual contact with a six (6)-year old child. He was subsequently sentenced to ten (10) years in New Jersey State Prison and must serve eight and a half (8 ½) years pursuant to the No Early Release Act before he is eligible for parole. The Court also sentenced the defendant to Parole Supervision for Life and Megan's Law. The defendant's conviction and ultimate sentence arose from the following: The offender was known to the child. He had the opportunity to be alone with the child and sexually assaulted the child in their home. The child notified their parents, who, in turn, contacted the authorities. The defendant was later questioned by the police and admitted to being present in the home, but denied any sexual abuse.

State v. Michael Eaton

The defendant was charged with first degree aggravated sexual assault, second degree sexual assault, and second degree endangering the welfare of a child. In this case, the defendant was known to the eight (8)-year old child victim who disclosed that the defendant sexually assaulted them. The matter was reported to law enforcement and during a forensic interview, the child-victim disclosed sexual abuse.

After an investigation, the defendant was criminally charged and in the end, he pleaded guilty to second degree sexual assault. The Court ultimately sentenced the offender to seven (7) years in New Jersey State Prison and further ordered that pursuant to the No Early Release Act, he must serve at least 85% of the term before he is eligible for parole. The Court also imposed Parole Supervision for Life and required the defendant to register as a sex offender pursuant to Megan's Law.

State v. John Holmes

In September 2021, the adult victim reported she was sexually assaulted at knife point in Phillipsburg. The victim was seen at the hospital for her injuries and a sexual assault examination was completed where possible DNA was obtained. The perpetrator was a stranger to the victim. Surveillance video showed the victim getting off a bus and being approached by a male. After a detailed investigation, DNA evidence was obtained that identified the male party.

The defendant was charged with a series of criminal offenses, most notably, two counts of first degree aggravated sexual assault, terrorist threats, and unlawful possession of a weapon. The offender pleaded guilty to the noted charges and was sentenced to ten (10) years in New Jersey State Prison, Parole Supervision for Life, and required to register as a sex offender in accordance with the mandates of Megan's Law.

State v. Joseph Gares

Following a trial that commenced in 2024, a jury of his peers convicted the defendant of seven (7) counts related to sexual abuse, including, first degree aggravated sexual assault, multiple counts of sexual assault, lewdness and one (1) count of endangering the welfare of a child. In this case, the defendant was accused of sexually assaulting a child known to him over the course of several years when the child was between the ages of eight (8) and eleven (11). The defendant was awaiting sentencing in 2024.

Cyber Crimes Unit

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor
2 Detectives, 1 Detective Sgt.
2 Agents
1 Clerk Transcriber

2024 Statistics:

Forensic Analysis Requests 26
NECMC Cyber Tips 73
Investigation of Distribution of Child Pornography 73
Investigation of Possession of Child Pornography 73
Other Forensic Analysis Requests 8
Cell Phone Analysis 38
Computer/ Hard drive/ SD/TD 32

The Cyber Crimes Unit of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office is a specialized team focused on investigating and prosecuting criminal offenses perpetrated through the use of technology. A vast array of crimes are pursued by the unit, which include, computer theft, cyber harassment, luring, stalking, and invasion of privacy. However, the main concentration of the team is to protect the community by prosecuting offenders who possess and distribute child sexual abuse material.

The unit itself is comprised of highly trained and experienced detectives, agents and prosecutors. Through various investigative means, the team is able to identify online perpetrators who commonly utilize the internet to hide their true identities. Much more, the team is able to evaluate online accounts and forensically analyze electronic devices to recover and preserve valuable pieces of evidence. Moreover, it is common for the team to work alongside local police departments, State Police, FBI, Secret Service, Homeland Security, and other law enforcement agencies to investigate, prosecute and ultimately hold offenders accountable for their criminal actions. The ultimate goal of the Cyber Crimes Unit is to pursue justice for victims and protect the public by removing and in the long run, deterring online predators.

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office is an active member of the ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) Task Force. The ICAC Task Force Program was created to help State and local law enforcement agencies enhance their investigative response to offenders who use the Internet, online communication systems, or other computer technology to sexually exploit children. The program is currently composed of 46 regional Task Force agencies.

2024 Cyber Crimes Unit Notable Cases

State v. Kyle Andrews

In this case, the defendant was charged with possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material in both Warren and Hunterdon County. Before the Warren and Hunterdon cases, the defendant was convicted of other sexually based crimes. In 2013, the defendant was convicted of lewdness and sentenced to two (2) years of probation. Then, a year later, while serving his sentence, he was convicted of criminal sexual contact of a fifteen (15) year child. For that matter, he was sentenced to county jail, five (5) years of probation, and obligated to register as a sex offender. Additionally, while the Warren and Hunterdon County matters were being prosecuted, the defendant was also facing criminal charges in Virginia for allegedly sending child sexual abuse material to an undercover officer who posed as a fifteen (15) year child online.

Ultimately, the defendant pleaded guilty to distributing child sexual abuse material online. In light of his plea, the defendant was required to be evaluated by the Adult Diagnostic Treatment Center. The evaluation report concluded that the defendant was a repetitive and compulsive offender.

At sentencing, the Court ruled that the defendant must serve four (4) years in prison, and imposed Parole Supervision for Life and Megan's Law. Also, in light of the evaluator's findings that the defendant was a repetitive and compulsive offender, the sentencing judge confined the defendant to the Adult Diagnostic Treatment Center.

State v. James DiMarsico

For this matter, Google notified the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) that an account holder uploaded several images depicting child sexual abuse to its platform. Our office was notified about Google's report and confirmed that the images placed online were in fact, child sexual abuse material. An investigation followed, supporting an indictment for three (3) counts of endangering the welfare of a child. More specifically, for distributing, intent to distribute, and possession of child sexual abuse material. The offender ultimately pleaded guilty to second degree distribution and was later sentenced to five (5) years in State Prison, Parole Supervision for Life, and was ordered to register as a sex offender pursuant to Megan's Law.

Narcotics Task Force

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor
2 Detectives, 1 Lieutenant
1 Clerk Transcriber

The Narcotics Task Force of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office is responsible for the detection, investigation, apprehension and prosecution of those individuals who violate the drug laws of the State of New Jersey. It is further responsible for the investigation of other forms of organized criminal activity such as gangs, weapons offenses, gambling and prostitution. The Assistant Prosecutor provides legal supervision for investigations and gives legal guidance to law enforcement on a daily basis. The investigative staff conducts criminal investigations throughout Warren County and assists Municipal, State and Federal Law Enforcement Agencies. Detectives work in an undercover/covert capacity. They are responsible for the detection, investigation, and apprehension of individuals involved in organized criminal activity and narcotics and weapons related offenses.

The Task Force uses a wide variety of investigative techniques to combat the use and sale of controlled dangerous substances as well as to investigate other forms of organized criminal activity. These techniques include undercover or plainclothes operations, physical surveillance, electronic surveillance, intelligence gathering and the investigative follow-up of referrals from civilians and other law enforcement agencies. Case preparation is developed by members of the Task Force with the supervision and guidance of the legal staff of the Office of the Prosecutor.

Warren County Support Teams

Warren County Regional Crime Scene Investigation Team (CSI)

The Warren County Regional Crime Scene Investigation Team (CSI) is a specialized team comprised of highly trained professionals from municipal police departments across the county and the Warren County Prosecutor's Office. In 2024 the team included fifteen (15) certified Crime Scene Investigators, Arson Investigators, and/or FARO operators (3D Laser Scanner), many of whom possess advanced training in specialized forensic disciplines such as shooting reconstruction, fingerprint analysis, and bloodstain pattern analysis.

CSI responds to and assists with criminal investigations in the thirteen (13) Warren County municipalities served by local police departments. Upon request, the team also provides support to federal agencies and the New Jersey State Police in the nine (9) Warren County municipalities under their jurisdiction.

CSI is led by a Coordinator, who oversees all operations and assignments. Our detectives handle a wide variety of cases throughout the county, meticulously processing each scene. Depending on the nature of the incident, responsibilities may include photographing and videotaping the scene and/or autopsy, documenting and collecting physical evidence, and preparing three-dimensional renderings of the scene using a FARO scanner and all necessary reports for trial.

Types of Incidents Investigated:

- Homicides and suspicious deaths
- Suicides
- Sexual assaults
- Child abuse and endangering the welfare of a child
- Arsons and suspicious fires
- Shootings
- Aggravated assaults
- Stolen motor vehicles
- Robberies
- Fingerprint comparisons
- Other serious crimes, as requested

In 2024, CSI had eighteen (18) investigations including but not limited to: Endangering the Welfare of a Child (Possession/Distribution of Child Sexual Abuse Material); Death investigations (suicides and recovery of found bone); Aggravated Assaults; Shootings; Weapons Possession; Arson/Fire investigations; and Latent Fingerprint verification.



Warren County Regional Serious Collision Analysis Response Team (SCART)

The Warren County Regional Serious Collision Analysis Response Team (SCART) is a specialized team comprised of highly trained professionals from municipal police departments across the county, the Warren County Sheriff's Office, and the Warren County Prosecutor's Office. The team includes certified Crash Investigators, certified Crime Scene Investigators, and/or FARO operators (3D Laser Scanner).

SCART responds to and assists local police agencies in investigating motor vehicle accidents involving death or serious bodily injury, which may ultimately result in death in the thirteen (13) Warren County municipalities served by local police departments.

SCART is led by a Coordinator, who oversees all operations and assignments. In the coordinator's absence, an Assistant Coordinator assumes leadership responsibilities to ensure continuity and efficiency in the team's response.

In 2024, SCART had six (6) activations.

Warren County Tactical Response Team (TRT)

The Warren County Tactical Response Team (TRT) is a highly skilled police tactical unit comprised of law enforcement personnel throughout the County. The Warren County Prosecutor and the Warren County Police Chiefs Association implemented this highly trained and skilled tactical team as a resource for the law enforcement agencies of Warren County in handling critical incidents. The presence of this highly trained, highly skilled police tactical unit has been shown to substantially reduce the risk of injury or loss of life to citizens, police officers, victims, and suspects; and recognizing that a well-managed team response to critical incidents usually results in successful resolution of critical incidents.

The mission of TRT is to support the law enforcement agencies of Warren County with a tactical response and provide successful resolution to critical incidents. This includes but is not limited to:

- High-Risk Search Warrant Executions
- High-Risk Apprehensions
- Barricaded Individuals
- Civilian Search & Rescue
- Criminal Search & Recovery
- Special Assignments

Warren County Child Abduction Response Team (CART)

The Warren County Child Abduction Response Team (CART) is a multi-jurisdictional team comprised of members from local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies working cooperatively in response to incidents involving an abducted, missing, and/or endangered child or children.

In 2024, Warren County CART received twenty-three (23) notifications, resulting in seven (7) CART activations. All seven (7) activations were successful, and each juvenile was found safe.

CART is made up of professionals from across the criminal justice and emergency response spectrum, including but not limited to:

- Local, county, state, and federal law enforcement officers
- Assistant prosecutors
- Victim advocates
- Search and rescue teams

CART is led by a Coordinator, who oversees all operations and assignments. In the Coordinator's absence, an Assistant Coordinator assumes leadership responsibilities to ensure continuity and efficiency in the team's response. The CART command structure is as follows:

- Command Group
- County CART Coordinator
- County Assistant CART Coordinator
- Legal Coordinator
- Investigations Coordinator
- Search Coordinator
- Public Information Coordinator
- Family Liaison Coordinator
- Logistics Coordinator

This multi-agency approach ensures that each investigation is supported with the legal, investigative, tactical, and support resources necessary to resolve cases efficiently.

CART works in close partnership with the New Jersey State Police Missing Persons Unit. While our primary mission focuses on child abduction and missing child investigations, CART may also assist in other missing person investigations when requested—particularly those involving vulnerable adults with special needs or medical conditions.

The criteria for a CART notification is:

1. All AMBER Alert requests and/or activations.
2. All stranger abductions of a minor child (under the age of 18).
3. The abduction (family and non-family) of a minor child (under the age of 18) with endangerment circumstances.
4. A missing child who is thirteen (13) years of age or younger and whose whereabouts are not currently known.
5. Any other abduction or missing child investigation that requires an immediate response in order to protect the well-being of the child.
6. Nothing in this criteria shall be construed to limit the authority of a county prosecutor to activate a County CART response for any missing person.

AMBER Alert Protocol

All AMBER Alert requests must be submitted through the county's CART team. The CART Coordinator is responsible for reviewing the request and forwarding it to the New Jersey State Police Missing Persons Unit for appropriate action. This process ensures consistency, accountability, and strict adherence to the criteria necessary for an AMBER Alert activation.

Legal Division

Trial Unit

Staff:

3 Assistant Prosecutors
1 Detective, 1 Detective Lieutenant
1 Agent
3 Clerk Transcribers

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office Trial Unit is responsible for prosecuting a wide variety of cases. These cases are initially investigated and charged by local law enforcement and New Jersey State Police.

The mission of the Unit is accomplished primarily through the early development of a viable and complete case to encourage resolution at the Pre-indictment Conference (PIC). PIC is typically the first opportunity to resolve a matter. At PIC Assistant Prosecutors tender appropriate plea offers, and attempt to resolve matters through guilty pleas, admittance into the Pre-Trial Intervention Program (PTI), or other diversionary program. If the matter is not resolved at PIC, it is presented to the Grand Jury.

If the Grand Jury chooses to return an indictment, the Assistant Prosecutors prepare the case for trial and handle all pre-trial motions and procedures. These include preparing legal memoranda and briefs, interviewing and preparing witnesses, presenting testimony, arguing various types of motions, and presenting the case to a petit jury. Throughout this process, there are continuing efforts to resolve the matter through a plea agreement.

In addition to the foregoing, the Unit is also responsible for violations of probation, Pre-Trial Intervention Program terminations, issuing and rescission of bench warrants, return of fugitives, restitution hearings and sentences.

Domestic Violence Unit

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor
1 Detective
1 Clerk Transcriber
1 Victim Witness Advocate

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office Domestic Violence Unit's primary focus is to prosecute domestic violence cases holding offenders accountable and affording a voice to victims. The mission of the Domestic Violence Unit is to provide a zero tolerance response to domestic violence within Warren County. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act of 1991 was enacted as the legislature declared that domestic violence is a serious crime against society and that there are thousands of persons in New Jersey that are abused, beaten, and in cases murdered by spouses, significant others, or household members. The intent of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was to assure the victims of domestic violence the maximum protection from abuse the law can provide. The Domestic Violence Unit is dedicated to upholding this intent by using an evidence-based prosecution, a model to successfully prosecute cases based on a thorough investigation, interviews of victims and witnesses, and gathering all available physical, audio, photographic, and electronic evidence that is relevant for a successful prosecution of these cases.

The Domestic Violence Unit incorporates a multidisciplinary team including assistant prosecutors, detectives, law enforcement, non-fatal strangulation forensic nurse examiners, victim-witness advocates,

and clerical staff to work together to investigate and prosecute these cases and ensure that victims are heard and receive support throughout the criminal justice process.

In accordance with the New Jersey Attorney General's Directive, on or about January 1, 2024, the Warren County Prosecutor's Office along with our Sexual Assault Forensic Nurse Coordinator implemented the Non-Fatal Strangulation Forensic Nurse Examination Program. This program allows victims to be seen at a hospital by a Forensic Nurse Examiner that has specific training to perform a forensic examination of the victim, document signs of injury and symptoms of strangulation, and complete a BREATHE assessment for strangulation cases. These examinations and reports are often crucial pieces of evidence in the prosecution of strangulation cases.

The Domestic Violence Unit is responsible for the prosecution of indictable criminal complaints from inception to resolution as well as contempt of court charges arising from a violation of a domestic violence restraining order. The Unit also handles civil forfeiture of firearms, weapons, and ammunition seized pursuant to the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act and makes the determination if an individual is subject to any disabilities as contained in New Jersey Statute N.J.S.A. 2C: 58-3 that would require a motion to forfeit the firearms. Almost all the cases handled by the Domestic Violence Unit originate from municipalities within Warren County, however the unit can originate their own investigations and complaints.

To ensure that the unit runs efficiently and effectively, regular trainings and meetings are completed providing updates in the laws or procedures and provides an opportunity for open discussion amongst those dedicated to prosecuting domestic violence cases and helping victims. The goals of the Domestic Violence Unit for 2025 are to continue to seek justice for victims and hold offenders accountable in an expeditious manner and to raise awareness in the increasing number strangulation cases in Warren County and the serious nature of those cases.

Juvenile Unit

Staff:

- 1 Assistant Prosecutor
- 1 Detective
- 1 Clerk Transcriber
- 1 Victim Witness Advocate

The overarching goal of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office's Juvenile Unit is two-fold. First, the Unit aims to bring youths who have engaged in unlawful activity to be held accountable and bring justice to those who they have harmed. Secondly, the unit aims to guide youth away from the juvenile and criminal justice systems and unlawful behavior more generally.

When juveniles are alleged to have committed offenses, the matters are prosecuted in the New Jersey Superior Court, Family Division. The Juvenile Unit prosecutes all juvenile offenders – with the exception of those accused of sex offenses and certain major crimes.

The unit also aims to provide youths with services to reduce the chance of recidivism. It is not uncommon for a youth who has been adjudicated delinquent to be ordered by the Court to engage in individual and family counseling and/or to undergo mental health and substance abuse evaluations and comply with any recommended treatment as part of probation.

In addition to its prosecutorial functions, the unit also strives to be proactive in preventing juveniles from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system through a variety of community and school programs. The

unit oversees the implementation of the Memorandum of Agreement between each school in the County and local law enforcement to share information and cooperate with one another on a variety of issues. The Unit also works collaboratively with law enforcement and school administrators to identify, assess and respond to threats and other incidents occurring in County schools.

Megan's Law Unit

Staff:

- 1 Assistant Prosecutor
- 1 Detective
- 1 Senior Clerk Transcriber

The Megan' Law Unit was created after the adoption of Megan's Law on October 31, 1994. The Unit administers and enforces the legal requirements regarding the administration and enforcement of Megan's Law in Warren County. The statutes include primarily N.J.S.A. 2C:7-1 et seq. (The Registration and Notification of Release of Certain Offenders) and N.J.S.A. 2C:43-6.4 (Special Sentence of Community Supervision for Life and/or Special Sentence of Parole Supervision for Life).

The Unit proposes and argues in court for tier designation of offenders and what, if any, members of the community may be notified as a result of a Registrant living or working in Warren County (Tier 1 – low risk to reoffend, Tier 2 – moderate risk to reoffend, or Tier 3 – high risk to reoffend) and seeks Internet publication if legally permissible.

The Unit tracks those individuals subject to Civil Commitment of Sexually Violent Predators.

The Assistant Prosecutor also responds to Motions made by Registrants who seek to be removed from either Megan's Law Registration, Community or Parole Supervision, or both registration and supervision.

In Summary, the Unit:

- Identifies individuals subject to Megan's Law
- Tracks their registration process
- Investigates the background of registrants
- Classifies the individuals as low, moderate or high risk
- Obtains necessary court approvals of tier classifications and notifications
- Notifies the organizations or areas authorized by the Court
- Prosecutes those who violate various parts of Megan's Law
- Responds to Motions to be removed from Megan's Law and/or Supervision for Life

Expungement Unit

Staff:

- 1 Assistant Prosecutor
- 1 Agent

The Expungement 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. In carrying out its duties, the Expungement Unit responds to petitions for expungements now mainly filed in the Ecourts Expungement Portal. There are many different types of expungements that the Unit handles, such as regular, clean slate, recovery court, and expedited.

In addition, the Expungement Unit bears the responsibility of ensuring the confidentiality of criminal records subject to an Expungement Order. Not only does the unit have to ensure the protection of documents of our own expungements, we are also served with Expungement Orders from all of the other 20 counties in New Jersey that granted an expungement which included an arrest that occurred in Warren County.

The Expungement Unit responds to our staff and municipal police departments regarding questions on expungements or expungement laws.

Expungements filed in Warren County have significantly increased in volume since 2020 (324 expungements) as a result of many new statutes that allow for expungements that would not have been eligible in the past, and the ease of filing a petition in the Ecourts Expungement Portal. In 2024 the Unit processed 1061 expungements.

Extreme Risk Protection Order Unit

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor
1 Detective

The Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Unit at the Warren County Prosecutor's Office is dedicated to enhancing public safety by managing requests for court orders that temporarily restrict individuals posing a significant risk to themselves or others from accessing firearms or dangerous weapons. Our Office diligently reviews petitions, often submitted by law enforcement or family members, and presents compelling evidence in court to secure these protective orders. Collaborating closely with law enforcement and community resources, the ERPO Unit ensures enforcement and compliance while upholding legal standards and due process. We also strive to connect individuals in crisis with mental health support, fostering safer communities through prevention and intervention.

Mental Health Program

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor
1 Detective

The Mental Health Unit was created in January, 2009. The Mental Health Unit has three primary goals: one, to handle criminal prosecutions involving individuals with serious mental illness who commit nonviolent offenses; two, to be a resource for local law enforcement agencies by acting as a liaison with the mental health community; and three, to provide training for local law enforcement on mental illness.

The Mental Health Unit works closely with the Warren County Department of Human Services and the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services to foster communication between law enforcement, mental health providers and mental health units. The Warren County Prosecutor's Office, Warren County Department of Human Services and the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services are committed to ensuring individuals with mental health illness are treated with dignity and respect.

Administrative Division

Professional Integrity Section

Professional Standards Unit

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor

1 Deputy Chief

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office Professional Standards Unit's mission is to ensure the integrity and ethical conduct of all law enforcement in Warren County. Its goal is to maintain public trust and confidence in all law enforcement agencies within the County. The Unit encompasses a number of responsibilities including internal affairs investigations and reporting, WCPO law enforcement licensing, background checks for employees, legal and law enforcement training, Office of Attorney General Reporting and WCPO policy review and update.

- *Internal Affairs*

The Unit is responsible for conducting internal affairs investigations. These investigations involve allegations of misconduct by employees of the Prosecutor's Office, as well as allegations of misconduct and criminal acts involving municipal police officers and police chiefs throughout the County. Additionally, the Unit assists and monitors local law enforcement agencies and their personnel in handling internal affairs matters within their respective agencies.

The Unit also oversees all **Early Warning System** activations. The Early Warning System is a police officer monitoring program that alerts supervisors to concerning trends in officer behavior. When certain thresholds are met, the officer may receive additional training, increased supervision, and other resources to correct the behavior before it escalates.

In addition to conducting investigations, the Unit develops policies and procedures that are disseminated to all law enforcement agencies within the County. This ensures a unified and standardized approach to policing.

The Unit is also responsible for compiling required law enforcement reports and continues to streamline reporting requirements to ensure that each agency adheres to current and evolving Attorney General Guidelines.

- *Law Enforcement Licensing*

As of January 1, 2024, the Unit began monitoring and verifying that all law enforcement officers in the County hold a valid, active license issued by the **Police Training Commission**. This licensing program requires all officers to meet uniform professional standards to become or remain active law enforcement officers in New Jersey.

The Unit tracks and reviews use of force and vehicle pursuit incidents from both the Prosecutor's Office and municipal agencies. This enables the Prosecutor's Office to monitor compliance with policies, identify potential training needs, and address any problematic behavior.

The Unit also conducts random drug testing of law enforcement personnel. The purpose of this policy is to deter illegal drug use among officers.

- *Training*

Finally, the Unit ensures that all law enforcement agencies in the County complete the **Yearly Mandated Training** as required by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office. This includes:

- Twice-annual firearms qualifications
- Use of force policy reviews
- Pursuit driving policy reviews
- Domestic violence updates
- CLEAR Institute training courses
- Case law updates
- Search and seizure updates
- Active shooter refreshers
- Defensive tactics training

In addition to mandatory training, the Unit provides training to WCPO staff, local law enforcement and Assistant Prosecutors on relevant topics, as needed, to ensure that our staff is up to date on the most recent law.

Crisis Intervention Training

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office and the Warren County Department of Human Services are pleased to announce that the 10th year of Crisis Intervention Team Training was held in 2024.

The CIT course is a 40-hour, five-day training for law enforcement officers and mental health professionals. The training is designed for law enforcement and other first responders encountering persons experiencing a psychiatric crisis in the community. Mental health and law enforcement professionals deliver the curriculum. It is comprised of classroom instruction, community site visits, and practical exercises delivered by local mental health professionals, CIT law enforcement instructors, and other subject matter experts.

CIT Training in Warren County has been sponsored by the Warren County Prosecutor's Office and the Warren County Department of Human Services with support from the Warren County Commissioners.



Appellate Unit

Staff:

1 Assistant Prosecutor
1 Clerk Transcriber

The Appellate Unit is responsible for representing the State of New Jersey in all criminal, quasi-criminal, and juvenile delinquency appeals arising from convictions or decisions in the Warren County courts. This includes Appeals from Municipal Courts to the Superior Court, Appeals from the trial level of the Superior Court to the Appellate Division and the Supreme Court of New Jersey and Appeals and proceedings in the Federal Courts. The Unit also handles, Petitions for post-conviction relief, Writs of habeas corpus, and Appeals from denials of firearm permit applications.

The primary responsibilities of the Assistant Prosecutor assigned to the Appellate Unit include, reviewing transcripts, briefs, and supporting documents, conducting legal research, drafting briefs, appendices, and other legal documents, appearing before various courts for oral argument, and providing support to Assistant Prosecutors with emergent legal research related to criminal prosecutions.

The Assistant Prosecutor also serves as a liaison between the County Prosecutor and municipal prosecutors. This includes organizing quarterly county municipal prosecutors' meetings, attending the Attorney General's Municipal Prosecutors Supervisors' Committee meetings, and addressing additional issues and conducting research projects as directed by the Prosecutor.

The Unit successfully prosecuted several appeals in 2024 including:

State v. Daniel Lawrence:

Convicted by a Jury of First Degree Murder, and multiple weapons offenses, the defendant appealed the Order denying his Petition for Post-Conviction Relief based on ineffective assistance of counsel. After a Post-Conviction Relief (PCR) hearing, the appeal was denied.

State v. Gilberto Morales:

Convicted by a Jury of First Degree Aggravated Sexual Assault, and other sexual offenses, the defendant appealed his conviction based on Prosecutorial Misconduct, Failure to give certain Jury Instructions and the order of Restitution. The Law Division denied defendant's motion and the Petition of Certification was denied.

Evidence Unit

The Evidence Unit of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office is responsible for the secure storage and maintenance of all items of evidence submitted in support of both criminal and civil investigations and prosecutions. This Unit ensures the proper identification, packaging, handling, processing, and safeguarding of all evidentiary materials. A critical component of this responsibility includes maintaining accurate chain-of-custody records to preserve the integrity and admissibility of evidence in court proceedings. Once a case has been completed and the associated evidence is deemed to have no further legal or investigative value, the Evidence Unit is tasked with the appropriate and lawful disposal of those items. The meticulous handling of all evidence, helps prevent contamination, misplacement, or loss, thereby ensuring that criminal prosecutions are not compromised. This process plays a key role in upholding public trust in the criminal justice system and preserving the credibility of law enforcement agencies regarding property and evidence control.

The Unit is currently staffed by a primary evidence custodian, with one additional detective designated as a backup to receive and retrieve evidence in the custodian's absence. The Evidence Unit works in close coordination with various internal divisions, assisting with both the intake and release of evidence and facilitating submissions to state forensic laboratories for analysis involving narcotics, sexual assaults, and ballistics. In addition to its routine responsibilities, the Evidence Unit Custodian regularly assists with on-site evidence collection during search warrant executions, manages evidence database entry, and oversees transportation of items to the NJSP Forensic Laboratory.

The Evidence Unit serves as a foundational component of the prosecutorial process in Warren County, ensuring that all evidence is managed with professionalism, accountability, and legal compliance. Its work is vital to maintaining the integrity of investigations, supporting successful prosecutions, and ensuring adherence to state and federal standards.

In 2024, the Evidence Unit processed a total of **1,384 pieces of evidence** originating from 169 criminal cases throughout the year. A significant portion of this work involved collaboration with the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Units, particularly in handling 684 firearms and weapon-related items seized from 70 combined Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and Temporary Extreme Risk Protective Order (TERPO) incidents across Warren County.

A notable case in 2024 took place in Blairstown, NJ, where the Evidence Unit played a key role in managing approximately 140 pieces of evidence. Items included modified assault rifles (machine guns), ghost guns, and various gun-manufacturing components and accessories. This operation was conducted in partnership with the Blairstown Township Police Department, WCPO Major Crimes Unit, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), ultimately resulting in a successful prosecution in 2025.

The Evidence Unit also provides essential support to Assistant Prosecutors by managing the completion of discovery materials in all assigned cases. Once weapons are transported to the WCPO facility, they are thoroughly inspected to determine compliance with New Jersey firearms regulations. Any illegal firearms, assault weapons, or large-capacity magazines not previously identified by the submitting agency are properly documented and forwarded for prosecutorial review.

Upon the conclusion of forfeiture hearings in domestic violence cases and the resolution of applicable mental health proceedings, the Evidence Unit is responsible for overseeing the transfer of property by either returning items to lawful owners or coordinating with Federal Firearms License (FFL) dealers for legal sale or ownership transfer. In cases where forfeiture is ordered, the weapons are processed and sent for destruction.

Two evidence destruction operations were conducted over the course of the year, resulting in the secure disposal of 596 items, primarily linked to narcotics and firearms cases.

Additional 2024 highlights include:

- 23 Distribution of Controlled Dangerous Substance (CDS) cases generated 303 individual pieces of evidence
- 163 firearms transferred to FFL dealers
- 273 items returned to rightful owners
- 94 items transferred to law enforcement agencies in surrounding states in support of inter-agency investigations
- 277 items submitted to the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) forensic laboratory for analysis

Community Support Section

Victim Witness Unit

Staff:

- 1 Victim Witness Unit Coordinator/Supervisor
- 3 Victim Advocates, Superior Court
- 1 Municipal Court Victim Advocate- Domestic Violence
- 1 Multidisciplinary Team Coordinator
- 1 Unit Clerk

The federal ‘Victims of Crime Act’, enacted in 1984, established a Crime Victims Fund to support a spectrum of programs to assist victims and their families. Recognizing the often times unmet needs of crime victims, on November 3, 1991, the citizens of New Jersey voted to amend Article 1 of the New Jersey Constitution. Article 1 in part states: “A victim of crime shall be treated with fairness, compassion and respect by the criminal justice system.” Additionally during that time period, a Crime Victim’s Bill of Rights, spearheaded by Assemblyman Alex DeCroke, was enacted that enhanced the ability of crime victims to actively participate in the criminal justice process. In the ongoing movement for victims’ rights, on August 7, 2012, Governor Chris Christie signed Alex DeCroke’s Law that updates and strengthens the current Crime Victim’s Bill of Rights. The revisions include increased access for victims regarding the progress of their case and the scheduling of court proceedings, the expansion of the consideration of victims’ impact statements with regard to plea agreements and the pretrial intervention program.

Warren County was a forerunner in victim’s rights; recognizing the rights of crime victims by establishing the Victim Witness Assistance Unit in 1983 prior to the New Jersey Crime Victims Bill of Rights enacted in 1985. Since 1983, Warren County has fully supported the rights of crime victims and has continued to evolve with specialized programs such as the Multidisciplinary Team, Joint Investigations of Child Abuse Cases utilizing the Warren County Child Advocacy Center, the Sexual Assault Response/BREATH, and the Municipal Court Victim Advocacy Program.

Statistics are entered into the Performance Measurement Platform (PMT) through the Office of Justice Programs each reporting quarter of the annual VOCA allocation. Reviewing the data entered for the Office of Victim Witness Advocacy in Warren County, **3104 victims received services with 1704 being new victims** for the year of 2024.

Services include; personal victim advocacy, criminal justice victim advocacy, court accompaniment, information and referral, transportation, child care, assistance with restitution, assistance with Victims of Crime Compensation, crisis intervention, and arrangements for lodging and meals for out of state victims and witnesses.

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office of Victim Witness Advocacy's staff provides services to assist victims and witnesses in coping with the aftermath of victimization and to help make their participation in the criminal justice system less difficult and burdensome. After a criminal event, many victim/survivors find themselves in a state of despair, confusion, and frustration. At the beginning of the criminal justice process, many victim/survivors lack the necessary resources to effectively manage their financial, mental health and social service needs. It is essential that they are informed about the services available to them and how to access these supports. The Victim Witness Unit assesses the needs of each victim and provides assistance to alleviate the aftermath of crime and as the case moves through the criminal justice system.

Victim Advocacy begins with outreach to victims and survivors as a defendant is arrested and scheduled for Central Judicial Processing (CJP). Victims are notified of pretrial release or detention and are provided with referrals for services and emotional support. This includes weekends and holidays where an advocate is on call. Other services Victim Advocates provide include but are not limited to:

- Criminal justice orientation
- The victim /witness's role
- Notification of case status and final disposition
- Assistance/Advocacy for intimidated victims/witnesses
- Advocacy on case decisions/sentencing/parole
- Crisis intervention
- Transportation to court related events
- Assistance in making travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-state victims and witnesses
- Child Care if needed for the victim/witness to attend court functions
- Assistance in applying for Victims of Crime Compensation (VCCO)
- Information and assistance in obtaining restitution
- Court accompaniment
- Employer, school, landlord and creditor intercession
- A separate and secure waiting area
- Assistance with victim impact statements
- Assistance with preparation for grand jury, hearing and trial testimony
- Assistance with property return when no longer needed as evidence
- Referral to counseling and/or other social service assistance
- Notification of parole eligibility and custody release notification
- Information, referral, and counseling regarding HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases
- Information on crime prevention

In Warren County, in addition to victim services provided in Superior Court, there is a designated victim advocate that provides direct victim services to domestic violence victims in the Municipal Court. Services include court accompaniment, referral to counseling and/or other social service assistance, case advocacy, and an explanation of the Municipal Court System. In 2024, **384 victims of domestic violence received services by a victim advocate**, with the majority of these cases being within the Municipal Court System.

Victim services are provided in the Municipal Court, in hopes that further victimization and escalation of the abuse may be prevented. In addition, victims of domestic violence often have special needs or safety concerns. A victim advocate providing direct victim services can address these concerns and refer the victims to appropriate services. An added benefit of an advocate being in the Municipal Court is the ongoing relationship with the local police officers and Municipal Court personnel. The advocate has built a rapport with the personnel in each jurisdiction who now feel comfortable inquiring about victim issues that arise at both the Municipal and Superior Court levels. This helps to foster a coordinated response to the needs of crime victims and provides ongoing education regarding resources and victim services.

Advocates participate in local, national and virtual conferences and trainings that assist in enhancing their knowledge of victim services and understand current victim issues. This helps by improving skills by learning about the latest topics and best-practices from dynamic and highly respected experts in the field. It is also a chance to network and refuel our passion to make a difference for victims and take that energy back to implement change in your own community. The Victim Witness Coordinator and one Advocate have completed the required courses to be a Certified Disaster Response Crisis Counselors (DRCC). This certification requires continuing education to maintain certification.

Victim Advocates attend community events and participate in providing educational training to the public. For the past 4 years, we have attended the Warren County Health and Wellness Day, a free community event that focuses on mental health awareness and healthy living. At this event we sponsor an activity and have child safety coloring books available for participants as well as other giveaways. During National Crime Victims' Rights Week we have a display at the County Administration building and have resources available for the public.

Child Advocacy Center

The Warren County Prosecutor's Office Child Advocacy Center (CAC) established in May 2008 and relocated in 2016 to a freestanding building located in Belvidere, NJ. The CAC is a safe, child friendly space where child abuse victims and their families come for their interviews with Law Enforcement. In 2023-2024 the CAC was renovated with assistance from the Department of Children and Families Child Advocacy Grant. The renovation consisted of upgrading many aspects of the CAC that include new flooring, new paint, new seating and new pictures throughout the building. We were also able to buy new toys, books and crafts for the children to utilize when at the CAC.

The Warren County Prosecutors Office currently holds an Associate Membership through the National Children's Alliance. The MDT Coordinator is actively taking steps to improve our facility through grants, with the end goal of applying for Accreditation of our Child Advocacy Center.



Community Initiatives

Health and Wellness Field Day

Health and Wellness Field Day is a free event for all citizens of Warren County focused on teens, children and family. The Warren County Prosecutor's Office worked hand in hand with the Warren County Department of Human Services for the 2024 event. The success of Health and Wellness Field Day is a testament to the hard work and attention to detail from all agency partners throughout Warren County. The event has multiple purposes, including but not limited to the following:

- Engage youth in positive interactions with law enforcement personnel;
- Provider agencies share interactive self-care tools or coping skills; and
- Connect youth and families to community resources for better health outcomes.



Operation Helping Hands

Operation Helping Hand (OHH) is a statewide initiative, funded by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, which fosters a partnership between law enforcement and the local recovery community to support individuals with substance use disorders. In the non-arrest model, law enforcement and Certified Peer Recovery Specialists work together to provide recovery support services before an arrest is made. Engagement takes place in various settings, such as knock-and-talk details, community outreach, and local community events. In Warren County, OHH's goal is for law enforcement and recovery specialists to connect with residents in need, offering immediate referrals to treatment and other resources. The success of this initiative in Warren County is largely due to the commitment of its community partner, Parent-to-Parent Addiction Services of Washington, NJ.



Recruitment

The goal of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office Recruitment Plan is to attract qualified individuals to pursue a career with the Warren County Prosecutor's Office. The objective is to achieve an overall racial and gender composition of the office in comparison to the population of the communities we serve. Through various office-recruiting activities, this office will make a good faith effort in meeting specific goals for recruiting a diverse workforce, in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender diversity. Our goals and objectives are listed in the Recruitment Activities section of our plan and achieving them are paramount for success. The Warren County Prosecutor's Office is an equal opportunity employer in all facets of the personnel process. Please see more detail of our Recruitment Plan on our website.

CLOSING

In closing, we thank you for taking the time to read our 2024 Annual Report. We hope it delivered a new perspective of the Warren County Prosecutor's Office and our accomplishments throughout the year. It is our honor to serve the citizens of Warren County. We will continue to do so with our commitment to integrity, justice and public safety. For more information please visit our website.



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