Office of the
Special Narcotics Prosecutor
for the City of New York

2019 Annual Report
Many major transportation routes run through the South Bronx and Upper Manhattan, a characteristic that is exploited by drug traffickers.

Photo by Angel Chevrestt.
Message from the Special Narcotics Prosecutor

This report focuses on the work of Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (SNP) in 2019, a year that brought continued attention on two important goals: effectively responding to a deadly and ever evolving opioid crisis, while simultaneously reducing arrests and incarceration. But I write this message in the Spring of 2020, at a time when, as a city and as a nation, we face unprecedented challenges whose importance cannot be overstated.

Over 17,000 people have lost their lives to COVID-19 in New York City alone and the city is just beginning to reopen. We mourn for those who have lost their lives and for their families, and are deeply concerned for all those who have and continue to endure hardship as a result of this virus.

Simultaneously, people across the U.S. are participating in mass demonstrations over systemic racism following the police killing of George Floyd, for which a Minnesota officer stands charged with murder. Law enforcement agencies across the city and the nation are reviewing policies and practices in light of these events, and my office is no exception. We can and must do better by reaffirming our commitment to justice and fairness for all, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

Turning to our work in 2019, SNP continued to implement its strategic approach to protecting public safety and preventing overdose deaths in New York City, a regional hub of drug distribution. The cover photo of this report depicts major roadways converging in the South Bronx, a characteristic exploited by drug trafficking groups. As a top priority, we seek to remove bulk quantities of narcotics from the top of the supply chain. We do this, in part, by identifying and investigating high level traffickers, as well those engaged in violence. This focused approach allows us to have the greatest impact on community safety by concentrating on the large scale distribution of deadly drugs, protecting lives while simultaneously lowering arrests and incarceration rates.

SNP couples its investigative work with comprehensive data analytics that allows it to identify trends and suggest new approaches to mitigate harm. Most recently, SNP uncovered links between escalating numbers of overdoses in the region, and suppliers of lethal fentanyl and related substances known as fentanyl analogs. This work was detailed in a Special Grand Jury Report.

In 2019, another major focus for the office was adapting our practices to meet new obligations under criminal justice reforms enacted by the New York State Legislature and Governor Andrew Cuomo. I am grateful for the opportunity to share constructive input with elected officials as these changes are implemented. Looking back at the past year, I am proud of all that we were able to accomplish, and feel honored to lead the office as we meet the challenges ahead.
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About the Office

A local prosecutors’ office with citywide jurisdiction, the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (SNP) is responsible for felony narcotics investigations and prosecutions in the five boroughs of New York City. Founded in 1971, it is the only agency of its kind in the United States.

Created in response to a burgeoning heroin epidemic and spike in violent crime, SNP was granted broad authority under New York State Judiciary Laws to root out sophisticated narcotics trafficking organizations and track offenders across traditional jurisdictional boundaries. The Special Narcotics Prosecutor is appointed by the city’s five District Attorneys, who also assign Assistant District Attorneys to serve in SNP. Since its inception, SNP has worked closely with local, state and federal law enforcement partners.

Renowned for its wiretap investigations, SNP is a leader in the use of cutting-edge electronic technology to identify and pursue members of criminal enterprises from international narcotics suppliers to local organizations linked to violence. In recent years, SNP has applied its expertise to confronting the opioid epidemic by targeting high-level heroin and fentanyl trafficking and prescription drug diversion. The office is committed to reducing demand for narcotics by raising public awareness and facilitating treatment for addicted offenders. Working in collaboration with its partners, SNP strives to strengthen communities while protecting public safety.

The first Special Narcotics Prosecutor, Frank Rogers, was appointed in January 1972. He was succeeded by Hon. Sterling Johnson, Jr., who headed SNP for 16 years before becoming a federal judge in the Eastern District of New York. Robert H. Silbering was named the Special Narcotics Prosecutor in 1992 and served for six years.

On May 1, 1998, Bridget G. Brennan was appointed Special Narcotics Prosecutor by the city’s five District Attorneys. Under her direction, the office has developed innovative strategies to stem the flow of drugs into the city and target emerging problems. Ms. Brennan established the Heroin Interdiction Team (HIT), the Digital Forensic Services Unit, the Prescription Drug Investigation Unit (PDIU), the Narcotics Gang Unit and the Money Laundering and Financial Investigation Unit.

Bridget G. Brennan (left) joined three of the city’s District Attorneys to celebrate expansion of Saturday Night Lights, a youth development program funded by the office of Manhattan DA Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. (right). From left to right: Bridget G. Brennan, Frederick J. Watts, Executive Director, Police Athletic League, Bronx DA Darcel D. Clark, Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez, NYPD First Deputy Commissioner Benjamin B. Tucker and Manhattan DA Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.
New York City’s District Attorneys

The five District Attorneys appoint the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, assign Assistant District Attorneys to the office and oversee the office’s work. The only agency of its kind in the nation, SNP is a model of collaboration and effective partnerships. In the midst of the current opioid crisis, the District Attorneys formally reaffirmed their support for SNP in an agreement that recognizes the importance of the office’s leadership in citywide narcotics prosecutions.
SAVING LIVES

The Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (SNP) implements a strategic approach to protecting public safety and saving lives by preventing overdose deaths, while simultaneously reducing arrests and incarceration. This approach is consistent with SNP’s commitment to promoting fairness and justice. The agency’s specialized focus on felony narcotics crimes enables it to closely track trends and respond with precision to each new phase of the opioid crisis. Four main areas of focus are:

- **Supply reduction**
- **Overdose death investigations**
- **Drug networks engaged in violence**
- **Prescription drug trafficking**

Preliminary data from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for New York City indicates fatal overdoses in 2019 flattened and declined slightly, a downward trend that began in 2018. However, the Bronx continues to be disproportionately impacted by high numbers of drug deaths.

### 2019 Fatal Drug Overdoses by Police Precinct

![Map showing overdose data by police precinct.]

### SNP Narcotics Seizures by Drug Type: 2019

- **Cocaine**: 673 lbs.
- **Heroin**: 348 lbs.
- **Fentanyl**: 315 lbs.
- **Heroin/Fentanyl Mixtures**: 241 lbs.
By prosecuting those at the top of the supply chain, SNP has maximal impact while making fewer arrests. SNP investigations target high level drug traffickers who import bulk shipments from supply organizations outside of the U.S., making millions of dollars in profits, and members of drug networks that knowingly sell lethal narcotics linked to overdose deaths or engage in violence. An investigation of two major traffickers and the seizure of $4 million in narcotics in the Bronx illustrates multiple facets of this approach.

**Overdoses Lead to Investigation**
5 overdoses in the Bronx and Westchester, including 3 fatal and 2 non-fatal, spark investigation.

**International Source of Supply**
Examination of phones and records reveal direct communications between one major trafficker and narcotics suppliers in Mexico.

**Millions of Dollars in Profits**
Financial ledgers detail receipt of more than $2 million between January and September of 2019. Over $140,000 cash was seized.

**Drugs and Guns Seized**
Court authorized searches in Morris Park and Elmsford uncovered over 30 pounds of heroin and fentanyl, 5 handguns and an assault rifle.
Supply Reduction

The central mission of SNP is to protect public safety and prevent overdose deaths by removing bulk quantities of dangerous drugs from the highest levels of the supply chain. New York City serves as a regional hub for the distribution of narcotics produced by international trafficking organizations. Shipments flow through the city to both local drug networks and those in surrounding states.

Working in partnership with the DEA New York Division, the NYPD, the New York State Police and other law enforcement teams, SNP investigations in 2019 resulted in the seizure of over 1,500 pounds of narcotics, including over 900 pounds of potent heroin, the synthetic opioid fentanyl and mixtures of the two. Mexican cartels use sophisticated concealment methods to transport shipments in cars and trucks on well-established smuggling routes across the Southwest border. Narcotics also travel by plane, boat and parcel delivery services.

Much of the heroin and fentanyl that enters New York City arrives in the Bronx, where numerous transportation thoroughfares converge and provide access to large metropolitan areas. Dozens of packaging “mill” operations across the city each pump out many thousands of individual dose glassine envelopes of heroin and fentanyl. These mixtures are increasingly lethal as evidenced by historically high rates of fatal overdoses.

Cocaine trafficking also surged in 2019. SNP investigations resulted in the seizure of over 600 pounds of cocaine, representing a 50% increase over 2018. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) reported the stimulant is increasingly present in drug deaths.

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SNP and partner agencies investigate overdose deaths in order to identify organizations that supply lethal drugs and prevent further fatalities. An investigation into three overdose deaths and two non-fatal overdoses in the Bronx and Westchester led law enforcement agents to dismantle a multi-million dollar drug operation in October of 2019. Over 30 pounds of heroin and fentanyl with a street value of over $4 million, five handguns, an assault rifle and $170,000 cash were seized in court authorized searches in Morris Park in the Bronx and Elmsford in Westchester County. Furniture was outfitted with hidden compartments to conceal narcotics. Nine individuals were charged, including two charged with Operating as a Major Trafficker. The investigation revealed direct communications between one manager and suppliers in Mexico. Members of the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Border Enforcement Security/Taskforce (BEST) recovered ledgers detailing the operation’s finances, indicating it received more than $2 million between January 2019 and September 2019.

Earlier in 2019, an investigation sparked by a fatal overdose in the Upper East Side led to the indictment of 14 defendants in the Bronx and Manhattan. The victim, a 28-year-old man, died in a diner in January 2018. An alleged supplier, Jose Jorge aka “Cataño” is accused of knowingly selling lethal drugs. In chilling conversations with an undercover officer, Cataño allegedly described mixing fentanyl with heroin and declared overdoses are “good for business” because then everyone wants what he is selling. Also charged is retired NYPD officer Edward Wagner, who allegedly sold the undercover officer cocaine, heroin, boxes of bullets, a ballistic vest, a shotgun and shotgun shells. Wagner’s son, who was also a target of the investigation, died of unknown causes prior to the arrests.

New York Post, March 7, 2019
Drugs and Violence

SNP strives to protect New York City neighborhoods from the destabilizing effects of drug-related violence by investigating a wide variety of organizations, from street gang affiliates to entrenched narcotics distribution groups. In partnership with the NYPD and the DEA, we identify and prosecute members of violent drug distribution networks that endanger our communities.

In a recent case, two overdoses, one of which was fatal, led to the arrest of 10 members of a Brooklyn criminal organization engaged in gun violence. A total of 12 guns were seized during the investigation by the NYPD’s Narcotics Borough Brooklyn North. The group was also charged in connection with sales of heroin, fentanyl and cocaine to an undercover officer.

Among the defendants charged were multiple members of the same family, the Watsons. Video from a security camera captured one of the Watson brothers with a large silver gun drawn and engaged in a shootout in broad daylight. The Watsons used a vehicle to block the flow of traffic on a narrow residential street in an attempt to corner a rival. A total of 20 shots were fired as pedestrians sought cover.

Two days after this incident, police received another report of shots being fired. The same individual previously captured on video with the gun during the broad daylight shootout was observed driving away from the scene. Police later found him at a stash location and acquired a search warrant. They recovered four guns, cocaine, and various drug paraphernalia at the location. A total of 12 guns were seized during the investigation.
Prescription Drug Investigations

Oxycodone Rxs Filled by NYC Residents: 2007–2019

Since its creation in 2011, SNP’s Prescription Drug Investigation Unit (PDIU) has targeted large scale pill mills, pharmaceutical drug trafficking rings and corrupt medical practitioners who sell prescriptions for highly addictive pills in exchange for cash. As a result of these efforts, combined with improved education for doctors, increased public awareness and more effective regulatory systems, the black market supply of diverted prescription drugs in New York City has been reduced.

Significantly, the office has obtained the convictions of two doctors on manslaughter charges in connection with separate investigations involving patients’ deaths. In November of 2019, the New York Court of Appeals broke new legal ground as it affirmed the manslaughter conviction of Dr. Stan XuHui Li, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison following a jury trial in 2014. The court ruled that doctors can face homicide charges, in certain instances, if the drugs they prescribe are used by one of their patients during a fatal overdose on the medication. It is the first New York high court decision to rely on the legal theory in a homicide case.

The decision, which was nearly unanimous, means the manslaughter conviction of Dr. Stan XuHui Li of Queens over the deaths of two of his patients will be allowed to stand. Associate Justice Eugene Fahey wrote for the majority that, given the facts of the case, a jury was correct in finding Li guilty on the charges of manslaughter in 2014 after two of his patients, Joseph Haeg and Nicholas Rappold, died of opioid overdoses. The decision Tuesday was nine years in the making, from their investigation into Li to his trial and the resulting appeals.

"Today’s Court of Appeals decision makes clear that those who recklessly prescribed opioid medication and other addictive pharmaceutical drugs in large amounts and lethal combinations for no legitimate medical purpose. The activity continued even when patients demonstrated clear signs of addiction.

NY High Court Rules Doctors Can Face Homicide Charges Over Drug Overdose Deaths

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By Dan M. Clark

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New York Law Journal November, 2019
An influx of fentanyl analogs is the latest wave in the opioid epidemic. An analog is a slight variation of fentanyl which may have the same or greater effect on the body. In July of 2019, SNP released a New York State Special Grand Jury report detailing the deadly toll of these highly potent variations of fentanyl. The Grand Jury heard evidence regarding lack of regulation of these substances and the overdoses and deaths associated with them.

In 2019, fentanyl analogs were present in approximately 40% of all New York City overdoses resulting from a non-prescription opioid. Yet regulation has been piecemeal and only select fentanyl analogs are regulated in New York State. The report recommended that the New York State Legislature prohibit all forms of fentanyl analogs and allocate additional funding for police labs, offices of medical examiners, and for treatment to assist substance users whose risk of death may increase with analog exposure.

After SNP and the city’s five District Attorneys spotlighted the Special Grand Jury report, 13 additional fentanyl-related substances were added to New York State’s list of controlled substances. While legislators stopped short of banning all fentanyl analogs, progress was made and Gov. Andrew Cuomo continues to show committed leadership in this area.

Also in 2019, Bridget G. Brennan traveled to the nation’s Capitol at the invitation of Congressman Max Rose and a bipartisan Congressional subcommittee for a hearing examining the homeland security implications of the opioid crisis. In her testimony, Ms. Brennan urged Congress to permanently ban all fentanyl analogs, emphasizing that states are reliant upon the federal government to effectively control dangerous substances originating from foreign sources. As discussed at the hearing, fentanyl analogs are produced from precursor chemicals originating largely in China. Foreign laboratories need only tweak the chemical composition to create new analogs and evade enforcement. Currently, the federal government has a temporary ban on fentanyl analogs.

More than a dozen different analogs have been identified in New York City. Readily available through the Dark Web, these substances are typically shipped in small packages via international parcel delivery services and the U.S. Mail, passing through
John F. Kennedy International Airport and other busy transshipment points. Fentanyl analogs are occasionally seized alongside bulk quantities of fentanyl and heroin in shipments from Mexico.

Low level narcotics organizations sell analogs mixed with fentanyl, heroin and other substances. Analogs can be highly pure and therefore lethal in low concentrations. It is difficult for local law enforcement agencies to intercept and identify unregulated compounds. Prosecutors are unable to obtain search warrants or make arrests in cases, even when deaths have resulted, unless controlled substances are also involved.

A complex investigation by SNP began after a rash of overdoses were linked to fentanyl analogs in South Brooklyn and Staten Island. The wiretap investigation resulted in the arrest and indictment of 14 individuals associated with two drug distribution organizations. Sales involved cocaine, heroin, fentanyl and fentanyl analogs, many of which were unregulated in New York State, creating significant impediments for the prosecution. The two drug rings obtained narcotics from a common source of supply, who was living in Virginia at the time of her arrest and allegedly traveled to Brooklyn to deliver narcotics.
Criminal Justice Reform

As part of the New York State budget passed in April 2019, lawmakers in Albany passed sweeping criminal justice reforms with the laudable goal of making the criminal justice system more equitable and reducing incarceration. The reforms dramatically changed State practices in the areas of bail, discovery and the defendant’s right to a speedy trial. Prior to the 2019 reforms, State judges had discretion to set bail or remand a criminal defendant on any criminal charge. With the passing of the 2019 reforms, judges were required to release defendants charged with most crimes without setting bail. The exceptions were for defendants charged with felonies classified as “violent” by the State penal law, as well as a handful of “non-violent” sex crimes, domestic violence offenses and one top narcotics charge. Discovery, which historically had been the right of a defendant to view evidence in preparation for trial, was transformed into a right granted within 15 days of arraignment in criminal court, with few exceptions. Additionally, the new law connected the defendant’s right to discovery with his or her right to a speedy trial.

Lawmakers revisited these reforms when they crafted the state budget in April 2020. While their original intentions were praiseworthy, certain unintended consequences led to criticism from the general public and prosecutors statewide. While keeping in place the spirit and vast majority of the substance of the prior year’s reforms, the legislature made important revisions. Notably, the legislature added more felony charges to the list of bail and remand eligible offenses. Because prosecutors’ new deadlines for complying with discovery obligations proved largely unrealistic, the timeline was slightly lengthened with special consideration given defendants incarcerated pre-trial. Even with the legislature’s most recent revisions to the reforms, the laws constitute remarkable changes to the Criminal Procedure Law in New York.
Prevention and Education

SNP seeks not only to diminish the supply and distribution of narcotics through prosecution of high-level traffickers, but to save the lives of New York City residents by educating the public about the dangers of street level narcotics.

Over the past four years, SNP has enlisted Staten Island District Attorney Michael E. McMahon and Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark as co-clients for graduate student researchers from Columbia University examining the opioid epidemic in New York City. Working closely with the client organizations, the capstone teams have produced independent reports and recommendations for improved access to treatment services, substance abuse education and prevention initiatives.

In the Spring of 2019, students from Columbia’s School of International Public Affairs (SIPA) created a report entitled “Combating the Opioid Epidemic through Effective Messaging and Prevention Strategies.” The capstone team focused on the enhancement of opioid education for students in grades 6–12 and prevention strategies that could be incorporated into the city’s educational system. They examined mental health education in tandem with opioid awareness.

This messaging and prevention education work is being carried forward on two tracks in 2020. A new SIPA team is involved in creating a small advertising campaign targeting teens to promote healthy lifestyle choices with an emphasis on substance abuse education and prevention. This campaign will effectively use social media and partnerships to reach young teens. The group will also provide guidelines to grow the campaign into a widescale popular platform in order to spread awareness.

Meanwhile, a graduate student from Teachers College is pursuing an independent study involving the use of effective drug education resources as a basis for an Opioid Crisis Prevention Education rubric for teachers. This rubric is designed to aid teachers in assessing the effectiveness of education materials on the topic of the opioid epidemic with the goal of supporting students in making informed decisions.

Over the summer a team of city educators collaborated with SNP to create a bank of over 60 lessons for multiple courses and grade levels to educate youth about the opioid epidemic and growing issue of substance abuse. Enabling students to make informed decisions while creating their own solutions is one of the best ways to combat this crisis.
SNP Outreach

Sharing Expertise with Local and International Partners

The French-American Foundation invited Bridget G. Brennan to be guest speaker on the topic of the U.S. Opioid Epidemic.

A delegation of narcotics investigators from the Republic of Korea Prosecution Service met with SNP staff to discuss narcotics enforcement strategies.

Bridget G. Brennan attended a PSA 5 Fellowship Luncheon at the Tiano Towers Crystal Room located in East Harlem.

Bridget G. Brennan served as a panelist at a community forum on the opioid crisis in Northern Manhattan.
Professional Recognition

Bridget G. Brennan, pictured here with former Acting Queens District Attorney John M. Ryan, received the Outstanding Prosecutor Award from the New York State Bar Association in recognition of contributions to the advancement of the fair and ethical administration of criminal justice.

Andres Torres, Senior Supervising Attorney, SNP’s Special Investigations Bureau, (far right) was congratulated by colleagues upon receiving the Thomas E. Dewey Medal from the New York City Bar Association.

Assistant District Attorneys Clark S. Abrams and Marcel J. Philippe received the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York NYS Prosecutor of the Year Award in recognition of their numerous successful collaborations with HSI and the El Dorado Task Force.

Odyssey House presented Bridget G. Brennan with a Public Service Award at a Mother’s Day Awards Breakfast held at the George Rosenfeld Center for Recovery on Wards Island.

Federal Drug Agents Foundation (FDAF) honored Assistant District Attorneys Tess Cohen and Kristin Bailey along with members of the DEA’s Long Island District Office – Tactical Diversion Squad (LIDO-TDS).
In partnership with the city’s five District Attorneys, SNP seeks to leave a positive imprint on communities touched by our major drug enforcement operations by investing in the development of the neighborhood youth. SNP partners with the city’s District Attorneys, the Police Athletic Leagues (PAL) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) each year.

During the summer of 2019, SNP partnered with the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, the NYPD and PAL to sponsor a West 123rd Street PAL Playstreet to provide safe and enjoyable recreational activities for local youth. This endeavor followed a long-term investigation into persistent drug trafficking in the area. The investigation was sparked by numerous community complaints. Drug sellers congregated in groups, impeding the ability of passersby, including school children, to safely use the block. Police arrested 11 individuals for over 50 sales of crack cocaine and heroin to undercover officers.

SNP is committed to educating communities across New York City about the opioid epidemic in an effort to prevent substance abuse and overdose. Bridget G. Brennan served as a panelist at “The Opioid Crisis in Northern Manhattan: A Community Forum” organized by Senator Robert Jackson in partnership with the Fort Washington Collegiate Church, the Washington Heights CORNER Project and VOCAL-NY in October of 2019. The event featured a discussion of efforts to address the opioid epidemic, which has had devastating effect on families and neighborhoods.
Investigation Division

In 2019, SIB launched 91 investigations targeting a wide range of criminal activity including drug trafficking, murder conspiracy, robberies, weapons trafficking and money laundering. The bureau also commenced civil actions to forfeit narcotics proceeds. Senior staff supervised wiretap investigations involving 227 eavesdropping applications, including 102 originals, 107 extensions and 18 amendments. Investigation Division cases resulted in the seizure of approximately 275 pounds of heroin, 251 pounds of fentanyl, 225 pounds of heroin/fentanyl mixtures, 606 pounds of cocaine, 45 pounds of methamphetamine and additional quantities of various other drugs.

Heroin Interdiction Team
The resurgence of heroin throughout New York State drove SNP to create the Heroin Interdiction Team (HIT) in late 2014. HIT is tasked with combating the flow of heroin to the area surrounding New York City, particularly upstate counties. Working with a dedicated team of New York State Police troopers, DEA agents, NYPD officers and other law enforcement officials, HIT focuses on cooperating with local prosecutors and law enforcement to share intelligence and resources to take down the organizations responsible for spreading heroin from the mills in New York City to New York State as a whole.

Prescription Drug Investigation Unit
Alarming rates of prescription drug abuse and related crime led SNP to form the Prescription Drug Investigation Unit in 2011. The unit is designed to combat the proliferation of prescription narcotics on the black market by investigating and prosecuting the criminal distribution of these drugs. Prosecutions target a range of

Special Investigations Bureau
The Special Investigations Bureau (SIB) targets major narcotics trafficking organizations, including those that import and distribute multi-kilogram quantities of heroin, fentanyl and cocaine. The activities of the criminal enterprises extend beyond county, state and international borders. SIB prosecutors work with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the New York City Police Department (NYPD), the New York State Police, the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF), the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and other local, state, federal, and foreign law enforcement agencies.

### 2019 SNP WIRETAP ACTIVITY

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### INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY

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Money Laundering and Financial Investigations Unit

The Money Laundering and Financial Investigations Unit was initiated in 2001, and reconfigured in 2005 and 2008. It investigates narcotics-related money laundering and other financial criminal activity. Cases are generated from multiple sources, including intelligence developed during narcotics investigations. The unit aims to prevent foreign drug trafficking organizations from repatriating drug proceeds through smuggling, as well as the use of the financial system and international trade, and local drug organizations from benefiting from illicit profits.

Narcotics Gang Unit

The Narcotics Gang Unit concentrates on violent neighborhood gangs, robbery crews and weapons traffickers committing drug-related criminal activity across the city. The unit, established in 2002, works closely with detectives from the NYPD’s Gun Violence Suppression Division, Narcotics and Gang Squads, and Precinct members. The unit has developed expertise in the use of new technologies and collecting evidence through social media and messaging applications. In addition to narcotics trafficking, the unit also prosecutes murder and murder conspiracy, assault, armed robbery, kidnapping, burglary, weapons possession and illegal firearms sales.

Forfeiture Investigations

Established more than 25 years ago, the Forfeiture Investigations Unit evaluates felony drug prosecutions for potential civil litigation to recover proceeds of narcotics crimes. The unit works closely with law enforcement on the federal, state and local levels to identify criminal assets and deprive narcotics traffickers and money-laundering groups of the profits of criminality. The unit has in place a comprehensive set of systems to track office participation in investigations resulting in forfeiture actions. In 2019, 150 federal forfeiture actions were initiated and 155 were completed. At the state level, 288 actions were initiated and 152 were completed.
**Investigators Unit**

SNP’s Investigators Unit handles narcotics cases targeting local, national and international trafficking groups, as well as trafficking over the Internet. Teams within the unit have expertise in identifying and dismantling major heroin and fentanyl distribution networks, prescription drug diversion organizations and pill mills run by corrupt medical practitioners. Investigators provide crucial leadership in collaborative efforts with law enforcement partners.

Created in 1992, the unit fulfills two primary areas of responsibility: investigations and enforcement support. A Chief Investigator oversees the activities of the investigators and monitors all investigation related expenditures.

The unit initiates cases independently and works jointly with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies throughout New York City and across the nation. During 2019, the unit opened 45 new investigations, resulting in 150 arrests. Of those, 119 individuals were charged with top felony narcotics counts. Investigations by the unit and its partners yielded seizures of hundreds of pounds of narcotics and millions of dollars in drug trafficking proceeds.

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**Trial Division**

Trial Division Assistant District Attorneys handle the bulk of the drug felony arrests referred to the office for prosecution. They are assigned to one of the two bureaus that comprise the Trial Division. Each bureau is headed by a Chief and Deputy Chiefs who supervise assistants as they provide legal advice and draw up court orders, including search and arrest warrants, on a 24-hour basis.

Assistants work closely with the NYPD’s Narcotics Division, the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, the Port Authority Police, the New York State Police, the New York State Health Department’s Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement and the SNP Investigators Unit. In 2019, the Division launched 183 new investigations. A total of 1,080 complaints were referred to the office for prosecution during the year; 896 defendants were prosecuted by indictment or Supreme Court information (SCI). Total SNP search warrants drafted numbered 1,282.

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**2019 SNP WORKLOAD**

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**FELONY DISPOSITIONS**

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**SEIZURES**

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Case Highlights

Fentanyl and Heroin

Approximately $5 million in heroin and fentanyl was intercepted in the Bronx, including 250,000 ready to use glassine envelopes and an additional three kilograms in bulk, which were destined for distribution in New York City and the Northeast.

Members of a drug trafficking organization used a variety of different stamps to brand the narcotics, including “El Chapo” and “Exit 4.” The El Chapo stamp was a nod to the convicted leader of Mexico’s Sinaloa Cartel, while the Exit 4 stamp referenced an exit off the Massachusetts Turnpike near Springfield, Mass., where one of the defendants resided. Some of the heroin and fentanyl was recovered from a vehicle, while the

Over 750,000 “Fire” stamped glassines with heroin/fentanyl mixtures were found in the Bronx packaging mill.

Three kilograms of heroin packages and 250,000 glassines were branded with various stamps such as “El Chapo” and “Exit 4”.

“Fire” Heroin/Fentanyl Worth $7 Million Seized

A long term investigation into heroin and fentanyl trafficking led to six arrests at a high volume heroin/fentanyl packaging mill in the Bronx. After conducting intensive surveillance on a Sedgwick Avenue apartment, agents and officers with the DEA-led New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF) obtained a search warrant and entered to find six individuals and piles upon piles of narcotics. A surprising discovery even for veteran narcotics agents, the defendants had allegedly filled over 750,000 glassine envelopes stamped with the brand name “Fire” and carrying a street value of over $7 million. The narcotics were believed to be destined for distribution in New York and Massachusetts. Hundreds of thousands

Over $5 Million Worth of Heroin and Fentanyl Seized: “El Chapo” Brand
majority was found during a court-authorized search of an apartment on Wallace Avenue. Glassine envelopes of heroin were piled on tables, in bags and on the floor. Most had been bundled into rectangular packages according to brand name, ready for delivery on the street. The three kilograms were in brick form and wrapped in cellophane. Three defendants were charged following the investigation by the NYDETF.

$5 Million in Fentanyl Hidden in Trap Compartment

A defendant is seen carrying a heavy duffel bag on security footage. He entered a car that was later found to contain 18 kilograms of fentanyl.

A large load of 18 kilograms of fentanyl (approximately 40 lbs.) was seized from a hidden trap in the rear of a Kia Sorrento in the Bronx. Members of the NYDETF stopped the car near the Bronx River Parkway after conducting round-the-clock surveillance. On the previous day, agents and officers observed the driver shining a light around the inside of the rear passenger area of the Kia Sorrento, which was parked near 1690 East 174th Street. The car remained in the parking spot overnight while agents maintained surveillance. Early the next morning, the driver placed a heavy looking gym bag in the backseat of the car and climbed inside the rear passenger area. He could be seen moving around and wiping the seat with a rag. He drove off and was stopped minutes later. The empty gym bag was inside the car when officers found the 18 kilograms of fentanyl.

Major Trafficker Extradited from Dominican Republic

A high-level alleged narcotics trafficker accused of setting up and supplying a series of heroin and fentanyl packaging operations in the Bronx was extradited from the Dominican Republic to face trial in New York City. A long-term wiretap investigation
Case Highlights continued

by the New York Strike Force revealed that Anyerson Delacruz-Rosario directed at least two heroin packaging operations in New York City from his base in the Dominican Republic. Delacruz-Rosario faces the top narcotics charge Operating as a Major Trafficker. The investigation began in October of 2014 following a young man's death from a fatal overdose in Sullivan County, N.Y. Eleven defendants were previously arrested as a result of the investigation. All entered pleas of guilty. Ten were sentenced, while one fled prior to being sentenced, prompting a Manhattan Supreme Court justice to issue a bench warrant. Agents and officers conducted court authorized searches at 11 locations, including an apartment that housed a drug packaging mill and multiple stash locations. Officers recovered thousands of individual dose glassine envelopes, more than 6.5 kilograms of fentanyl and heroin (over 14 pounds) and a loaded .357 Magnum. The narcotics carried an estimated value of $2 million once packaged for street-level sales.

Fentanyl Assault on Officer Inside Drug Packaging Mill
A defendant was charged with assault for throwing toxic fentanyl at law enforcement officers who were in the process of conducting a court authorized search of a drug packaging location in the Bronx. Multiple officers required medical treatment for nausea and shortness of breath after defendant Christian Rojas allegedly threw the potent illicit opioid at an officer's head, causing powder to become airborne. A total of seven defendants were found inside the drug packaging mill on Willis Avenue in Mott Haven, where approximately 20,000 individual glassines had been filled with heroin and fentanyl. Additional quantities of narcotics were present in loose powder form. All seven of the defendants face top narcotics possession charges.

Pallets of Drugs Shipped from Mexico to U.S. Cities
An investigation disrupted a sophisticated scheme to smuggle bulk amounts of drugs hidden in shipping pallets from Mexico to cities across the U.S. Two pallets intercepted in Brooklyn and in Memphis, Tenn. contained a total of 12 kilograms (over 25 lbs.) of heroin and cocaine. Agents with the NYDETF linked these shipments to a defendant based in Brownsville, Tex., who was arrested and extradited to New York City to face trial. At the time of his arrest, the defendant was in possession of a phone and other evidence associated with 10 shipments of narcotics. Besides the narcotics, the pallets

20,000 glassines were being packaged in the apartment. Additional fentanyl powder was recklessly strewn around the location.

Bulk amounts of drugs were shipped from Mexico to the U.S. hidden in shipping pallets.
contained hundreds of pounds of discarded household goods. The investigation identified approximately 100 pallets that followed a similar pattern, including the use of a shipping account under a fake name associated with the defendant. Additional pallets were subsequently intercepted in Baton Rouge, La. and Fort Wayne, Ind. and contained 217 lbs. of marijuana and 10 lbs. of methamphetamine.

**Multi-Drug Packaging Mill Dismantled Near Bronx School**

A three-bedroom apartment housed a multi-drug packaging mill on the same block as a private elementary school and a day care center. Over six kilograms of narcotics (13 lbs.), including three kilograms of fentanyl, three kilograms of heroin and quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine, were recovered by the NYDETF. A defendant was observed leaving the mill location on Andrews Avenue in the Bronx carrying a black backpack, which contained three brick-shaped packages of heroin and fentanyl. Upon conducting a court authorized search of the apartment, agents and officers found an additional three brick-shaped packages of heroin, as well as several plastic bags containing methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin. Also recovered were narcotics paraphernalia, including empty glassine envelopes, a scale, grinders and a kilogram press. The DEA New York Division estimated the wholesale value of the drugs recovered at over $300,000 and the street value at approximately $1 million. The defendant was sentenced to four years in prison after pleading guilty to Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the Second Degree.

**Fentanyl Analog Investigations**

**Fentanyl Analogs Cause Rash of Overdoses in Brooklyn: 14 Charged**

A rash of overdoses linked to fentanyl analogs in South Brooklyn sparked a wiretap investigation that resulted in the arrest and indictment of 14 individuals. The defendants are charged in connection with two drug distribution organizations that sold cocaine, heroin, fentanyl and fentanyl analogs. Fentanyl analogs are potent variants of fentanyl that are produced illicitly. At the time of the investigation, many of these substances were unregulated in New York State. The two drug rings obtained narcotics from a common source of supply, Brandice Williams, who faces the top narcotics charge of Operating as a Major Trafficker. Williams was living in Virginia at the time of her arrest and allegedly traveled to Brooklyn to deliver narcotics.

Defendant Waldemar Valentin, aka “Wiz,” the alleged head of one drug ring supplied by Williams, is also charged with Operating as a Major Trafficker. More than 175 instances
of drug sales or possession were linked to his ring, which operated out of two South Brooklyn motels. Valentin also faces charges of assault and witness intimidation in connection with a baseball bat beating of an individual suspected of stealing from the drug ring. The beating occurred inside a car in a Staples store parking lot.

The second organization turned the Marlboro Houses, a New York City Housing Authority residential complex, into a hub of lucrative drug activity. Drugs, guns and ammunition were stashed inside various apartments at the complex. Defendant James Sease resided in New Jersey and regularly commuted to Brooklyn in his Mercedes Benz car in order to conduct drug sales. During the investigation, Sease allegedly spent some criminal profits on shopping sprees at high end stores, such as Chanel where Sease purchased a $5,000 bag with a stack of $20 bills that he photographed on his phone. Following his arrest, Sease was indicted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York in a sweeping racketeering case involving the Brims gang. He is currently in federal custody.

**Major Trafficker Charged: Array of Drugs and Gun Seized**

A long term investigation by the El Dorado Task Force resulted in the seizure of over eight pounds of heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and acetyl fentanyl (a potent fentanyl analog) worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in September of 2019. The narcotics were recovered from two apartments associated with Cesar Hernandez De La Rosa, who is charged with Operating as a Major Trafficker. A search of 1729 East 172nd Street, Apt. 3, in the Bronx resulted in the seizure of nearly four pounds of cocaine, drug paraphernalia, a loaded 9mm handgun and fake IDs. A second apartment at 1551 University Avenue contained two kilos of narcotics (over four pounds), branded with the “Captain America” shield, as well as drug paraphernalia and fake IDs. Subsequent laboratory analysis revealed the narcotics seized contained a mixture of heroin, fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and tramadol. Prior to the searches, agents were conducting surveillance on Hernandez De La Rosa and stopped him outside of 1729 East 172nd Street. De La Rosa had previously been deported from the U.S. and was ordered held without bail at his arraignment.
In addition to the Major Trafficker charge, he faces multiple top drug charges and Criminal Possession of a Weapon.

Case Highlights continued

Citywide Cocaine Supply

Multi-Million Dollar Cocaine Shipment Seized in Hunts Point

Over 150 pounds of cocaine was recovered in the Hunts Point warehouse district. Packages were wrapped in yellow and brown tape, some marked with a $200 bill logo or imprinted with the name "Fred."

A $3 million cocaine shipment was seized in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx during an investigation into narcotics activity at a commercial warehouse. Members of the NYDETF were conducting surveillance when they observed a series of cars and trucks entering through a metal security gate at the warehouse, including a Hyundai Santa Fe. Agents stopped a Hyundai they had previously seen with different license plates. Inside were two large black suitcases containing 70 kilograms of cocaine (over 154 lbs.) in individually wrapped packages. In a subsequent court authorized search of the warehouse, Port Authority K-9 “Balu” alerted agents to the presence of narcotics in a truck trailer that had entered the location earlier that day. Agents discovered a hidden compartment at the top of the trailer. The main area of the trailer contained bags of rotted papayas, and pallets of cartons of oregano and coconuts. The investigation revealed the cocaine was destined for distribution in New York and the Northeast.

Major Cocaine Trafficker Indicted: Ordered Shipments Direct from Mexico

The accused leader of a multi-million-dollar cocaine trafficking organization and three others were arrested following a long-term wiretap investigation by the NYDETF. Miguel Rodriguez was charged with Operating as a Major Trafficker for allegedly overseeing the shipment and sale of 30 kilograms of cocaine (approximately 66 lbs.). The investigation revealed Rodriguez directly contacted a source of supply in Mexico to coordinate bulk shipments of narcotics that he received on a monthly basis. Acutely aware of law enforcement, the defendants stashed escape vehicles in different neighborhoods around the city. On the day that agents and officers seized the 30 kilograms of cocaine, Rodriguez initially directed his co-defendant to transfer the narcotics at a hotel, but changed course due to too much activity in the lobby. As Plan B, Rodriguez directed his codefendants to a vacant apartment on West 130th Street in Manhattan. Agents observed
Case Highlights continued

one defendant enter the apartment carrying two heavy pieces of luggage, which proved to contain 29 kilograms of cocaine. An additional kilogram was recovered from a vehicle. Rodríguez was stopped leaving the apartment.

Large Load of “Pablo Escobar” Branded Narcotics Seized

Kilogram-sized packages were wrapped and labeled with various images, including a photo of notorious drug trafficker Pablo Escobar.

Approximately 30 kilograms of narcotics, including cocaine, heroin and synthetic painkillers, and $200,000 cash were seized in Harlem as a result of an investigation by the NYDETF. Kilogram-sized packages were wrapped in brown, black and clear tape, with various labels affixed on top. Among the labels was a photo of the notorious drug trafficker Pablo Escobar, as well as pieces of paper marked with his name. Other labels bore recipient code names and images of airplanes. Agents seized the narcotics during a short-term investigation in which they observed two men meet in the vicinity of 630 Lenox Avenue. One man then entered an apartment at that address and later reemerged with a gray backpack containing three kilograms. A court authorized search of the apartment uncovered the other 27 kilograms of narcotics. The total street value of the 30 kilograms (66 lbs.) of narcotics seized was an estimated $3 million. The main target of the investigation was sentenced to seven years in prison after pleading guilty to drug possession charges.

NYC Distribution Networks

“Operation Frostbite” Nets 14 Following Deaths

Fourteen defendants in the Bronx and Manhattan were indicted in sales of heroin, fentanyl and cocaine following an investigation sparked by a fatal overdose in the Upper East Side. The victim, a 28-year-old man, died in a diner in January 2018. Jose “Cataño” Jorge, an alleged drug supplier based in the Soundview neighborhood of the Bronx, faces narcotics and conspiracy charges, as well as reckless endangerment for knowingly selling potentially lethal drugs. In chilling conversations with an undercover officer, Cataño allegedly described how he mixed fentanyl into the heroin he sold. Laughing

Patch News, March 7, 2019
off an accusation of causing a death, he explained that overdoses are actually “good for business” because then everyone wants what he is selling.

Also charged was former police officer Edward Wagner, who retired from the NYPD in 1994 and who allegedly drove his son from Manhattan to the Bronx in order to purchase cocaine, heroin and fentanyl from Cataño. Drugs were then sold to an undercover officer. The son, who was a friend and neighbor to the 28-year-old overdose victim, also died during the investigation. Subsequently, Edward Wagner sold the undercover officer cocaine, heroin, boxes of bullets, a ballistic vest, a shotgun and shotgun shells.

Five members of a Sunset Park, Brooklyn-based narcotics trafficking organization received prison sentences of up to six years for selling a variety of narcotics, including potent fentanyl, heroin and cocaine. During the investigation, two individuals overdosed on narcotics allegedly linked to the drug ring. A Staten Island woman fatally overdosed in early 2019. An autopsy in the Staten Island fatality determined the cause of death was the combined effects of fentanyl, a fentanyl analog called fluoroisobutyryl fentanyl, cocaine and morphine. Subsequently, a Brooklyn man related to two of the defendants suffered an overdose and survived. At the outset of the investigation, the defendants sold blue-tinted fentanyl to an undercover officer with the NYPD’s Narcotics Borough Brooklyn South, leading officers to dub the investigation “Operation Blue Dope.” The defendants later expanded the types of narcotics sold to heroin and cocaine.

California to New York Supply Chain Disrupted

An investigation that began with drug overdoses led police to uncover a Queens distribution network and a California to New York City supply chain. In a sophisticated scheme, Nassau County based brothers Jamel and Randolph Brown allegedly teamed up with a New York City school custodian, Troy Williams, to transport large quantities of cocaine and fentanyl across the U.S. Jamel Brown made multiple trips to California to meet with members of a supply organization. Williams is charged with orchestrating these meetings. Packages containing narcotics were sent back to New York through mail.
Drugs and Violence

Drug Stash Worth $4 Million and Six Guns Seized Following Overdoses

An investigation into three overdose deaths and two non-fatal overdoses in the Bronx and Westchester led law enforcement agents to seize over 30 pounds of heroin and fentanyl with a street value of over $4 million, as well as five handguns, an assault rifle and $170,000 cash. Nine defendants were charged, including members of a drug distribution network and two top suppliers for the organization, Ismael Lugo and Ricardo Gonzalez. The two suppliers were present inside a drug stash location on Holland Avenue in Morris Park when members of the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Border Enforcement Security/Taskforce (BEST) conducted a court authorized search and seized approximately 10 kilograms.

Drug Dealer Targeted Busy Union Square Businesses in Sales

A defendant who sold heroin, fentanyl and cocaine to an undercover NYPD officer set up the majority of his sales in the vicinity of Union Square. The defendant directed the undercover to meet him inside busy fast food restaurants, including Chipotle, McDonald’s and Au Bon Pain, with most sales occurring between the hours of 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. The defendant handed narcotics to the undercover inside a bag or box, while families with young children and babies in strollers were nearby. In the largest sale, the undercover met the defendant at a Dunkin’ Donuts on St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem and paid $3,700 for cocaine and purported heroin. Laboratory analysis determined the narcotics sold were cocaine and heroin. The defendant was sentenced to eight years in prison after pleading guilty to Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Second Degree.
case highlights continued

of heroin and fentanyl, six guns and over $100,000 cash. Furniture inside the stash apartment was outfitted with hidden compartments. Mechanical kilo presses used for forming bricks of narcotics and four pounds of marijuana were also recovered. A subsequent search of Lugo’s residence in Elmsford, N.Y. yielded an additional four kilograms of narcotics packaged in the same manner as those at the stash location. Members of the drug distribution network conducted more than a dozen sales to undercover officers during the investigation, including sales of heroin laced with potentially lethal fentanyl.

Family Members Among 10 Face Assault, Weapon and Drug Charges

Ten members of an alleged Brooklyn-based criminal organization were charged with trafficking in narcotics, attempted assault and weapons possession. A total of 12 guns were recovered. The investigation began following two overdoses, one of which was fatal. The indictment contains charges related to two incidents of shots fired in Brooklyn, including a wild shootout on August 27, 2018 in which over 20 bullets were fired in broad daylight. The indictment charges multiple members of the same family: brothers Michael Watson and Marvin Watson and their nephews Jerry Watson and Earl Watson. During the August 27, 2018 shootout, which was captured on security video, Michael and Marvin Watson emerged from a black SUV carrying weapons and exchanged fire with a rival driving a silver Lexus. Pedestrians dove for cover as Michael Watson brandished a large gun and ran after the rival’s car, which sped backwards and rammed multiple vehicles. Two days later, police received another report of shots fired and observed Michael Watson speeding away from the scene. Police tracked him to a stash location, where five of the defendants were present. A court authorized search yielded four guns, cocaine and drug paraphernalia. During the investigation by the NYPD’s Narcotics Borough Brooklyn North, the ten charged defendants allegedly coordinated with one another to make sales of heroin, fentanyl and cocaine to customers, including 10 sales to an undercover officer.

Notorious Bronx Street Market for Drugs Dismantled

An indictment charged 14 members of a large narcotics trafficking organization with conspiracy to sell heroin and cocaine in the vicinity of a Bronx bakery following a long-term wiretap investigation. The alleged leader of the organization, Jack Acevedo, faces the top narcotics charge of Operating as a Major Trafficker. The New York Strike Force investigation was initiated in response to community complaints about the open and
notorious sale and consumption of narcotics along a busy commercial stretch of 3rd Avenue in Mott Haven, as well as violent incidents. Acevedo’s alleged organization took over the bakery, a legitimate business, and used it as a hub for drug trafficking. Sales were conducted on the sidewalk and inside. Members of the organization observed a strict hierarchy. A court authorized search of Acevedo’s residence, which served as an alleged stash location, yielded approximately $50,000 cash and hundreds of glassine envelopes of suspected heroin as well as ziploc bags containing suspected heroin and cocaine. Acevedo received his narcotics from multiple suppliers, including Antonio Paigne. In a court authorized search of Paigne’s residence, agents and officers recovered two loaded guns and nearly a kilogram of suspected heroin and cocaine.

Speedster Drug Suspect Nearly Ran Down Woman and Dog
A suspected drug dealer known for high-speed getaways was arrested two months after fleeing from DEA agents and nearly running down a young woman walking her dog in the Upper East Side. The close call came in August 2019 after members of a DEA surveillance team attempted to approach Arfhy “Coyote” Santos in the vicinity of Park Avenue and 97th Street as he was allegedly conducting the sale of two kilograms of purported cocaine. Santos twice smashed his car into a police vehicle as he fled the scene. Security video allegedly shows Santos drive up onto a sidewalk and come within inches of hitting a woman and her dog. Laboratory testing determined that the two kilograms Santos was selling were fake. Santos was arrested in October 2019 outside a Bronx nightclub. He had three pounds of marijuana inside his vehicle. Santos faces charges of Reckless Driving, Aggravated Unlicensed Operation of a Motor Vehicle, Leaving the Scene of an Incident without Reporting, Reckless Endangerment, Criminal Possession of Marijuana and Attempted Grand Larceny. In a prior incident prosecuted by the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office in 2018, Santos struck and dragged a police officer who had approached his car in Times Square.
Prescription Drugs

Queens Doctor Sentenced to 7 Years in Patients’ Deaths

Dr. Lawrence Choy was sentenced to a nearly seven-year prison term on two counts of Manslaughter in the Second Degree, 27 counts of Criminal Sale of a Prescription for a Controlled Substance and five counts of Reckless Endangerment. Three of the doctor’s patients died of overdoses, including two patients whose deaths are the subject of the manslaughter charges. In pleading guilty to 34 felony counts stemming from illegal sales of prescriptions for controlled substances, Choy admitted to causing the deaths of patients Eliot Castillo, 35, and Michael Ries, 30, both of whom fatally overdosed within three days of receiving prescriptions from Choy. Five counts of Reckless Endangerment relate to five additional patients, one of whom died of an overdose. A licensed physician since 1981, Choi specialized in internal medicine and nephrology and operated a full-time medical office in Flushing. Beginning in 2012, he began issuing prescriptions for dangerous levels of narcotic drugs in high-risk combinations with other controlled substances. Choy drew patients from a wide geographic area. The investigation was conducted by SNP’s Prescription Drug Investigation Unit and Investigators Unit, the DEA’s New York Strike Force and the New York City Human Resources Administration with assistance from the Nassau County and Suffolk County Police Departments.

Pharmacist Sentenced for Oxycodone Sales and Forged Rxs

A supervising pharmacist was sentenced to four years in prison for diverting millions of dollars in oxycodone pills from a Queens pharmacy. Victor LaPerla and a pharmacy technician allegedly conspired to fill forged prescriptions in exchange for cash at their workplace, Dale Pharmacy & Surgical Inc. in Richmond Hill, Queens. Each forged prescription was written for 180 pills of 30 mg oxycodone painkillers for a total of 2,700 pills. An unindicted coconspirator and others also made cash payments for oxycodone pills in unlabeled bottles for which no official prescription had been presented. This was done for the purpose of reselling the pills on the black market. Through search warrants at the pharmacy and LaPerla’s home and phone, investigators found proof of unaccounted for prescriptions.
addictive opioid painkiller, for no legitimate medical purpose. In pleading guilty, Feygin admitted to directing his employees to provide oxycodone prescriptions to individuals known to be reselling pills on the street and to those using illicit drugs, such as heroin. Feygin and his staff were responsible for prescribing over 3.7 million oxycodone pills between early 2012 and early 2017 and received over $16 million in reimbursements from Medicaid/Medicare.

and corresponding documentation of the amount of pills that were resold. The investigation, conducted by the Prescription Drug Investigation Unit and the DEA, revealed that between March 2013 and May 2018 LaPerla filled over 855 oxycodone 30 mg prescriptions. As a result, an estimated 158,000 pills carrying a street value of up to $4 million were diverted to the black market. In 2017 alone, LaPerla allegedly received approximately $303,900 as a result of the scheme. LaPerla pled guilty to Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Second Degree and Conspiracy in the Fourth Degree.

**Doctor Sentenced in Multi-Million Dollar Fraud**

Dr. Lazar Feygin received a sentence of five years in prison in connection with schemes to illegally sell prescriptions for millions of oxycodone pills, to defraud Medicaid/Medicare of millions of dollars and to commit money laundering. Feygin pled guilty to 16 felonies, including multiple counts of Conspiracy, Criminal Sale of a Prescription for a Controlled Substance and Health Care Fraud. As operator of two medical clinics in Brooklyn, Feygin directed medical professionals and office staff to subject patients to unnecessary tests that were then fraudulently billed to Medicaid/Medicare.

To induce patients to submit to these tests, Feygin and his staff illegally provided patients with prescriptions for oxycodone, an addictive opioid painkiller, for no legitimate medical purpose. In pleading guilty, Feygin admitted to directing his employees to provide oxycodone prescriptions to individuals known to be reselling pills on the street and to those using illicit drugs, such as heroin. Feygin and his staff were responsible for prescribing over 3.7 million oxycodone pills between early 2012 and early 2017 and received over $16 million in reimbursements from Medicaid/Medicare.

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**New York Post, March 11, 2019**
For defendants with substance abuse disorder, an effective drug treatment program can mean the difference between the ability to lead a productive, law-abiding life and a cycle of relapse, criminal behavior and incarceration. Yet it is not enough to simply treat the physical aspects of addiction. To begin anew, those in recovery require skills gained through academic and vocational training, along with supportive counseling.

A pioneer in the field, SNP’s Alternative Sentencing Bureau has successfully worked with thousands of individuals over the past three decades to provide the tools needed to achieve and maintain a meaningful and sustained recovery.

Since October 2009, judges are authorized to place defendants in a court sponsored diversion program. A judge determines which felony offenders qualify for these programs and court staff supervises them. SNP staff offer their expertise in the screening and monitoring of diverted defendants. Eligible candidates are given the opportunity to enter an appropriate program instead of going to prison. Treatment options include long-term residential programs, short-term residential programs or intensive outpatient treatment programs. Upon successful completion, charges may be dismissed.

Through SNP’s Drug Treatment Alternatives to Prison (DTAP), which began in the early 1990s and served as a model for subsequent local and state programs, highly experienced staff members evaluate defendants who are likely to reap the benefits of treatment, identify appropriate programs and monitor progress. SNP also refers eligible offenders with co-occurring substance use and mental illness disorders to the Manhattan Mental Health Court to provide integrated substance use and mental health treatment.

**DEFENDANTS ENTERING TREATMENT 2005–2019**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversion</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DTAP</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTC</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Treatment</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indictments/SCI</td>
<td>2,424</td>
<td>2,178</td>
<td>1,974</td>
<td>1,703</td>
<td>1,595</td>
<td>1,376</td>
<td>1,293</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>1,228</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>1,219</td>
<td>1,141</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Indictments/SCI diverted</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Legal Training Unit

The Legal Training Unit develops and implements the professional training curriculum offered to Assistant District Attorneys. The unit selects speakers, lectures and workshops to address topics that include investigatory and prosecutorial techniques, legal procedures, changes in the law, and effective approaches to the prosecution of felony narcotic and related crimes.

In 2019, the Legal Training Unit offered a professional development series and numerous lectures throughout the year to both experienced and new assistant district attorneys. Presentations included: Drafting Search Warrants, Ethical Obligations, and Introduction to Wiretapping. Of particular focus this year, considering the sweeping criminal justice reforms enacted by the New York legislature, was preparing our Office for adapting to and complying with these extensive reforms.

The training curriculum complies with the regulations and guidelines of the New York State Continuing Legal Education Board. The office has been a New York State CLE Accredited Provider since 2000.

For over a decade, SNP has devoted a portion of its resources to training programs offered to hundreds of local and federal enforcement and criminal justice personnel in New York and other areas of the country. Senior staff members lecture on narcotics investigations and prosecutions at the New York State District Attorneys Association (DAASNY) Summer College, the DAASNY Winter Conference, the New York Prosecutors Training Institute (NYPTI), the New York Police Department’s Police Academy, the DEA’s New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (DETF), and the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA).

Left: Deputy Chief of the Trial Division Paul M. Harvey (l.) and Executive Assistant District Attorney Joseph J. Tesoriero (r.) attend the District Attorneys’ Association of New York (DAASNY) Annual Winter Conference. Right: Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan delivers a presentation about the opioid epidemic at the DAASNY Annual Winter Conference.

John Iannelli
NYPD Special Narcotics Prosecutor’s Unit

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has assigned a team of detectives to the office since 1972. The Special Narcotics Prosecutor’s Unit, as it is known, is under the command of a senior NYPD lieutenant who serves as a liaison between SNP and the Detective Bureau’s Criminal Enterprise Division.

Expert at tracking, safekeeping and presenting electronically recorded evidence, the detectives also provide support on search warrant investigations and maintain citywide repositories for electronically recorded evidence and SNP search warrants.

**Search Warrants**
The unit prepares search warrants and affidavits and expedites requests through SNP. Detectives keep track of all confiscated evidence and maintain a database on arrests and seizures resulting from the execution of search warrants. The unit also educates new investigators on search warrant procedures. In 2019, the unit processed 1,282 search warrants.

**Digital Media Evidence**
The unit tracks and controls “chain of custody” for electronic media evidence and makes certain that all audio/video evidence is secure. Additionally, the unit is responsible for the creation and testimony of grand jury/trial wiretap composite recordings and processes digital photographic evidence and data evidence.

In 2019, the unit registered 1,703 pieces of audio/video evidence, 1,351 pieces of wiretap media evidence and 80 pieces of data and photographic evidence. The unit also prepared, created and registered 2,750 duplicate copies of registered electronic media evidence. Editing of original video evidence to protect the identity of undercover officers and make compilations of original evidence was performed 119 times in 2019.
Support Services Units

Fiscal
All agency fiscal activities, including the production and submission of funding requests to federal, state and city funding agencies, and the monitoring of expenditures, fall under the responsibility of the Fiscal Unit. To that end, the unit assesses and approves purchases and payment vouchers, disbursement of funds, such as petty cash, and payroll coordination; enforces fiscal policy; conducts internal audits; and reviews and approves agency procurements.

Human Resources
The Human Resources Unit oversees and implements procedures related to the assignment or transfer of Assistant District Attorneys from the offices of the five county District Attorneys, while also administering the recruitment of managerial, administrative and clerical personnel. The unit is committed to fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion among staff and seeks out individuals with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Unit staff participates in planning, developing and executing programs for all employees, as well as in support of recruitment efforts. The unit implements effective human resource policies; adheres to collective bargaining agreements; maintains time and leave records for all employees; and is responsible for bi-weekly payroll distribution. The unit serves as liaison with the citywide payroll management system and adheres to all HR regulatory compliance laws.

Public Information
The Public Information Unit responds to inquiries from members of the media, government agencies, advocacy groups and individuals on the status of cases, joint enforcement efforts, legal decisions, legislative action and citywide narcotics-related trends. Press releases, reports and testimony are prepared and distributed through the unit. The agency’s website and social media accounts are also maintained by the unit.

Community Outreach
The Community Outreach Coordinator meets with community and religious leaders, block associations, the New York City Housing Authority and other groups to address local drug problems, while conferring regularly with NYPD officials to devise strategies to combat crime. Once an investigation is completed and a drug organization is removed from a building or neighborhood, resources are devoted toward providing community support services. Additionally, experienced prosecutors offer lectures to schools and youth groups, serve as mock trial coaches and speak at career days.

Information Technologies (IT)
Information Technology develops, establishes and administers SNP’s computer networks and telecommunication systems. The unit identifies needs and puts in place systems that effectively merge technology with office processes, and provides a variety of case-related services.

Digital Forensics and Litigation Support: provides pre-trial and in-court technology support, including recovery and examination of evidence from electronic devices, trial exhibit preparation and presentation.

Application Development and Support: develops, maintains and supports computer software.

Technical Support: supports staff in using electronic devices, and addresses technical problems and desktop security.

IT Infrastructure Support: oversees servers, computers, network security, email and data storage and backup maintenance.
Records Management: files, registers and maintains a record of closed and bench warranted case files and processes parole requests.

Case Information: captures and tracks data pertaining to all cases prosecuted by the office, from arrest to disposition. The unit prepares regular reports and ad hoc reports on narcotics activities and performs statistical analysis. Unit staff is assigned to coordinate data capture and provide additional support.

Criminal and Investigative Analysts
Analysts are instrumental to all stages of investigation and prosecution, using the most current technology available to enhance a case from its inception through trial. Evidence from various sources is analyzed, including telephone communication carriers, social media sources, Treasury Department data and prescription drug-related data. Analysts prepare and process subpoenas, provide background searches using public records and law enforcement specific databases, prepare investigative reports, and act as points of contact for law enforcement. During the presentation of a case, analysts prepare trial exhibits and testify in the grand jury and at trial.

Trial Preparation Assistants (TPAs)
Trial Preparation Assistants (TPAs) are assigned to the Investigations Division, the Trial Division, Part N, and the Alternative Sentencing Division. Investigation and Trial Division TPAs track cases, maintain case records and gather reports and legal papers required by Assistant District Attorneys. Additionally, they make arrangements for prisoners to be produced in court and help Assistants prepare for grand jury and trial presentations. Alternative Sentencing Bureau TPAs interview defendants who are diverted to treatment and track their progress. Part N TPAs assist in tracking plea offers, grand jury actions and case dispositions.

Extraditions/Detainers
The unit administers the return of fugitives apprehended or in custody in other jurisdictions and in foreign countries that have extradition treaties with the United States.

Grand Jury Reporters
Grand Jury Reporters record, produce and maintain transcripts of confidential testimony presented before the grand juries.

Interpretation and Translation Services
The unit interprets and translates for non-English speaking witnesses in debriefings with investigators and Assistant District Attorneys, and during testimony before the grand jury; provides written translation and transcription services for evidentiary consent and wiretap recordings that contain dialogue in languages other than English; and provides translation of documents.

Property Release
The Property Release Section is responsible for coordinating with the New York City Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to ensure property that can be legally returned to its rightful owner is returned in a timely manner.

Operations
The Operations Unit is responsible for office maintenance, reproduction of documents, mail delivery, messenger services, housekeeping requests, office supply inventory and disbursement, housekeeping requests, office supply inventory and disbursement.
The People of SNP
Executive & Legal Staff

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Special Narcotics Prosecutor

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Chief Assistant District Attorney

Joseph J. Tesoriero
Executive Assistant District Attorney
Chief of Investigations

Rhonda Ferdinand
Special Assistant District Attorney
for Drug Prevention and Policy

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Chief of the Trial Division
Chief of Alternative Sentencing

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Senior Supervising Attorney,
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