

Testimony

of

Bridget G. Brennan
Special Narcotics Prosecutor

Before

The New York City Council
Committee on Public Safety

Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 22, 2021

As Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York, I am grateful for the support that my office and the District Attorneys receive from the New York City Council's Committee on Public Safety. I welcome the new leadership and vision of Chairperson Adrienne E. Adams and look forward to furthering our common goals of protecting city residents and ensuring our criminal justice system is fair for all.

The Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (SNP) works collaboratively with the city's elected District Attorneys to investigate and prosecute felony narcotics cases across all five boroughs of the City. We have jurisdiction to prosecute cases involving heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, addictive pills and related crimes. New York City is unique in many ways, including its division into five separate boroughs, each with its own District Attorney empowered to prosecute crimes committed there. New York City is also a major hub of international narcotics importation. Each drug shipment has a single point of entry through one of the five boroughs, but may be distributed to all. SNP was created to address this free flow of narcotics across county lines. The District Attorneys appoint the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, assign Assistant District Attorneys to serve in SNP and oversee all of our wiretap investigations. Historically, we have conducted some of the nation's most serious narcotics investigations, and were among the first to recognize the explosion of prescription pills and later deadly fentanyl coming into the city. Recently, we have seized more semiautomatic weapons and other firearms in connection with narcotics organizations than at any time in recent memory. I urge you to take a look at the case summaries at the end of my testimony for a sense of the scope of the investigations that we handle.

As our work on developing high-level investigations and seizing weapons to prevent violent crime continues, we simultaneously have been dedicating time and resources to the examination of racial inequality in the criminal justice system. As the Council is well aware, nationwide civil rights protests in response to the killings of George Floyd and other Black people sparked important and often difficult conversations about race, justice and policing in communities throughout the country and our city, and intense reexamination of our methods and goals in our own criminal justice community. SNP staff members were deeply affected by these national tragedies. The agency committed itself to reviewing

and improving our policies and practices to counter systemic racial inequities in every aspect of our work. I will discuss our process and progress in detail later in my testimony.

Tragically, as the city and nation struggle to end racial inequities in our criminal justice system, and continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, another deadly health crisis – the opioid epidemic – has dramatically worsened. It also disproportionately impacts people of color in our city and in the nation. On average, five people fatally overdose in New York City every day. COVID-19 has both overshadowed the opioid crisis and exacerbated it. Preliminary information released by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) indicates 26% more people died from drug overdoses in New York City in 2020 than in the prior year, a record high. The epidemic continues to have a disproportionate impact on high poverty neighborhoods, particularly in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan.

SNP has developed a national reputation for successfully intercepting dangerous addictive substances, like heroin, fentanyl and cocaine. We have accomplished this while reducing incarceration and promoting treatment and proven harm reduction practices. The office was one of the first prosecutorial agencies in the nation to offer alternatives to incarceration for defendants with substance use issues. SNP continually refines and modernizes its mission to meet the needs of the people it serves and responds to new challenges.

We employ a strategic approach in confronting the opioid epidemic and violent crime, focusing on four main areas: high level narcotics importation and trafficking; drug activity associated with violence; overdose death investigations; and medical professionals who illegally sell prescriptions.

Over the past year, SNP has worked closely with the District Attorneys, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the City Council to respond to the unprecedented challenges that COVID-19 has posed for the criminal justice system. Meanwhile, our efforts to address the opioid epidemic have never been more important. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our important work.

Bridget G. Brennan
Special Narcotics Prosecutor
for the City of New York

Criminal Justice Reform

Criminal justice reform touched every aspect of our work this past year in response to police killings and mass protests over racial injustice and systemic inequities. Our office is engaged in identifying how racism or bias has affected our work, and how we can change to assure fair and equal treatment for all involved in the criminal justice system.

Our first step was to invite members of our legal and non-legal staff to participate in small group discussions led by the Chief Diversity Officer to share personal stories and reflections. Many talked of experiencing trauma, racism and/or privilege because of their skin color. We subsequently formed a Diversity & Inclusion Committee to explore how we can best respond to systemic racism as an office. To get beyond discussion, and identify and change flawed practices, we broke into individual working groups, which examined topics, such as Legal Practices & Procedures, Education & Training, Alternatives to Incarceration and Community Outreach. Our goal was to provide a space for those who might not have previously had a platform to speak, with executives and managers serving in advisory roles.

The Diversity & Inclusion Committee presented recommendations to me and we are working to put these thoughtful observations and insights into practice. I have no specific funding requests at this time, but we are currently exploring how we can expand our diversion programs and we may turn to the Council for more funding to support that. Alternative dispositions are an effective crime prevention strategy and public safety measure, and a critical tool for correcting for inequities.

Our office is proud to have been in the forefront of developing alternative to incarceration programs 35 years ago. Our programs were aimed at diverting those whose crimes (often street sales of drugs) were motivated by their own substance use issues. As an alternative to the harsh criminal penalties of the times, we offered placement in treatment programs, which helped people recover from substance abuse and develop life skills. Vocational training helped ensure that participants would have the tools necessary to obtain employment, lead purposeful lives, and avoid future contacts with the criminal justice system.

Much has changed since we launched our pioneering treatment programs. Under today's laws, for first time offenders, criminal penalties for all but the most serious drug crimes no longer require incarceration. We are expanding criteria for treatment eligibility and consulting with District Attorneys, who have considerable experience in alternative dispositions, to develop new programs suitable to the individuals we prosecute. As a society, we have learned more about what may motivate some people to engage in drug dealing, such as mental health issues and lack of access to secure and stable housing. We are adapting, recognizing that we need to offer programs that provide supportive services as an alternative disposition, in addition to promoting treatment for those with substance use issues.

Other Diversity & Inclusion Committee recommendations include:

- Reevaluation of our search warrant practice, and revision of our training and manuals. As an agency, we have a strong record of rigorously reviewing requests for search warrants, and carefully considering the factual bases for these requests. Because of the care and attention we devote to our search warrant practice, none has resulted in a death or serious injury to an occupant of a premises or a law enforcement officer. However, the death of Breanna Taylor during a search warrant execution prompted a thorough review of our protocols, with particular attention to no knock warrants.
- Careful analysis of whether any of our practices regarding permissible pleas unfairly impact codefendants, and discussion among legal supervisors of best and fairest practices.

We have made great progress over the past year, but there is much more work to be done. I will report back to the City Council at a later date to discuss our needs in the alternative disposition arena in greater detail. We were leaders in this field long before most prosecutors and judges would even consider alternatives to incarceration, at a time when incarceration rates were significantly higher, and hope to join the District Attorneys in developing programmatic supports that reduce reoffending and rebuild lives.

COVID-19

The city has faced unprecedented challenges over the past year since the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a shutdown that remains partially in place today. Even in the face of so much uncertainty and tragic loss of life, SNP has continued to perform its core mission to protect the public and prevent overdose deaths by investigating and prosecuting high-level narcotics trafficking organizations. Beyond that, we have taken on new obligations to better serve the city during a very difficult time.

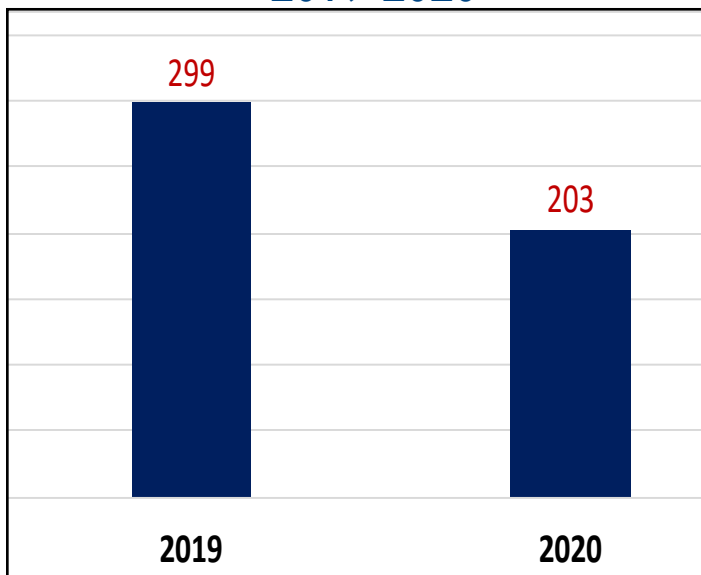
In March of 2020, it became evident that the city was facing an unprecedented public health emergency. After a comprehensive review, the office agreed to the release of both convicted narcotics traffickers as well as high-risk offenders from incarceration at Rikers Island to prevent the transmission of the virus. Working together with the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (“MOCJ”) and the defense bar, we identified those prisoners for whom the risk posed to public safety by their release was outweighed by the serious danger to health. We recognized that justice compelled the early release of these prisoners.

While we paid close attention to balancing public safety against health risk to prisoners, we also continued to be vigilant in protecting the city against deadly drugs that

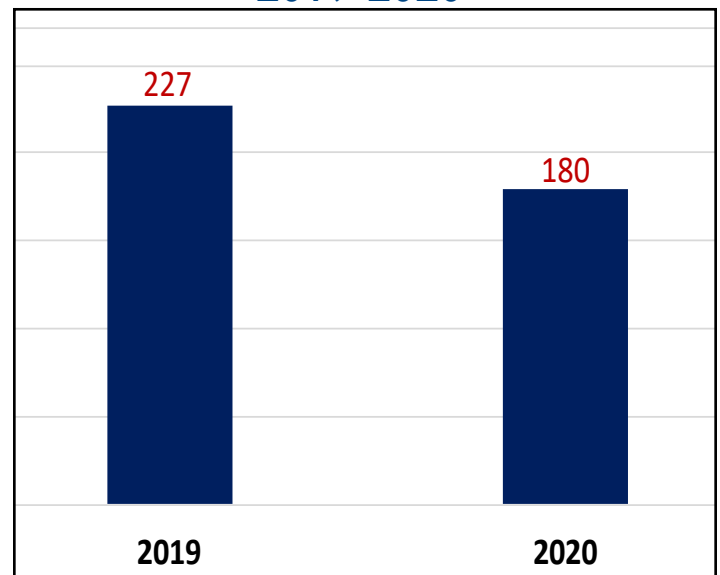
continued to saturate the city during the pandemic. SNP pioneered the use of new technologies to fulfill our mission. Despite the health risks raised by COVID-19, at the height of the outbreak in New York City, a limited number of SNP staffers were present in person to make sure the important work of the office could continue. At a time when the city had no Grand Jurors empaneled, the office conducted the first virtual preliminary hearing in New York City during the pandemic, for a defendant facing the top narcotics charge of Operating as a Major Trafficker. He was charged with trafficking tens of thousands of individual dose glassine envelopes containing the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl from a large-scale production mill in the Bronx. On the street, the fentanyl, stamped with a variety of brand names, including “Coronavirus,” would have sold for more than a million dollars. The preliminary hearing ensured the defendant’s right to have a judge review the evidence to support the charges against him, so that the defendant would remain detained as directed at his virtual arraignment.

SNP has maintained staffing levels on a rotating basis as necessary to support its operation, taking into account needs for reduced travel and social distancing. The office provides staff members with access to PPE, and the physical space has been by installing Plexiglas through-

SNP Investigations 2019-2020



Wiretap Investigations 2019-2020



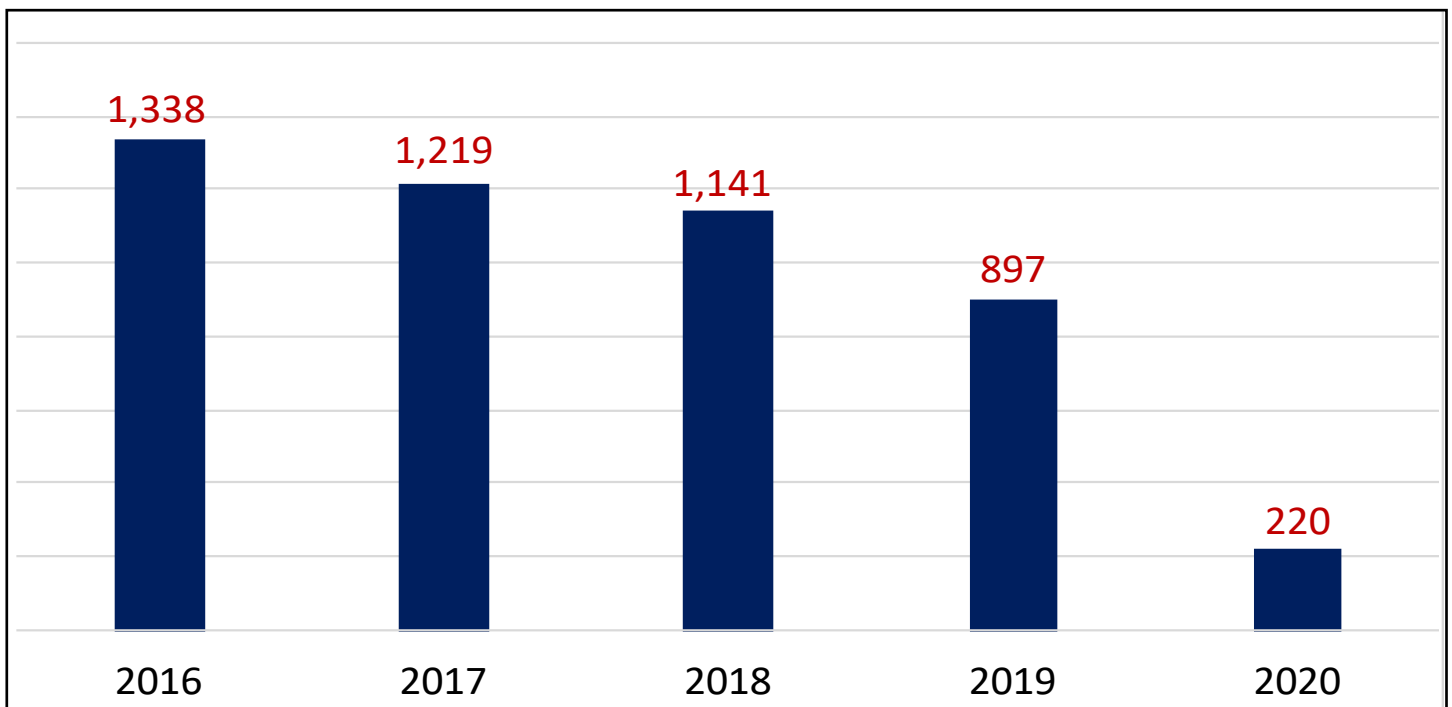
out the office, removing extra furniture and clutter, and placing touchless equipment in bathrooms. While our physical office never closed during the pandemic, SNP, like most offices in the city, has increasingly relied on remote work in during this past year. While this was an adjustment, we were well prepared. In the aftermath of the passage of the historic statewide criminal justice reforms in 2019, SNP invested in a suite of cloud computing software that would expedite our compliance with new discovery obligations. That investment allowed us to pivot relatively seamlessly from largely in-person to remote work. During the past year, we have used Microsoft Teams regularly for meetings, trainings and other communication purposes. And so, when the Office of Court Administration (“OCA”) announced in late October 2020 that all virtual court proceedings would be conducted on Microsoft Teams, SNP’s Assistant District Attorneys were already accustomed to using the software and required minimal additional training. While we are proud at how well SNP adjusted to the new demands placed upon us during the past year, it is important to recognize that there have been significant challenges. It has been frustrating that court personnel, prosecutors and defense attorneys only recently received priority consideration for vaccinations, effective less than a week ago.

Currently, the office is short staffed due to a high level of attrition during the COVID-19 pandemic. We anticipate challenges in hiring replacements due to low salaries as compared to the private sector, as well as a City-imposed hiring freeze due to financial concerns.

The suspension of Grand Juries for much of the past year created a significant backlog of cases. We have had to adjust to new and unfamiliar conditions as Grand Juries were relocated to cavernous courtrooms where jurors are socially distanced and witnesses testify behind face shields. As with the Grand Jury backlog, we recognize that when jury trials are reinstated in the City, there will be a backlog and readjustment period. However, just as we were ready and willing to be one of the pilot trials when the jury trial pilot program had a brief run during this past autumn, we will also be ready and willing to try our cases again when trials reconvene, as planned, at the end of the month.

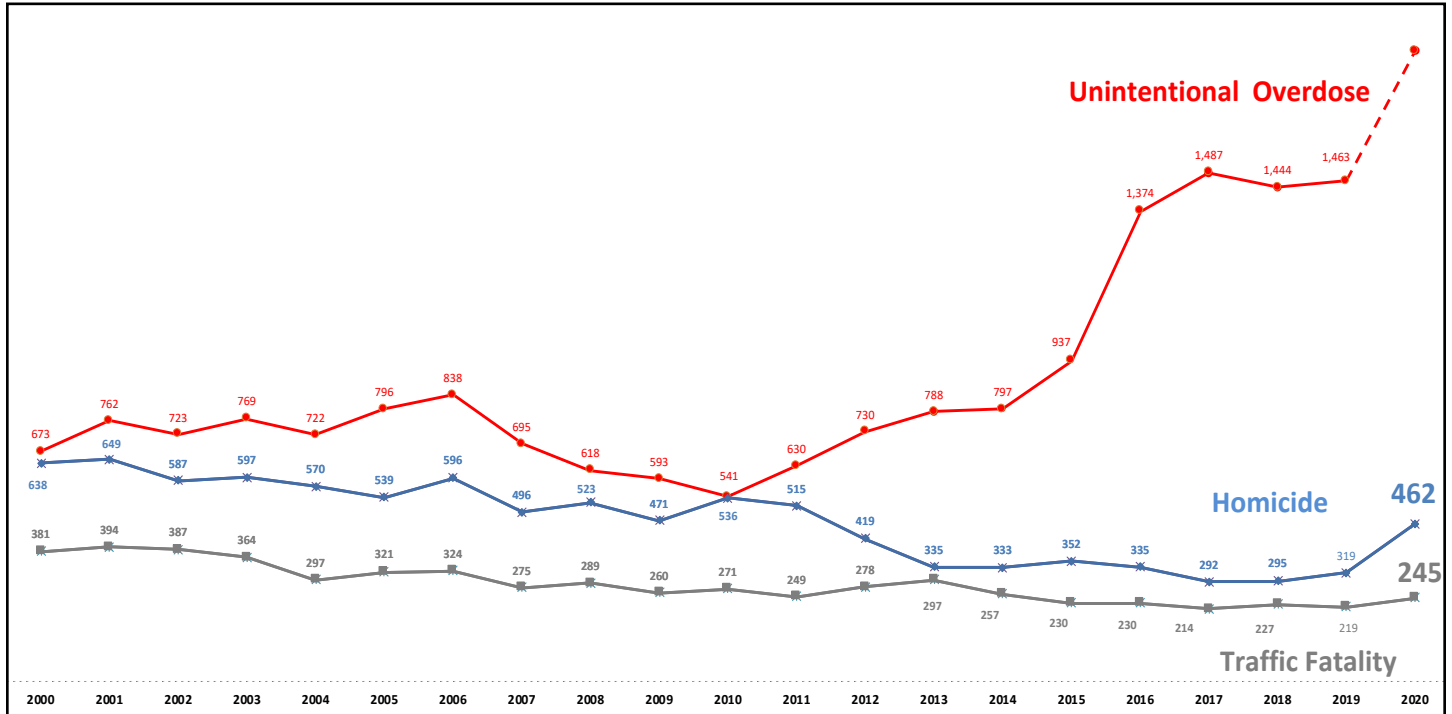
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large impact on SNP, but due to the commitment and dedication of both our legal and non-legal staff, and our preparedness for remote work, we have made the necessary adjustments during the past year to ensure that we are furthering our mission on behalf of the People of the State of New York.

SNP Indictments/SCIs



Opioid Crisis

NYC Fatal Overdoses Exceed Homicide and Traffic Fatalities Combined



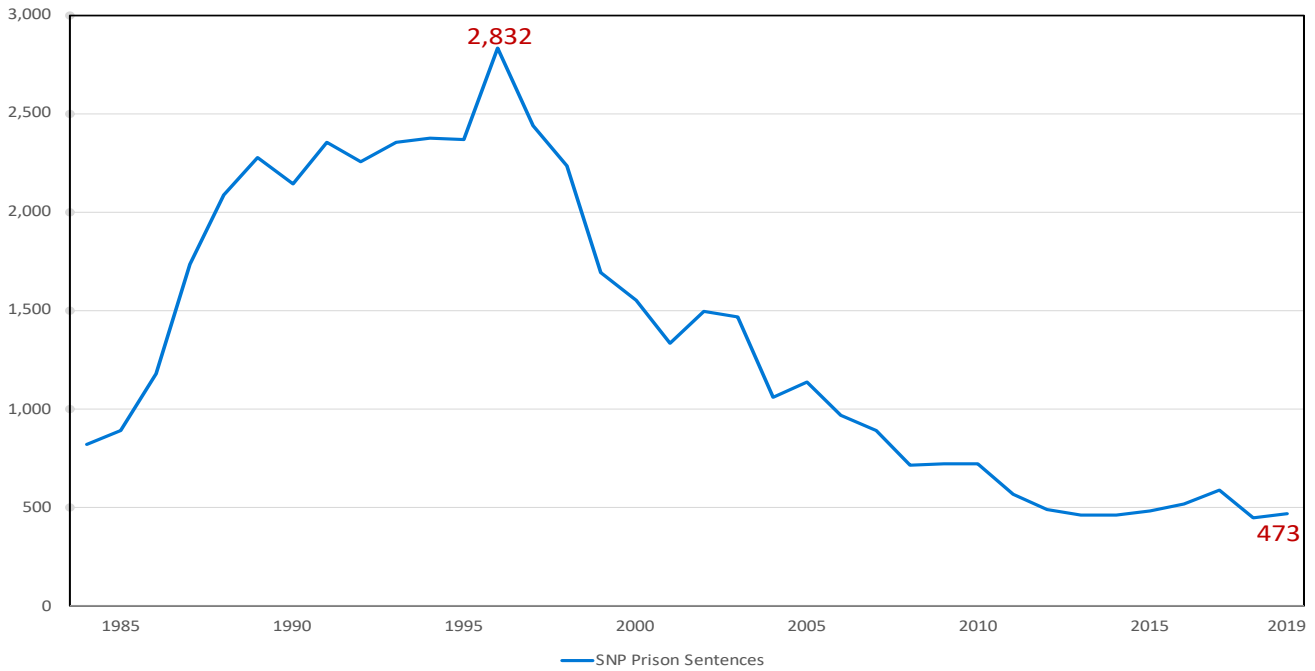
The opioid crisis in the city and in the nation is only getting worse during this difficult time. Given our progress in reducing overdose deaths in recent years, this result is very disappointing. Researchers suggest that stressors associated with COVID-19, including trauma from economic instability, social isolation and grief, as well as limited access to treatment, have contributed to a surge in relapses. Here in New York City, our beleaguered public health officials have scrambled to launch new initiatives to expand access to medications, such as methadone and buprenorphine, and the opioid overdose antidote naloxone.

At the same time, we are seeing a flood of deadly fentanyl coming into the city. A synthetic opioid, fentanyl is 50 times more potent than heroin. It is saturating the drug supply. Most heroin and counterfeit prescription pills sold on the street contain fentanyl. Cocaine and methamphetamine sometimes do as well. Unsuspecting drug users are at grave risk of overdose. Fentanyl is linked to well over 60% of drug-related deaths in New York City. During the first two months of this year,

our investigations have confiscated more fentanyl than during all of last year.

Our approach to addressing the opioid crisis is multi-pronged: reducing the supply of dangerous narcotics through our focus on high-level traffickers; investigating organizations linked to overdoses deaths; and prosecuting those responsible for prescription drug diversion, including medical practitioners. Both the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) New York Division observed a strong correlation between sharp escalations in violent crime and drug trafficking over the past year. We are strong supporters of treatment and harm reduction techniques, such as medication-assisted therapies (MATs), needle exchanges and easy access to naloxone, the overdose reversal drug. Our approach is consistent with the city's goals to reduce incarceration.

SNP Defendants Sentenced to Prison (1984-2019)



Supply Reduction

A main focus of SNP is reducing the supply of deadly fentanyl, the majority of which is produced in illicit laboratories in Mexico. In the first two months of this year alone, investigations by my office resulted in the seizure of more fentanyl than in all of 2020. Our main partners in this critically important work include the five District Attorneys, the U.S. Drug Administration (DEA)

New York Division, the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF), of which we are a key member, and the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Together, we focus on international narcotics importation and high-level traffickers, overdose death investigations and prescription drug diversion.



Semiautomatic weapons and ammunition.



Guns and narcotics seized from vehicle.

Because narcotics trafficking and violence often go hand in hand, it is common to recover guns from these groups. A long-term investigation into a narcotics trafficking operation in Ozone Park, Queens resulted in the seizure of approximately 40 pounds of suspected fentanyl, heroin and cocaine, and seven semi-automatic guns, including four assault weapons. The narcotics and two guns were recovered in December as members of NYDETF searched a vehicle and an apartment that had been set up for packaging drugs. Three of the assault weapons were found later, in January, inside a storage unit associated with the ringleader and a female associate. Three individuals were charged.

New York City is a hub of narcotics trafficking for the Northeast. Most commonly, large loads of drugs are transported across the Southwest border between U.S. and Mexico in trucks or other vehicles. The DEA tells us that fentanyl has been produced and stockpiled in Mexico during the pandemic border shutdown, and high volume loads are being transported to New York City with great frequency. Upon arriving in the city, drug shipments are delivered to packaging mill operations, which are frequently set up in residential apartment buildings in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan. Recent investigations have also uncovered packaging operations in Queens.

One such packaging operation was dismantled in January, when members of DETF and SNP's Investigators Unit uncovered an active heroin/fentanyl mill occupying two apartments inside a building on Valentine Avenue in West Bronx. Over 30 pounds of suspected heroin worth millions of dollars and approximately 500 counterfeit pills suspected to contain fentanyl were present inside the apartments, which also contained all of the equipment necessary for packaging narcotics. Five individuals were charged.

An even larger drug-packaging mill was dismantled in Ridgewood, Queens in February. Approximately 86 pounds of suspected heroin and fentanyl with a street value of over \$12 million, plus 1,000 counterfeit fentanyl pills and \$200,000 cash was seized by members of NYDETF and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York. An accused major trafficker and three others were charged. Members of the drug organization were in the process of filling more than 100,000 individual dose glassine envelopes with heroin when agents and officers entered the mill apartment. The bulk of the narcotics was still wrapped in brick shaped packages. DEA laboratory analysis is still pending on much of the drugs seized.



Over 100,000 street-ready heroin and fentanyl glassines seized.



Close up of fentanyl glassines seized by NYDETF and SNP.

Prescription Drug Investigations

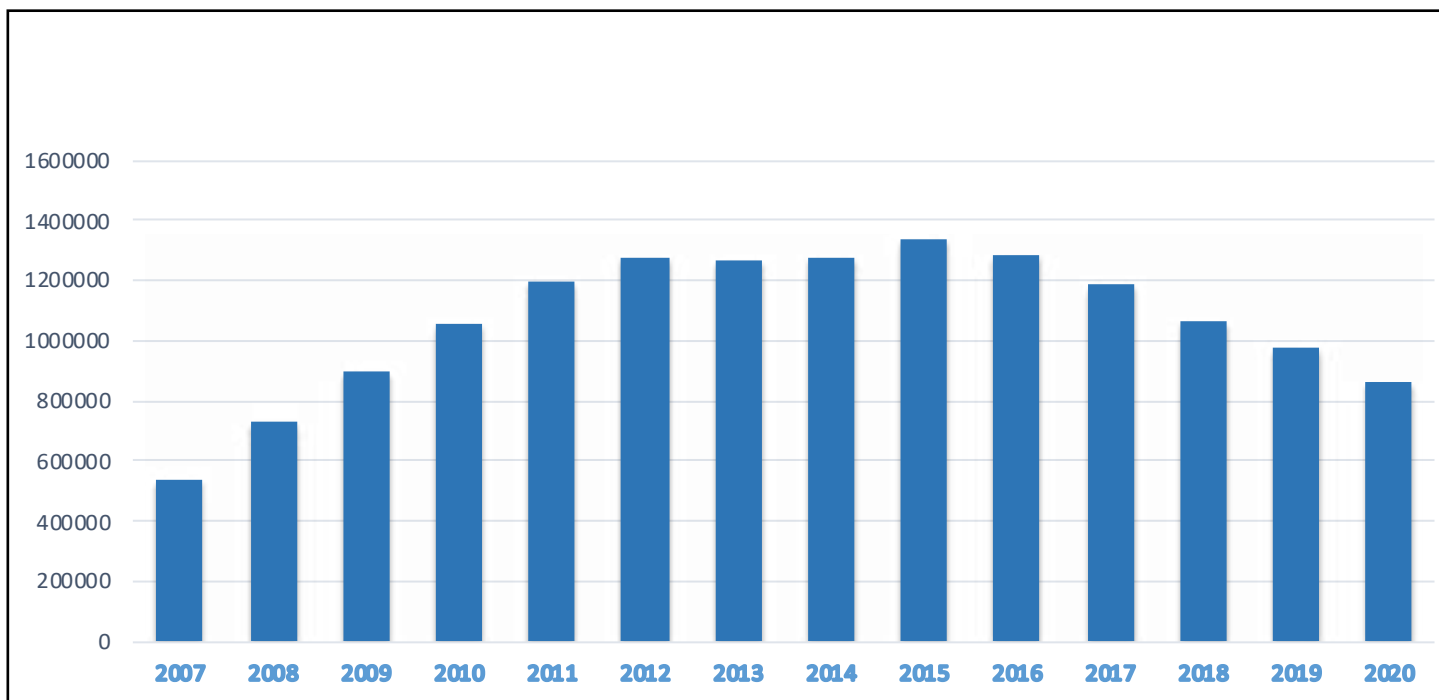
Since its creation in 2011, SNP's Prescription Drug Investigation Unit (PDIU) has targeted large-scale pill mills, pharmaceutical drug trafficking rings and corrupt medical practitioners who sell prescriptions for highly addictive pills in exchange for cash. Our investigations have uncovered a wide array of criminal schemes that share a common goal: to turn a profit from illegally prescribed drugs. Significantly, the office has obtained the convictions of two doctors on manslaughter charges in connection with separate investigations involving patients' deaths.

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. One of the most impactful regulatory changes was the implementation of mandatory electronic prescribing, which is far easier to track than paper prescriptions. Given the amount of money to be made from illegal pill sales, it is no surprise that corrupt medical practitioners would seek out ways to circumvent these important new regulations. Two investigations in 2020 focused on doctors who allegedly attempted to do just that.

A long-term wiretap investigation, conducted with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, centered on Dr. Lajos Lamperth, owner of a pain management clinic in Gravesend, Brooklyn. Dr. Lamperth allegedly conspired with two employees to issue prescriptions for narcotics and other controlled substances at the clinic when he was not present. These two individuals, a married couple, are not themselves licensed medical professionals and were therefore unauthorized to issue prescriptions or make any determinations regarding the medical needs of patients.

The investigation revealed that Dr. Lamperth also worked as an anesthesiologist at a Brooklyn hospital and was frequently at the hospital, or elsewhere, on days that the clinic issued prescriptions in his name. Indeed, Dr. Lamperth allegedly was attending a conference in Colorado when numerous prescriptions were issued using the clinic's account. The clinic allegedly filed thousands of dollars in claims with Medicaid and Medicare for numerous medical visits that did not occur. In order to skirt laws governing electronic prescribing, Dr. Lamperth allegedly allowed one employee's cellphone to serve as the "hard token" for two-factor authentication for the clinic's electronic prescribing activities, which

Oxycodone Rx's filled by NYC Residents: 2007-2020



is illegal. Phone records show patients also allegedly contacted the employee directly to renew prescriptions.

As alleged at Dr. Lamperth's arraignment in Manhattan Criminal Court, three of the doctor's patients died due to drug overdose within days of getting a prescription from the clinic and had other illicit substances in their system. The investigation was abruptly cut short when

intercepted communications suggested the defendants were planning to commit acts of violence against two individuals. Dr. Lamperth faces 42 counts, including Criminal Sale of a Prescription for a Controlled Substance. Dr. Lamperth voluntarily surrendered his DEA registration and is not permitted to issue prescriptions for controlled substances.

Methamphetamine

In January, the DEA New York Division issued a warning about a surge in both fentanyl and methamphetamine related to COVID-19. The DEA reported seizing an alarming amount of both synthetic drugs in 2020: a 214% increase in methamphetamine and 59% rise in fentanyl as compared to 2019. These dangerously potent substances are mass-produced by Mexican cartels, and are two top contributors to overdose deaths. DEA intelligence and investigations identified that Mexican cartels had to adapt their smuggling methods to increased security during COVID-19. In the early stages of the pandemic, DEA saw trafficking organizations "employ mail services to send smaller and more frequent loads of highly potent drugs like fentanyl to New York. Mexican cartels took advantage of their ability to process fentanyl into pill forms for easier transport, concealment, and ultimate user popularity." They simultaneously increased the volume and frequency of methamphetamine shipments to the area. "New York has not been a major methamphetamine market in the past, but the increase in seizures indicates the Mexican cartels continue to push it into the Northeast," DEA reported.

On February 3, 2021, SNP partnered with DEA and the NYPD in a case involving a methamphetamine conversion lab located in a vacant apartment in the Bronx. This was the first meth conversion lab that DEA had encountered in New York City. According to the DEA, the chemicals found at methamphetamine conversion labs and methamphetamine clandestine labs are highly volatile and may ignite or explode if mixed or stored improperly. Fire and explosion pose risks not only to the individuals producing the drug but also to anyone in the surrounding area. Toxic chemical exposure can pose a variety of health risks.

In this case, the conversion lab was located within a large, six-story residential building, directly across the street from a public elementary school. The lab was safely dismantled after the NYPD 50th Precinct received reports of unusual activity. Agents seized approximately 22 pounds of meth, 45 grams of heroin and 2,000 counterfeit pills with the appearance of Percocet and oxycodone from a vacant apartment. Three individuals, including the superintendent of the building, were charged.



Bags of loose narcotics.



Crystal meth in strainer.

Community Outreach and Public Awareness



While in person events and programming were interrupted by COVID-19, our community outreach efforts continued virtually during the pandemic. SNP's Community Outreach Director attended more than 100 community board meetings, Precinct/PSA Community Council Meetings, NYCHA resident meetings and other events. SNP also hosted community forums for the office's Assistant District Attorneys and interns to create space for an open dialogue about drug enforcement and areas of community concern.

Educating the public about the dangers of street level narcotics is an important priority for SNP. Over the past four years, the office has collaborated with Staten Island District Attorney Michael E. McMahon and Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark as clients on capstone projects with Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) to examine the opioid epidemic in New York City. We worked closely with teams of graduate student researchers who produced independent reports and recommendations for improved access to treatment services, substance abuse education and prevention initiatives. In the Spring semester of 2020, a SIPA team created a plan for an advertising campaign targeting teens to promote healthy

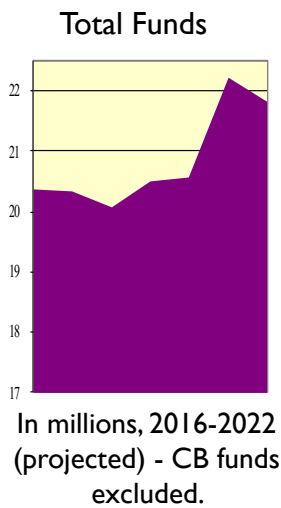
lifestyle choices with an emphasis on substance abuse education and prevention. Simultaneously, a graduate student from Teachers College pursued an independent study involving the effective use of drug education resources by teachers. Both projects were underway at the time of the COVID-19 shutdown in New York City one year ago. The SIPA team and the Teachers College student smoothly transitioned to remote work settings and adapted the scope of their projects to ensure successful results.



2020 Capstone

Funding

Overall Funding Outlook



For the current fiscal year, FY 2021, our projected grant funds have decreased by 9% from last fiscal year. City funds allocated to our office remain unchanged according to the proposed preliminary budget plan for fiscal 2022.

In FY 2020, the City implemented two mid-year PEGs (program to eliminate gap) with a total cash reduction of \$1,847,779 to our budget. We

were able to meet this cash cut with savings generated in various areas in our operations and helped the city close its budget gap for the year. While the nation reeled from the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, we worked with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to achieve the savings. We are proud to have helped the city during a dire financial situation, while keeping our city safe and protecting our people from the deadly virus.

For FY 2022, the City's preliminary plan contains no funding changes. However, we do project baseline shortfalls in Criminal Justice Reform (CJR) funding. In addition, as we continue our efforts in combating COVID-19, we have begun preparations for reopening. It has been a gradual process as we must implement cautious procedures and protocols and provide our staff with the necessary protective supplies, and a safe, clean and secure work place when the City is ready to reopen. Therefore, we anticipate the reopening process to be a costly one as well.

City Funding Needs

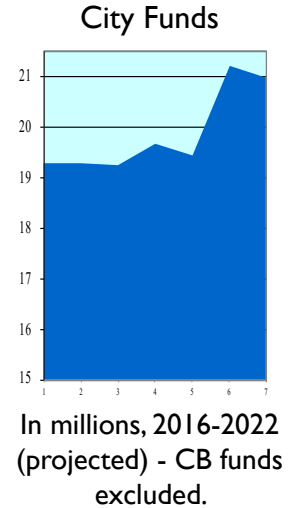
We are grateful for all the support we have received from the City Council over the years. We are especially thankful for the efforts you have made in helping the prosecutors' offices like us secure CJR funding. The City Council played a crucial role in this initiative and without

your support and assistance, we would not have received our CJR funding as quickly. With your support, we were able to hire the additional personnel and procure up to date IT resources required to stay compliance with the new discovery law. While the COVID-19 pandemic put a hold on our recruitment and procurement efforts, it also allowed us to generate the cost savings we need to meet our PEG target and help the City close its gap in FY 2021.

In FY 2022, however, we will have shortfalls in CJR funding. This shortfall is caused by the fact that we only received partial CJR funding for FY 2022 and out years. CJR funding provided for personnel services (PS) are used to pay for salaries of new hires. Our funding was computed for a 7-month period for FY 2021. The same amount was baselined for FY 2022 and out years, instead of the full year or 12 months. OMB agreed to revisit and possibly annualize CJR funding to cover full year salaries for our reform hires in late 2019. We hope that they initiate this process soon.

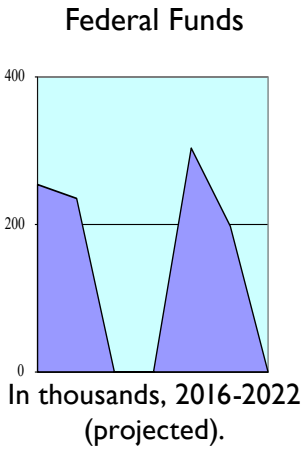
State Funding Reductions

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) ended two of our three state grant programs in FY 2016. We currently only have one state grant left, which is our SNP Aid to Prosecution program. In FY 2021, we are thankful that state funding for this program remained unchanged. We are hoping for the same for FY 2022 but have to remain cautious, as there have been multiple attempts to eliminate this program in recent years. Over the past two decades, funding for this longest running grant of ours has been reduced six times from \$1,425,000 in FY 2003 to \$825,000. The loss in this state grant alone amounted to a stunning \$600,000 or 42%.



Funding

Federal Funding Updates



Our federal funding has also gone down drastically over the years from \$843,059 in FY 2013 to \$236,728 in FY 2017. In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, we received \$0 in federal funding due to sanctuary city status. After the removal of sanctuary city status, we received \$304,921 in FY 2020 from JAG programs and for

COVID reimbursement. However, our federal funding for current fiscal year is down to \$197,984 again, with JAG state pass through pending at DCJS. For FY 2022, we have not received any information and/or update on federal funding.

Fentanyl & Counterfeit Pills

\$12 Million Drug Seizure in Ridgewood

Approximately 86 pounds of suspected heroin and fentanyl with a street value of over \$12 million, plus 1,000 counterfeit fentanyl pills, were seized by members of NYDETF Group T-21 and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York in February of 2021. An accused major trafficker is among four charged in connection with a large-scale heroin and fentanyl mill in Ridgewood, Queens. Members of the organization were in the process of packaging heroin and fentanyl into individual dose glassine envelopes, and had filled over 100,000 glassines, when agents and officers entered the mill apartment. The bulk of the narcotics were wrapped in brick shaped packages. Agents also recovered \$200,000 cash. DEA laboratory analysis is still pending on some of the narcotics seized.



Active heroin mill work table.

Packaging Mill Contained Over \$4 Million in Heroin/Fentanyl Seized



Fentanyl kilograms seized by NYDETF and SNP.

Over 30 pounds of suspected heroin and hundreds of fentanyl pills were recovered from a drug packaging operation occupying two apartments in a building on Valentine Avenue in West Bronx. Five individuals were arrested in January of 2021. Members of NYDETF Group T-21 and SNP's Investigators Unit seized approximately 11 kilograms of heroin in brick form and over 100,000 filled individual dose glassine envelopes, as well as 500 blue pills of suspected fentanyl and \$60,000 cash. The apartments also contained all of the equipment necessary to package narcot-

ics, including 69 different stamps with brand names such as “Exit 3,” “Versace,” “American Gangster” and “Mortal Kombat.” The narcotics carried an estimated street value of over \$4 million.

Fugitive among Four Charged in Drug Importation

A long-term investigation disrupted a narcotics trafficking operation believed to import heroin and fentanyl from Mexico for distribution in the Bronx. More than 28 pounds of heroin and fentanyl were recovered and a four individuals were charged. Beginning in 2019, members of NYDETF Group T-41 established surveillance on an apartment located on East 169th Street and periodically observed the defendants entering and exiting the location. Three arrests occurred between November of 2019 and April of 2020, during which time agents and officers intercepted five kilograms of heroin and fentanyl from alleged members of the group. On April 16, 2020, agents and officers conducted a court-authorized search of the East 169th Street apartment and recovered an additional six kilograms of heroin and fentanyl and \$115,000 cash from inside hidden compartments built into furniture. As the investigation continued, agents and officers identified the fourth man who oversaw packaging the narcotics into individual dose glassine envelopes for street level distribution. Agents and officers conducted searches of three apartments this individual allegedly controlled in October of 2020 and recovered two kilograms of heroin and fentanyl, plus 4,000 filled glassine envelopes. Agents and officers learned that he had previously fled to the Dominican Republic to avoid prosecution on an SNP indictment filed in 1998. While living as a fugitive, he underwent surgery to alter his fingerprints.



\$115,000 cash recovered from a hidden compartment.

“Fire” Fentanyl Worth \$4 Million Seized

Six individuals were arrested at a high volume drug packaging mill in the Bronx in January of 2020 as members of NYDETF seized over



Hundreds of thousands of fentanyl glassine envelopes.

\$4 million worth of fentanyl. The narcotics were believed to be destined for distribution in New York and Massachusetts. After conducting intensive surveillance on a Sedgwick Avenue apartment, agents and officers with the DEA’s Drug Enforcement Task Force obtained a search warrant and found the large scale mill. The defendants had allegedly filled over \$425,000 glassine envelopes with fentanyl. Hundreds of thousands of glassine envelopes covered two table tops and overflowed from plastic bins and cardboard boxes on the floor and a bed. Equipment and paraphernalia typical of a heroin/fentanyl mill were present in the room, including a glass table, desk lamps, a scale, grinders, empty glassine envelopes, small spoons, an ink bottle, ink pads and stamps.

“Coronavirus” Branded Fentanyl Seized in the Bronx

A long-term investigation into an NYC narcotics trafficking operation, with distribution throughout the Northeast, led to the seizure of approximately 15,000 glassine envelopes containing a mixture of fentanyl, tramadol and other substances. Individual dose glassine envelopes were stamped with various brand names, including two associated with multiple fatal overdoses in New Jersey: the word “Coronavirus” next to a biohazard symbol and “24 Black Mamba” (an apparent reference to the death of Kobe Bryant). The fentanyl mixture was seized from a drug-packaging mill in University Heights, Bronx,



Glassines stamped with various brand names.

at the height of the pandemic in May of 2020 and carried a street value of \$150,000. A surveillance operation by NYDETF Group T-12 centered on the alleged manager of the drug distribution network, who faces the charge of Operating as a Major Trafficker and top narcotics possession charges. A total of six individuals were charged.

Man Indicted for Creating Dangerous Drug Mixtures



Glassine envelopes stamped with 'Stroke'.

An accused drug trafficker allegedly obtained multi-kilogram quantities of opioids and methamphetamine, which he mixed to create highly unusual and potentially lethal combinations. Nearly four pounds of narcotics and packaging equipment were recovered from the maintenance area of a residential building on Walton Avenue in Fordham Heights, Bronx. Members of the DEA's New York Strike Force conducted a court-authorized search and found multiple brick-shaped packages of narcotics inside a hidden compartment carved into the wall of a shower area. The narcotics consisted of mixtures of heroin, fentanyl, tramadol

and methamphetamine. Agents and officers also recovered bottles of ketamine (a general anesthetic), quinine (an anti-malaria agent) and \$1,000 cash, as well as all of the equipment necessary for mixing and packaging the substances. Individual dose glassine envelopes were stamped with the brand names "Queen & Slim" and "Stroke." The combination of opioids and methamphetamine (a stimulant) could easily cause an unsuspecting user to overdose.

Round-the-Clock Street Market Dismantled

A disruptive street-level drug organization that operated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Manhattan and the Bronx was shut down. Seven individuals were arrested and indicted, including an alleged ringleader charged with Operating as a Major Trafficker. The highly organized group allegedly sold a wide range of substances, including heroin mixed with fentanyl and what appeared to be homemade prescription pills. The majority of sales took place in the vicinity of Audubon Avenue between West 173rd and West 174th Street in Washington Heights. An alleged ringleader oversaw numerous workers and assigned different roles and shifts, covering mornings, afternoons and nights.

Members of the organization sold to undercover NYPD officers on approximately two-dozen occasions. In conducting sales, the workers retrieved narcotics stashed in cars parked on the block and in nearby apartments. The investigation revealed that customers came from as far away as Connecticut. The alleged ringleader also travelled to Maine to sell to individuals there. Members of the organization were security conscious, yet brazen. They allegedly coordinated by phone, sometimes even by handheld two-way radio, using cryptic language. They could be heard calling out the presence of police in the area as they continued drug sales.

Drugs and Violence

Assault Rifle Aimed at NYPD Detective

A Queens man was indicted on weapons and narcotics charges after allegedly aiming an assault rifle at an NYPD detective. Members of NYDETF Group T-31 were conducting surveillance in Middle Village as part of a short-term narcotics investigation when they saw the defendant outside his residence on Elliot Avenue accompanied by a bulldog and carrying what appeared to be an assault rifle. As members of Group T-31 drove closer, the defendant appeared to “cock” or load the rifle and place it in front of his body. He then allegedly pointed it at an NYPD detective in an unmarked car. The detective, whose vision became obstructed by a blinding light, exited the car and announced he was a member of law enforcement. At that point, the defendant fled back into his home. The NYPD’s Emergency Services Unit (ESU) responded and the defendant was taken into custody. Agents and officers conducted a court-authorized search of the residence and a car parked in the garage. A hidden compartment inside the car contained three loaded guns: a semi-automatic pistol, an EVO 9mm carbine assault rifle and a MAC-11 submachine gun with a suppressor (used to eliminate muzzle flash). Agents and officers also seized quantities of cocaine, handcuffs and ammunitions. The incident,



Defendant with gun at hip before raising it.

which occurred on October 7, 2020, was captured on the defendant's own security cameras. Footage shows the defendant coming out of the house and pointing the gun. After the defendant flees back inside, he can be seen carrying multiple backpacks to the car and cramming them into the area where the hidden compartment where the guns were later found.

Seven Guns Recovered From Drug Network



Semiautomatic rifles and bulletproof vests.

Seven semi-automatic guns, including four assault weapons, and 40 pounds of suspected fentanyl, heroin and cocaine were recovered as a result of a long-term investigation. Members of NYDETF Group T-31 recovered the narcotics and two guns from a vehicle and an apartment in Ozone Park, Queens. The apartment housed a drug packaging mill. Prior to conducting a court authorized search of the apartment in December of 2020, agents and officers observed the alleged ringleader of the drug network and a second man entering and exiting the residence with bags and equipment consistent with drug packaging.

Five guns, including three assault weapons, ammunition and a bulletproof vest were later found inside a storage unit associated with the ringleader and a female associate. A total of three individuals were charged.

Street Market for Drugs Dismantled: Two Guns Seized

A notorious street market for drugs drew numerous community complaints about the open sale and consumption of narcotics along a busy commercial stretch of 3rd Avenue in Mott Haven, as well as violent incidents. An indictment filed in March of 2020 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 New York Strike Force investigation revealed that the organization took



US currency, a loaded revolver, half of a kilogram of cocaine and a quarter of a kilogram of heroin.

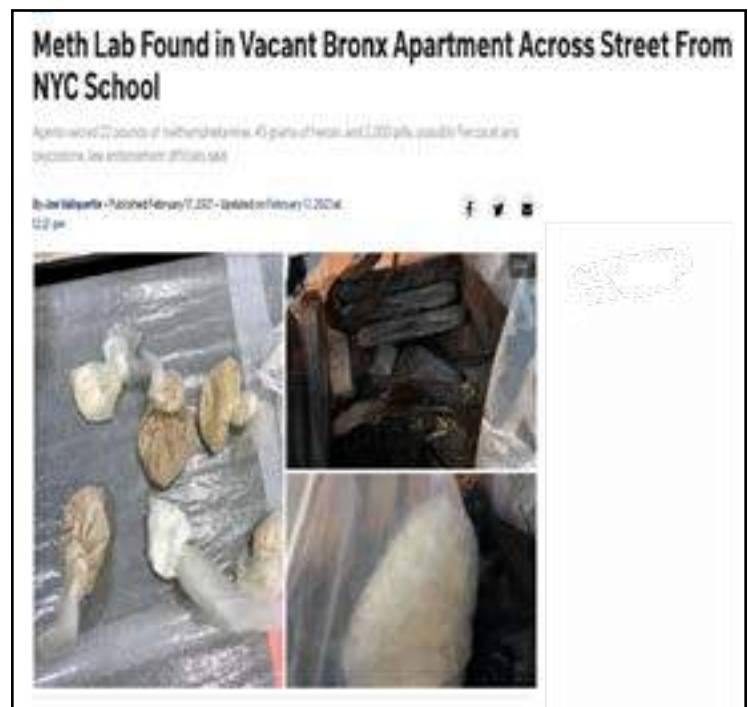
over the bakery, a legitimate business, and used it as a hub for drug trafficking. Members of the organization observed a strict hierarchy and conducted sales on the sidewalk and inside the bakery. A court authorized search of an alleged stash location, yielded approximately \$50,000 cash and hundreds of glassine envelopes of suspected heroin, as well as ziplock bags containing suspected heroin and cocaine. In a search of an alleged drug supplier's residence, agents and officers recovered two loaded guns and nearly a kilogram of heroin and cocaine. Five individuals have since pled guilty and one was murdered in an unrelated incident.

Methamphetamine Surge

Meth Conversion Lab Dismantled

The first meth conversion lab ever encountered by the DEA in New York City was safely dismantled in the Bronx on February 3, 2021. The conversion lab was located inside a vacant apartment in a six-story residential building, directly across the street from a public elementary school. The NYPD 50th Precinct contacted DEA about the lab after receiving reports of unusual activity at the apartment. Agents seized approximately 22 pounds of meth, 45 grams of heroin and 2,000 counterfeit pills with the appearance of Percocet and oxycodone from a vacant apartment. Three individuals,

including the superintendent of the building, were charged. According to the DEA, the chemicals found at methamphetamine conversion labs and methamphetamine clandestine labs are highly volatile and may ignite or explode if mixed or stored improperly. Fire and explosion pose risks not only to the individuals producing the drug but also to anyone in the surrounding area. Toxic chemical exposure can pose a variety of health risks.



NBC News- February 17, 2020



Pill press recovered from illegal Bronx drug lab.

Illicit Pill Manufacturing Lab Uncovered in Bronx Basement

An investigation into illegal narcotics pill manufacturing in the Bronx uncovered a basement drug laboratory outfitted with three industrial pill press machines used to form counterfeit pills from illicit drugs. The basement also contained a coop of dozens of roosters and chickens. Members of the NYPD Narcotics Borough Brooklyn South Overdose Squad, DEA Group D-24 and SNP's Investigators Unit agents conducted a court-authorized search on June 19, 2020 on West 170th Street in Highbridge. Agents and officers recovered quantities of the synthetic drugs fentanyl and methamphetamine, including approximately 1,600 blue methamphetamine pills. In the days prior to the search, agents learned three

suspicious packages weighing more than 280 pounds were address to an apartment in Union City, N.J. The packages had originated in China and were purported to contain pill presses. Agents observed a suspect accept delivery of the packages and transport them to the Bronx, where a second man helped to bring them into the West 170th Street building. Both men were arrested on top narcotics possession charges.

Citywide Cocaine Distribution

Over 25 Pounds of Cocaine Bearing Dragon Symbol Seized

An accused major trafficker was among three individuals indicted in connection with over 25 pounds of cocaine and \$125,000 cash seized in the Bronx. An investigation revealed the narcotics trafficking organization secured large quantities of cocaine in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic-related shortage. In a search of an apartment on Popham Avenue, members of DEA Group D-43 and the New York State Police recovered 11 kilograms of cocaine labelled with a Chinese dragon stamp. The majority of the cocaine was



Kilos of cocaine hidden inside wall.

found inside a wall in a bathroom behind the vanity and medicine cabinet. Agents and investigators also recovered \$125,000 cash, more than 100 pills and a makeshift pill press from the apartment. Prior to the court authorized search, agents and investigators conducted surveillance on Popham Avenue and observed the alleged major trafficker and a second defendant entering and exiting the building carrying a bag and a brick shaped package wrapped in plastic. The three defendants were arrested in a vehicle that contained a kilogram of cocaine. During the pandemic, wholesale prices for cocaine increased by up to 72% per kilogram.

Cocaine Sold at Pandemic Prices: Two Guns Seized

An accused major trafficker and nine others were arrested for selling cocaine at a premium during the COVID-19 crisis. At the height of the pandemic in NYC, access to cocaine was extremely limited. The organization operated its lucrative narcotics business in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Park Slope, Gowanus and Sunset Park, and paid up to \$50,000 for a kilogram (nearly 30-50% over the typical wholesale price). Members of the group immediately resold the cocaine after tacking on an additional 3-5%. Operating in this manner, the organization sold hundreds of thousands of dollars in cocaine. The long-term investigation, conducted by the NYPD Brooklyn North Overdose Squad, began in August of 2019 following a nonfatal overdose in the vicinity of the Farragut Houses, a NYCHA residential complex in Brooklyn. Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez reviewed and submitted multiple wiretap eavesdropping applications for court authorization during the investigation. In conjunction with the arrest, police recovered quantities of heroin and cocaine, two defaced firearms, a bulletproof vest, ammunition and over \$145,000 cash.



A bullet proof vest, two fire arms, ammunition, quantities of heroin and cocaine, and over \$145,000 cash recovered.

