

# BIENNIAL REPORT

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

# 2020 - 2021

## *Mission Statement*

The District Attorney of Riverside County, as the public prosecutor acting on behalf of the People, vigorously enforces the law, pursues the truth, and safeguards the rights of all to ensure that justice is done on behalf of our community.

The District Attorney works with every component of the criminal justice system to protect the innocent, to convict and appropriately punish the guilty, and to protect the rights of victims.

The District Attorney also works within our community to prevent and deter crime and to promote public safety, now and for future generations.

The District Attorney fulfills these critical responsibilities through the efforts of the employees of the District Attorney's Office, and each employee is integral to achieving this mission. To that end, we, the employees of the Riverside County District Attorney's Office, will adopt the highest standards of ethical behavior and professionalism and proudly commit ourselves to the following core values in the performance of our duties:

**Integrity, Respect, Quality, Loyalty, Teamwork,  
Partnership, Innovation, Fairness, and Service.**

# Core Values

## *Integrity*

As professionals, members of the criminal justice system, officers of the court, and highly visible public employees, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of integrity and professional conduct. Ethics and integrity are not negotiable.

## *Respect*

We treat each other and all members of the public with dignity and respect. Because the people of this organization are its most valuable asset, each of us must nurture a working climate that is based on trust, courtesy, and mutual respect. We must also apply that attitude of consideration, dignity, and respect to the public we serve. We must remember that the personal dignity of each individual is inviolate.

## *Quality*

To earn and hold the trust and confidence of our community, we must perform our duties with uncompromising commitment to quality. Each of us is responsible for ensuring that our community receives the finest prosecution services possible, and we are committed to hiring and training the most qualified individuals to accomplish our mission.

## *Loyalty*

We recognize that the District Attorney's mission is a public trust, and we are loyal to that mission. We take seriously our obligations to the community, to law enforcement, and to the victims of crime.

## *Fairness*

We are committed to treating people reasonably and consistently without personal bias, discrimination, favoritism, or animus. Each of us must act fairly toward our fellow employees and others within the criminal justice system. In addition, we are committed to developing leaders at all levels that communicate expectations and provide consistent feedback, who motivate and inspire others, and who understand the importance of equality, fairness, and diversity.

## *Innovation*

We accept a shared responsibility to ensure the most effective use of resources and to identify and apply new methods and technology for increased efficiency. Each of us strives for continuous improvement, which allows the District Attorney's Office to deliver better prosecution services and further enhances public safety.

## *Partnership*

We are committed to building strong and viable partnerships with other law enforcement agencies, every component of the criminal justice system, and the community we serve. We recognize that a united and cohesive effort to prevent and punish crime allows us to achieve the highest level of public safety for our community.

## *Service*

The core mission of our entire organization is to promote public safety by delivering quality prosecution services to the citizens of Riverside County. However, we recognize that we are also part of the Riverside County community and our effectiveness as an office is enhanced through our employees' community service. We value and encourage community involvement, volunteerism, and participation in community improvement efforts.

## *Teamwork*

We work as a team, encouraging both diversity of thought and unity of action. Each of us plays an integral part, but we must work together to achieve our mission. "Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success."

# TO THE CITIZENS OF RIVERSIDE COUNTY

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The Riverside County District Attorney's Office was faced with many challenges in 2020 and 2021. I am proud of our perseverance during these unprecedented times and most importantly, our unwavering dedication to the pursuit of justice. Not only did we pivot to remote working during a pandemic, but we also remained true to our core values and continued to provide transparent public safety services to our community members.

Justice can be delivered in various formats. At times, it requires vigorous prosecution of violent felons, such as the prosecution of Jesse Perez Torres for the violent 2010 murder of 17-year-old Norma Lopez as she walked from school to a friend's house in Moreno Valley. In other cases, it involves alternative programs to incarceration, such as a veteran experiencing struggles like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of their service. However, in all cases, our value of providing safety to our community members remains our focus.

Despite the many hardships provided by the pandemic, our office continued to prosecute cases while maintaining a victim-centered approach of assisting victims of crime through the criminal justice system. Our Victim Services Specialists continued their commitment to providing supportive services both virtually and in-person to victims of violent crime. In 2021, we were able to enhance our services to victims of crime with the addition of K-9 Rachel. K-9 Rachel is a support services dog that is trained to comfort victims and witnesses during traumatic events, such as interviews and testifying.

Our commitment to keeping our community safe often involves community outreach, education, and prevention. Our Crime Prevention Unit continues to work with at-risk youth in our schools. Engaging the youth in positive programs and activities provides them with opportunities to achieve academic success and positive life skills. In 2020, our Crime Prevention Unit started a partnership with the SAFE Family Justice Centers. This collaboration has strengthened the services that both entities provide to youth who are at risk and have experienced adverse childhood trauma.

In 2021, we identified that our community was being terrorized by the fentanyl crisis. Our office led the way in combating the fentanyl epidemic with a three-pronged approach: education, prevention, and prosecution. Our office was one of the first in the state to prosecute fentanyl dealers with homicide charges. Our Bureau of Investigation seized more than 20 pounds of fentanyl, taking it out of our community. Additionally, we informed the public about the dangers of fentanyl by creating a social media campaign and a prevention presentation aimed at educating the youth in our schools.

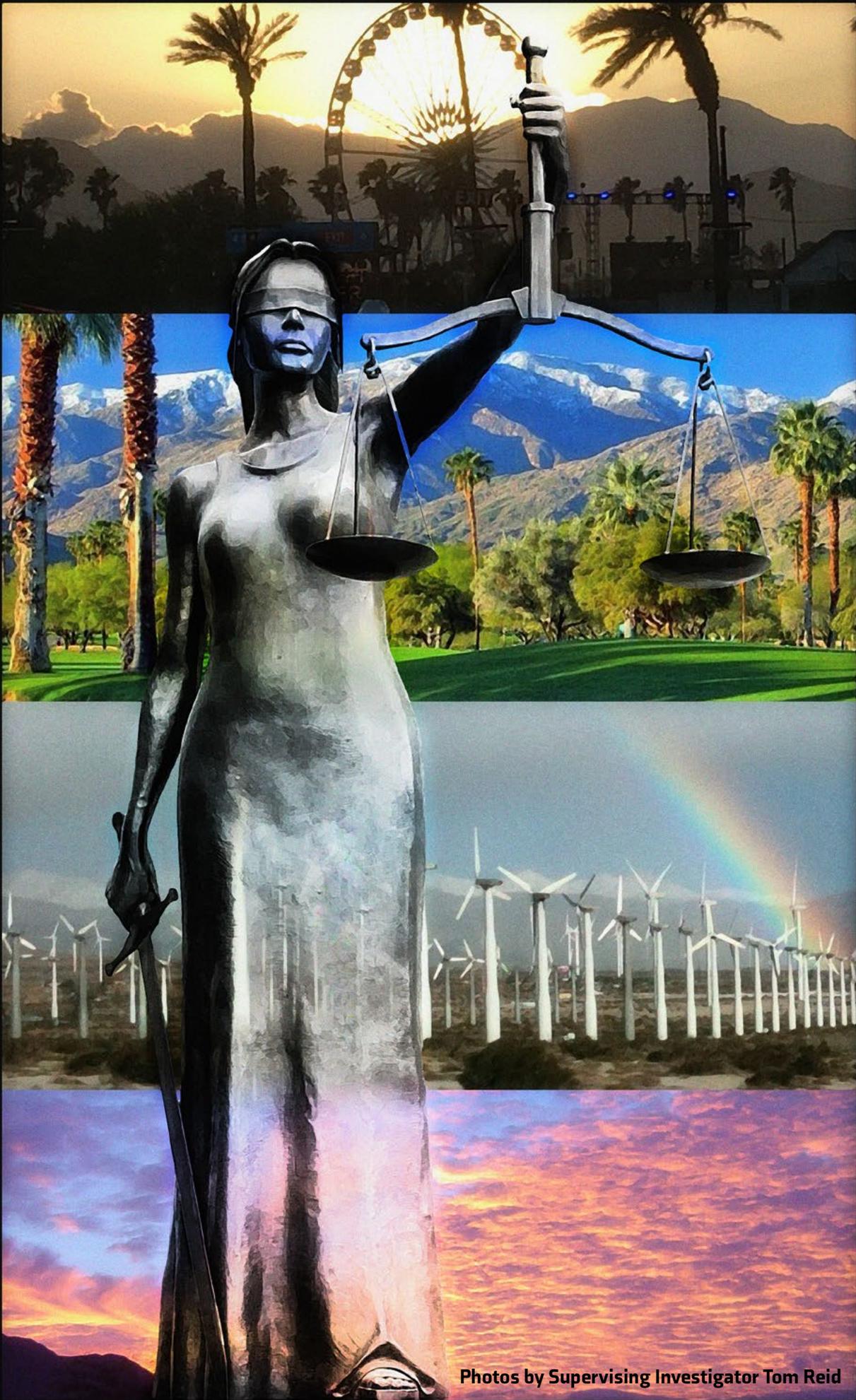
Our Bureau of Investigation is the investigative arm of our office that provides a full range of law enforcement services to keep our community members safe. For example, our Bureau of Investigation developed the Riverside County Child Exploitation Team (RCCET), which proactively apprehends online child predators. During the pandemic, children were spending more time online than ever before, and so were predators looking for victims. The Riverside County Board of Supervisors recognized the need to expand RCCET and approved the additional costs to provide one additional Supervising Investigator, two additional Senior DA Investigators, and an additional DA Computer Forensic Examiner. In 2020, RCCET also added a special team member, K-9 Chewie. K-9 Chewie is an electronic detection canine, trained to locate electronic devices used to store digital media. Chewie has discovered more than 100 different electronic storage devices throughout these operations, which included cell phones, USBs, SD cards, iPads, laptops, external hard drives, and digital cameras.

In closing, our office is comprised of more than 700 dedicated staff members across Riverside County in the pursuit of justice for victims of crime. I am deeply honored to serve as the District Attorney for the people of Riverside County. I invite you to read more about our mission, values, and the work that we do. We are currently operating in a time where the justice system is under great scrutiny. My pledge and obligation to our community is that we will continue to maintain transparency and integrity in everything we do. Thank you for your ongoing support and trust in each of us.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael A. Hestrin". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

MICHAEL A. HESTRIN  
RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



Photos by Supervising Investigator Tom Reid

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Chief DDA Carlos Monagas addresses the judge in the case of *The People vs. Michael Joseph Callahan*.



## JURY FINDS MAN GUILTY OF MURDERING CHP SERGEANT

Sergeant Steven Licon was killed on the afternoon of April 6, 2019, when he was struck by a vehicle driven by a Winchester man. Sgt. Licon was standing next to his CHP motorcycle on southbound Interstate 15, near Nichols Road in Lake Elsinore when a Toyota Corolla hit him. The driver of the Toyota, Michael Joseph Callahan, had been traveling at an estimated 65 mph on the freeway's right shoulder before striking Sgt. Licon. Sgt. Licon had stopped a 2017 Chrysler 300 for a traffic violation and the Chrysler and Sgt. Licon's CHP motorcycle were stopped on the freeway's right shoulder. The Toyota was traveling along the right shoulder and not in the designated freeway lanes. Sgt. Licon was transported by medical helicopter to Inland Valley Medical Center in nearby Wildomar but died from his injuries. He was a 27-year veteran of the California Highway Patrol.

The DA's Office charged Callahan with second-degree murder under the theory that he was aware of the dangers of driving while intoxicated because of a 2004 misdemeanor DUI conviction in Orange County. As a term of his probation in that case, Callahan was required to attend Mothers Against Drunk Driving courses where he was educated about those dangers.

Callahan was sentenced to 15 years to life by Riverside County Superior Court Judge Timothy Freer on Oct. 1, 2021, at the Southwest Justice Center in Murrieta. The case, SWF1907227, was prosecuted by Chief Deputy DA Carlos Monagas and Deputy DA Allison Pace.



California Highway Patrol Sgt. Steven Licon

# ILLICIT FENTANYL MURDER CHARGES FILED

Joseph Michael Costanza, of Eastvale, has been charged with four felonies: one count of murder; one count of sales of a controlled substance, fentanyl, to a minor with an enhancement of drug sales to a minor at least four years younger and an allegation of causing great bodily injury, and two counts of possession of a controlled substance, fentanyl, for sales.

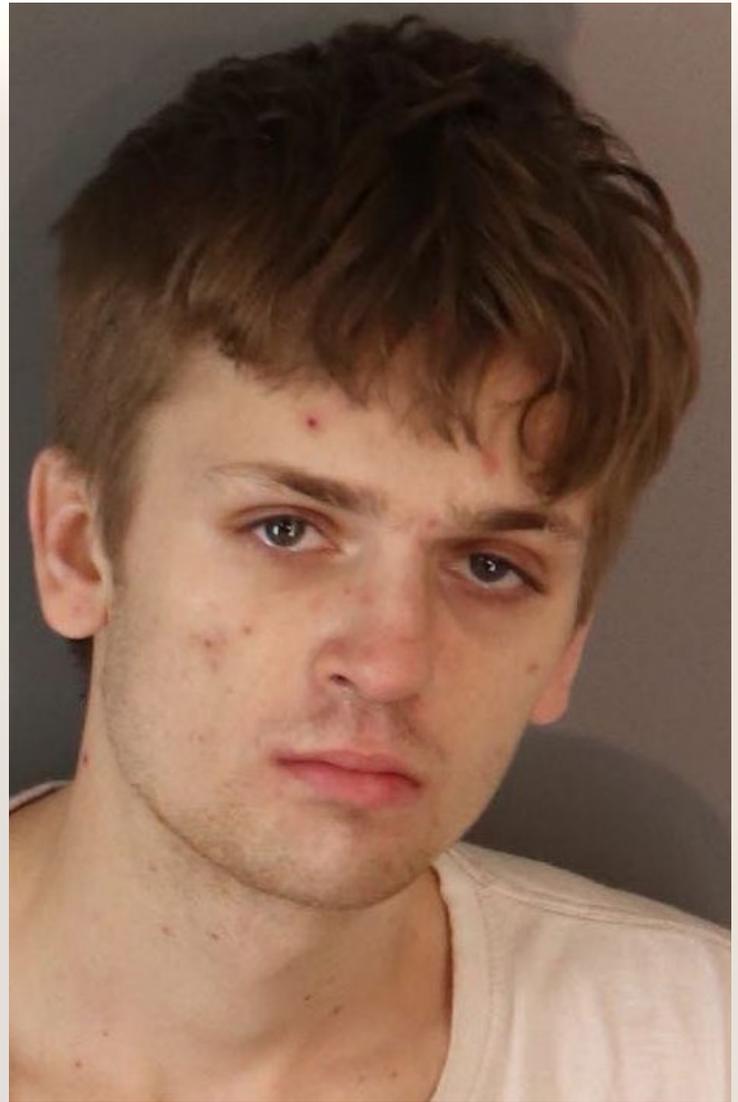
The victim who died in this case is Angel Vazquez, 18. The morning of Oct. 4, 2020, he was found unresponsive at a home in Eastvale. He was transported to a nearby hospital and pronounced dead about an hour later. A 16-year-old victim, listed in count two, overdosed but survived and was found in the same home on that day.

“There is no safe way to use or to sell fentanyl. Simply put, it is lethal,” DA Mike Hestrin said. “Those who sell fentanyl should know that and, if they choose to sell it anyway and someone dies, the dealer should be prosecuted for murder.”

This was the first fentanyl-related murder case filed by a DA’s Office in Southern California and among the very first in the state. Our office will continue to file murder charges, based on the evidence, against anyone who sells or provides drugs containing illicit fentanyl to someone who dies after ingesting it.

Fentanyl is known to be an extremely dangerous and potent manmade opioid that is very lethal and potentially deadly in even very small amounts. It is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. It only takes about two milligrams of fentanyl to potentially be lethal for most people. For perspective of how small that amount is, it takes 5,000 milligrams to make one teaspoon.

The case, RIF2100641, is being prosecuted by Deputy DA Gerald Pfohl.



**Joseph Michael Costanza**  
Image provided by the Riverside County Sheriff's Dept.

**On February 22, 2021, District Attorney Mike Hestrin announced that his office has filed a murder charge against a man accused of selling fentanyl-poisoned drugs to a victim who overdosed and died.**



## **TWO SAN JACINTO MEN INDICTED INCLUDING A CITY COUNCILMEMBER**

On June 18, 2021, a Riverside County criminal grand jury indictment was unsealed, charging two San Jacinto men – including a then city councilmember – with four counts involving the operation of an illegal cannabis dispensary.

Joel Lopez and Edward Padilla were each charged in the indictment with one felony count of conspiracy to commit misdemeanor possession of a controlled substance for sale, one felony count of maintaining a place for the purpose of unlawfully selling or giving away a controlled substance, one misdemeanor count of operating without a seller's permit by the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, and one misdemeanor count of failure to file a sales and use tax return. Lopez was a councilmember in the City of San Jacinto at the time.

In June 2021, Padilla pled guilty to the conspiracy count and was sentenced to 180 days in custody to be served on work release, and 24 months of formal probation. In December 2021, Lopez pled guilty to the court and the judge sentenced him to 365 days in custody and five years of formal probation.

Among the overt acts alleged in the indictment were: That both defendants hired individuals to work for an unlicensed illegal cannabis dispensary called “Santa Fe Co-Op,” “Santa Fe Collective,” or “Santa Fe.” That both defendants placed cannabis and/or THC products for sale in display cases inside 1190 S. San Jacinto Ave., in San Jacinto. That both defendants, and others, sold cannabis and/or THC products from that same address to members of the public. That both defendants sold cannabis and/or THC products to the public through a delivery service. And that Lopez received the proceeds from the illegal sale of cannabis.

The case BAF2101021, was prosecuted by Deputy DA Lauren Dossey of the DA's Public Protection Unit.



Deputy DA Lauren Dossey

## MAN SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR MURDER OF TEENAGE GIRL

On Dec. 4, 2020, a Long Beach man was sentenced to death for the 2010 murder of 17-year-old Norma Lopez as she walked from school to a friend's house in Moreno Valley. Jesse Perez Torres was found guilty on March 13, 2019, of one count of first-degree murder and jurors found the special circumstance of murder during the commission of a felony, in this case kidnapping, to be true. A week later, the same jurors determined that Torres should be sentenced to death. Judge Bernard Schwartz affirmed the jury's decision and sentenced Torres to death.

Norma was kidnapped on July 15, 2010, as she walked from summer school at Valley View High School in Moreno Valley to a friend's house. Five days later, her body was found in a dirt field about three miles away. Torres was later identified as the suspect and was charged in October 2011 by the District Attorney's Office with Norma's murder. At the time of the crime, Torres lived in the Moreno Valley neighborhood where the murder and kidnapping happened. The case, RIF1105550, was prosecuted by Deputy DAs Michael Kersse (now retired) and Kevin Beecham.



Norma Lopez, 17

Image provided by Riverside County Sheriff's Department.

## TWO PEOPLE SHOT IN THEATER CHARGES FILED IN CORONA CASE

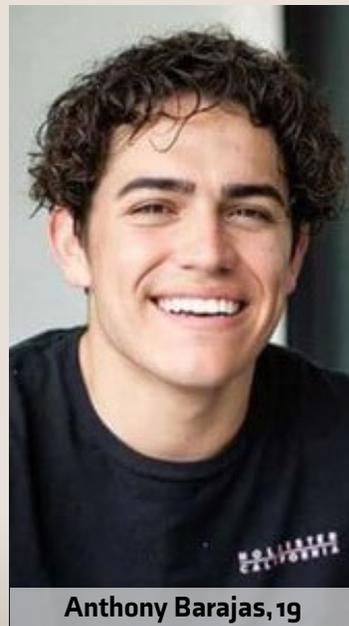
In July 2021, the Riverside County District Attorney's Office filed charges against a man accused of shooting and killing two people in a Corona movie theater July 26, 2021. Joseph Jimenez of the unincorporated area of Corona, has been charged with two counts of murder with a sentencing enhancement of personal use of a firearm causing death, a sentencing enhancement of personally inflicting great bodily injury and a sentencing enhancement of personal use of a firearm causing great bodily injury. The DA's Office has also filed two special circumstance allegations -- lying in wait and multiple murders. Those special circumstance allegations make Jimenez eligible for the death penalty.

On July 26, 2021, the victims in this case, Rylee Goodrich, 18, and Anthony Barajas, 19, both of Corona, attended the 9:35 p.m. showing of a movie at the Regal Edwards Theatre at the Crossings at Corona shopping center. After the movie ended, theater employees went to clean the auditorium and made the horrific discovery that the two victims had been shot in the head. Goodrich was pronounced dead at the scene and Barajas was taken to a nearby hospital where he later died.

The case, RIF2103205, is being prosecuted by Deputy DA Kevin Beecham of the DA's Homicide Trial Team.



Joseph Jimenez charged with two counts of murder.



Anthony Barajas, 19



Rylee Goodrich, 18

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF

## The Bureau of Investigation

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Joe DelGuidice  
Chief of Investigators

The Bureau of Investigation is the investigative arm of the District Attorney's Office, comprised more than 115 sworn DA investigators, and more than 70 non-sworn support team members which includes investigative technicians, examiners, forensic accountants and technicians, computer forensic specialists, audio-video technicians, dispatchers, and clerical support. We provide a full range of professional law enforcement services in our effort to keep the residents and visitors of Riverside County safe.

The Bureau conducts criminal investigations, prepares and serves warrants, collects additional evidence for prosecution, and arrests suspects. We also detect and locate witnesses, conduct interviews, and serve subpoenas. Our work takes us not just throughout the county, but also throughout the state, country, and in certain cases, the world.

The Bureau's management structure is comprised of a Chief Investigator, two Assistant Chief Investigators, six Commanders, and 17 Supervising Investigators. There are more than 50 different investigative assignments, including homicide, gangs, drugs, crimes against children, sexual assault, white-collar crimes, environmental protection, and many more. We also lead or participate on a variety of innovative law enforcement task forces with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, such as fugitive apprehension, organized crime involving gangs and cartels, cannabis regulation, auto theft, human trafficking, and more. All of this makes us one of, if not the most successful and progressive DA bureaus in the State of California.

The following examples are but a glimpse into the heroic efforts that these law enforcement professionals undertake daily.

## EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT

### EDD & Fraud Task Forces

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Riverside County District Attorney Mike Hestrin serves as the Team Leader for the Southern California Working Group Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Unemployment Insurance Fraud Task Force. The task force was formed to combat Employment Development Department (EDD) fraud in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The State of California responded to the pandemic and offered much needed financial assistance through EDD benefits. The benefits helped support those who lost their jobs or had a reduction in work hours and provided financial assistance to stressed businesses. Many families relied on these benefits for basic living expenses.

As the pandemic progressed, more and more Californians applied for EDD economic relief benefits. Unfortunately, the easy availability of EDD money, funded by California taxpayers, attracted many fraudsters and identity thieves who used unsuspecting victims' stolen personal information to obtain EDD payments. These victims only became aware of the crime when they filed legitimate unemployment claims or were notified by their employer.

Another massive source of EDD fraud involves California state prisoners and county jail inmates. These inmates conspired with criminals on the outside to file

falsified EDD applications. These outside facilitators would withdraw money using EDD debit cards and share the fraudulently obtained benefits with the prisoners. The loss is estimated to be in the billions of taxpayer dollars which ultimately may never reach the neediest Californians.

In late 2020, DA Hestrin tasked the Bureau of Investigation with fighting EDD fraud by conducting criminal investigations. DA Investigators are working tirelessly, side-by-side with our prosecutors and allied law enforcement agencies, as part of the statewide EDD fraud task force. The investigations are complex and require countless hours of painstaking document review and financial analysis to identify fraudulent activity.

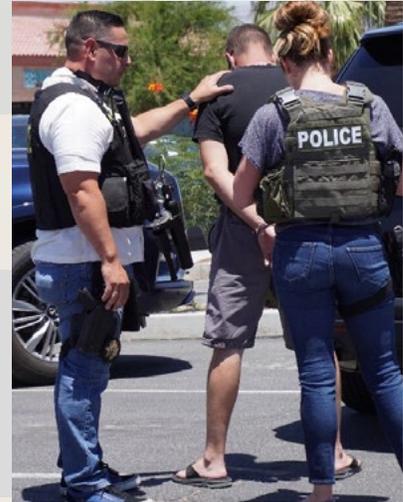
Our team is currently investigating more than 40 active EDD fraud cases. The goal is to bring criminals to justice and recover stolen EDD funds. To that end, our investigators have arrested multiple suspects, served more than 100 search warrants, and seized hundreds of thousands of dollars in ill-gotten assets including luxury goods purchased with fraudulently obtained benefits.



Suspects of fraud detained in Riverside County.

# RCCET

## Riverside County Child Exploitation Team



**District Attorney investigators operate in the field.**

In June 2020, the Bureau identified a dramatic increase in the number of online predators targeting children in Riverside County with the nefarious purpose of meeting in-person and engaging in sexual activity.

To facilitate the fast identification and apprehension of these suspects, the Bureau of Investigation developed the Riverside County Child Exploitation Team (RCCET). This proactive approach is a Bureau-led task force comprised of investigators from the DA Bureau of Investigation and other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

Since 2006, the Bureau of Investigation has been directly involved in monitoring registered sex offenders and investigating internet cyber-tips in Riverside County. Proactively pursuing sexual predators online is among RCCET's highest priorities. Additionally, internet cyber-tips are forwarded to the Bureau of Investigation by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) from their cyber-tip database. One of the many complex cases this unit has worked involves an incident which occurred late last year.

On December 4, 2020, RCCET began investigating multiple cyber-tips involving a suspect. This 36-year-old man was uploading numerous images and videos of himself having sexual relations with several underage females. Investigators discovered that he had gained access to two of these individuals by posing as their father. Subsequent investigation positively identified the suspect and his place of residence.

During the extensive investigation, numerous victims were identified including the suspect's own daughters. Investigators learned that the youngest daughter—and most recent victim—was in Mexico with him on vacation. Through the assistance of an ex-wife, investigators learned the suspect was aware of the investigation and was taking active measures to avoid apprehension in Southern California.

On December 9, 2020, RCCET investigators located a family in Long Beach, California that was actively helping the suspect avoid arrest. During his flight to avoid justice, he had abandoned his personal property including a cell phone which the investigators had been tracking. Through further investigation it was determined he had been dropped off at a bus terminal in Huntington Park, intending to take a bus to Mexico and disappear. While en route to Mexico, the bus stopped in the City of Anaheim, and with the assistance of the Anaheim Police Department, the suspect was detained.

The suspect was then arrested by RCCET investigators and returned to Riverside County. Although the nature of his crimes has undoubtedly caused lasting damage to the victims, the dedicated work of RCCET investigators brought him to justice and ended the nightmare they were experiencing at his hands.

The Riverside County District Attorney's Office - Bureau of Investigation is proud of this unit, and all of those that serve or work with our partner agencies. We will continue to dedicate resources to remove these monsters from our streets.

RCCET consists of law enforcement officers and investigators dedicated to proactively monitoring and tracking registered sex offenders to ensure their compliance with registration requirements, and to protect our children through community education and the identification, apprehension, and prosecution of those who commit internet crimes against children. The task force works in partnership with the following agencies: Riverside County Sheriff's Department, the Beaumont, Blythe, Desert Hot Springs, Menifee, Murrieta, and Riverside police departments, California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, FBI, the Inland Regional Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking task force, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Marshals Service. RCCET is an affiliate of the San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children task force. For more information about RCCET or sex offender information and internet safety tips, please visit [www.RivCoSAFE.org](http://www.RivCoSAFE.org).

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

### The Division of Victim Services

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Melissa Donaldson  
Director of Victim Services

The dominating factor for all of us has been COVID-19 and how to navigate our way to continue to serve crime victims during this very challenging time. As designated essential workers, the Division of Victim Services continued to provide services throughout the pandemic, albeit differently due to the use of technology, but they were delivered! Out of all crisis comes opportunity and that opportunity for those of us in advocacy was the ability to continue to serve victims while evaluating our delivery systems to ensure help was delivered. The ability to access more online training than ever before helps ensure we maintain a professional staff that is educated on trauma informed service delivery for the citizens we serve.

A very exciting addition to our commitment to trauma-informed care was securing our first K-9 facility dog, Rachel. Research shows the addition of facility dogs into the justice system results in less trauma for victims and witnesses, and Rachel has also been a benefit to our staff. The work done here in Victim Services is stressful and heart wrenching and seeing Rachel's wagging tail sometimes makes all the difference for all she comes in contact with. We know our youngest victims can recount trauma with less stress when K-9 Rachel is with them and because of the positive effects on child victims we are adding another K-9 facility dog in 2022.

Professionalism, knowledge and compassion are the attributes that are required by all staff working in the Division of Victim Services. We have successfully built a team with those attributes and more. Due to the changes internally, it was recognized by county officials that there was a need to move from a para-professional classification to a professional one. This change brought respect, pay and acknowledgment of the importance of the work we do as part of the prosecution team. This division is the social services arm of our office. Riverside County is now the model for the state and perhaps nation. Once the best kept secret of the Riverside County District Attorney's Office, the Division of Victim Services is now recognized as critical to helping victims of crime and our communities in the prevention, intervention and treatment of those affected by crime.

## HELPING VICTIM'S FAMILY AFTER MURDER OF TEENAGE GIRL

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In December 2020, the man who kidnapped and murdered 17-year-old Norma Lopez was sentenced to death. But that disposition in Norma's case took a decade to finally happen and our Victim Services Specialist was with the family the entire time.

In July 2010 the case of a missing 17-year-old girl resulted in significant media attention as well as concern from the public. In the early hours of July 15, 2010, Norma Lopez was doing what many teens do -- innocently walking to a friend's house from summer school. But she was never seen again. The Lopez family was devastated when their daughter went missing and ultimately it was determined that she had been the victim of a kidnapping and murder. The family was consumed with grief and sadness at the loss of their daughter. Victim Services Specialist Yadira Vega took this tragic case and began working with the family even before our office filed any charges. Victim Service Specialists have a very challenging job to do especially when a young person is missing. Yadira met with the family to explain the process of the investigation of a missing child alongside local law enforcement and the FBI. The Lopez family was in a state of shock and despair and relied on Yadira being able to provide trauma-informed services, and to assist the family in navigating the criminal justice system. The case

unfortunately turned from a missing person to a murder investigation when Norma's body was found. Yadira was asked to help the family with making funeral arrangements. Yadira's commitment to and concern for the family compelled her to attend the funeral to continue to provide support and care.

This criminal case went on for a decade from 2010 to 2020 and through almost 100 court hearings Yadira was there, supporting and accompanying the family. During those 10 years, there were changes in personnel and even Yadira switched assignments, but she always requested to keep the case and provided the family with much-needed consistency. Yadira always worked hard to assist the family in understanding the many hearings, meetings and evidence that happened. The trial for Norma's killer went on for two months and everyday Yadira was always there with the family. Yadira not only coordinated the many witnesses that testified during the trial she also provided critical court support for the grief-stricken family. She explained to them in Spanish what had happened in court so that the family knew and understood everything that had transpired. Yadira's decade long commitment to this case and this family is an example of the passion and professionalism we have come to expect from our Victim Services Specialists.

# BUTANE HONEY OIL EXPLOSION CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM



**Members of the Crisis Response Team respond to a butane honey oil explosion.**



**Victim Services Specialists of the Crisis Response Team**



**Leaders of DVS and SAFE FJC**

On March 1, 2021, the DA's Division of Victim Services (DVS) received an urgent call from the Riverside Police Department (RPD) requesting the assistance of the Crisis Response Team (CRT). DVS Supervisor Jeanette Hunter took the call from the RPD sergeant who was at the scene of a butane honey oil lab explosion.

The explosion caused a fire and ongoing hazards impacted the surrounding apartments and its tenants. Jeanette supervises the Crisis Response Team which is comprised of specially trained Victim Services Specialists who deploy and respond to mass victimization crimes to assist victims and witnesses.

Thankfully no one was killed or injured in the explosion, but the structure of the apartment building was damaged causing the surrounding tenants to be displaced. Riverside Police Department requested emergency assistance for a family of three, including a 5-year-old child. The family had remained there with police and said they had nowhere to go. Assistance was also requested to contact additional victims who had fled the scene. At the direction of DVS Director Melissa Donaldson, Jeanette deployed two CRT Victim Services Specialists to meet with RPD and the family so that emergency resources could be provided. Jeanette coordinated follow-up assistance for this family and the other tenants through the American Red Cross.

Victim Services Specialist Denise Diamond and Claims Unit Supervisor Tara Fuller contacted three other families providing emergency assistance with temporary lodging and vouchers for groceries and necessities since they were unable to access their belongings. The Division of Victim Services worked closely with the Red Cross which assigned a case manager to the families to provide ongoing assistance with lodging while their apartments were uninhabitable. The DVS Crisis Response Team works closely with various partners to provide a coordinated response with law enforcement, the Red Cross, and California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB) to provide immediate assistance to victims. The Crisis Response Team is made possible through the support of special grant funding from the California Office of Emergency Services.



## **K-9 CHEWIE**

### **BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

There is a member of the DA's Bureau of Investigation that loves to meet new people, chew on branches, and play "tug-o-war." But he also is very good at finding electronic device that suspects, like those involved in child pornography, try to hide from authorities.

Meet Chewie, an electronic scent detection canine with the Riverside County Child Exploitation Team (RCCET), which is led by our Bureau of Investigation. Chewie is an English Labrador who joined our office in August 2020.

Chewie is specially trained to locate electronic devices - such as laptops, thumb drives, SD cards, external hard drives, cell phones, tablets, etc. - used to store digital media. One of the important missions of the RCCET task force is investigating crimes committed against children using the internet and other electronic communications including possessing, distributing, and producing child pornography; sextortion of minors; and adults seeking sex with a minor. That's where Chewie's skills truly help.

DA Sr. Investigator Joel Pabelico II was selected in 2020 to be Chewie's handler. "Being Chewie's handler is a lot of work. It's fun and tiring at the same time," Pabelico said. "I am extremely proud to be his handler because of the work we are doing. Knowing that Chewie has the ability to locate electronic storage devices that may contain videos or images of child sexual assault material which can help convict a suspect and ultimately save a child - there is no greater satisfaction."

When our Bureau of Investigation determined there was a need for an electronic scent detection (ESD) canine to assist the task force they found Operation Underground Railroad, a non-profit organization that agreed to sponsor an ESD canine. Chewie was deployed 53 times in 2021 when RCCET was conducting operations. Chewie will often find devices that have also been found by investigators, but there were at least two electronic storage devices that Chewie found that had not been located by investigators. Chewie is also utilized as a "comfort" canine during these operations when children are also at these traumatic scenes.

RCCET is a team of local, state, and federal law enforcement officers and investigators dedicated to proactively monitoring and tracking registered sex offenders to ensure their compliance with registration requirements, and to protect our children through community education and the identification, apprehension, and prosecution of those who commit internet crimes against children. The task force works in partnership with the following agencies: Riverside County Sheriff's Department, the Beaumont, Blythe, Desert Hot Springs, Menifee, Murrieta, and Riverside police departments, California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, FBI, the Inland Regional Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking task force, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Marshals Service. RCCET is an affiliate of the San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children task force. For more information about RCCET or sex offender information and internet safety tips, please visit [www.RivCoSAFE.org](http://www.RivCoSAFE.org).



## **K-9 RACHEL**

### **DIVISION OF VICTIM SERVICES**

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K-9 Rachel joined the Riverside County DA's Office on Nov. 12, 2020. She is the first facility dog with the Division of Victim Services. K-9 Rachel's mission is to work directly with victims and witnesses to help them through trauma from victimization and provide some comfort as they move forward in the criminal justice system.

Rachel can help children get through meetings and interviews that can be very stressful for them, especially if they must talk about what has happened to them. These meetings are necessary and can be emotionally difficult for all concerned, but K-9 Rachel helps the victims manage their stress – especially if they are testifying in court.

K-9 Rachel is partnered with her certified handler, Rosa Gutierrez, who is also an experienced Victim Services Specialist with the Division of Victim Services. Raised and trained by Assistance Dogs of the West, a service dog organization that is accredited by Assistance Dogs International, K-9 Rachel has been specifically trained as a Courthouse Facility Dog which is different than a therapy dog.

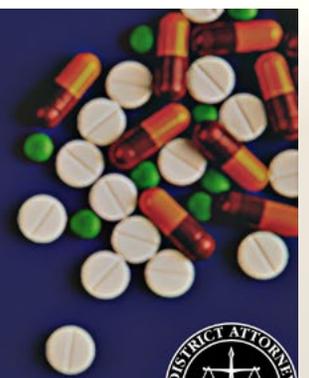
She sits quietly under the witness stand with distraught and upset individuals as they testify, and can handle the intense, emotional environment of a courtroom during a preliminary hearing, jury trial, or sentencing hearing without being with her handler. The leash can be held by our young victims, which brings comfort and a sense of control. During interviews, K-9 Rachel and her handler work together with the Deputy District Attorney and Victim Services Specialist assigned to the case to use K-9 Rachel's special training for a more trauma-informed environment.

She supports the prosecutor and Victim Services Specialist in building rapport with the victim or witness. This could simply include providing K-9 Rachel's quiet, calming presence and empathy, or creating some relaxing games by using the more than 90 cues to which K-9 Rachel has been trained to respond. K-9 Rachel even has her own coloring book which children love to use and take home.

Participating in criminal justice proceedings is often re-traumatizing for victims of crime and arguably can be one of the most stressful events a child may experience. The Division of Victim Services is looking forward to growing its Facility Dog Program, expanding the reach and impact of these unique services throughout the county.

# What's in your pills? Fentanyl kills.

Illegally obtained pills may contain Fentanyl.



**RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

HOW MUCH DOES IT TAKE TO KILL?

**A lethal dose of fentanyl is 2mg.**

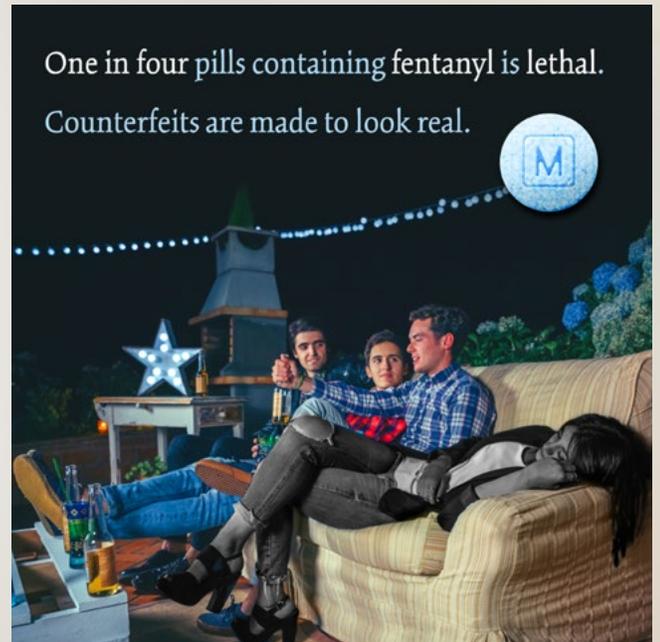
Fentanyl is 50x stronger than heroin and 100x stronger than morphine.



Morphine  
Heroin  
Fentanyl



One in four pills containing fentanyl is lethal.  
Counterfeits are made to look real.



**Fentanyl** is 50x stronger than heroin and 100x stronger than morphine.  
More than **150 people die each day** due to overdoses related to synthetic opioids.  
California has seen a **40% spike in fatalities** compared to the previous 12 months.

It's not a drug.  
It's a poison.

**1 Lethal Dose**



Penny for scale.

## THE DANGER OF FENTANYL LEADS TO NEW OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

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In 2020, Matt Capelouto contacted our office. He shared the heartbreaking story of how his daughter, Alexandra, died from fentanyl poisoning. It is then that our office realized the impact that fentanyl was having in our community.

We quickly learned that fentanyl changes the paradigm of drug use. What the public generally thinks about the dangers of drug use was no longer entirely accurate. Fentanyl was killing people – including young people like Alexandra – in our community at an alarming rate.

Fentanyl is so deadly that high school and college students who were just experimenting with drugs and took one pill were dying. In many cases, they had no idea that fentanyl was in the pill or illicit drug that they were taking. Most people do not know what fentanyl is, or how deadly it is, until it is too late. Once we realized the impact fentanyl was having and the limited information available to the public, we started our commitment to informing the community about the dangers of fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a synthetic, manmade opiate that can be easily produced in a lab or on the streets. Fentanyl is less expensive than other opiates and is highly addictive. Fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine.

Fentanyl is being added to counterfeit pills and misrepresented as prescription items like Xanax, Percocet, and Oxycodone. Fentanyl is also mixed with other street drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and even marijuana. It only takes two milligrams (1/2500 of a teaspoon) to be a lethal dose. In 2016, Riverside County had two fentanyl-related deaths and in 2020 we had 227. That is a startling 800 percent increase.

Our office recognizes that fentanyl is terrorizing our community. We are dedicated to combatting the fentanyl crisis with a three-prong approach: education, prevention, and prosecution.

In 2021, we created a social media campaign “What’s in your pills? Fentanyl Kills” to educate the public about the dangers of fentanyl which includes several informative graphics and videos. We partnered with local community organizations like the Corona Chamber of Commerce to provide vehicle bumper stickers with our phrase “What’s in your pills? Fentanyl kills.” The bumper stickers were placed on official DA’s Office vehicles and were also provided to the public at various community outreach events and presentations. The same image and message seen on the bumper stickers is also on a freeway billboard that is being placed in various locations across the county.

On a countywide level, our office is an active participant in the Board of Supervisors-directed Multidisciplinary Committee for Fentanyl Response. Our office also is collaborating with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, and the San Bernardino District Attorney’s Office to implement law enforcement trainings, public service announcements, and school presentations in the Inland Empire.

Our Crime Prevention Unit recognized the importance of educating our youth about the dangers of fentanyl. They created a presentation aimed at the high school student audience that includes various videos to grab and hold their attention. At the end of each presentation, they have a parent share how they have lost their child to fentanyl poisoning. These presentations have been given to students and parents both virtually and in-person across Riverside County.

In addition to our public outreach efforts, our Bureau of Investigation has played a vital role in prevention and enforcement. The Riverside County Gang Impact Team (GIT), which is supervised by the DA’s Bureau of Investigation, has seized fentanyl from dealers in our community on multiple different occasions. From Feb. 4 to March 10, 2021, GIT seized 10 kilos, or about 22 pounds, of fentanyl in Riverside County. That equates to about 5.5 million lethal doses. To put that into perspective, Riverside County’s population is 2.5 million people. In that short period, our investigators seized enough fentanyl to kill every person in Riverside County. Twice.

Our office is dedicated to taking a tough stance on prosecuting fentanyl dealers and those who provide drugs mixed with fentanyl. Our office was the first DA’s Office in Southern California and among the few offices to criminally charge drug dealers with murder for selling or providing fentanyl-laced drugs to someone who dies from ingesting it. At the time of publication, our office has filed 12 cases, charging 13 defendants with fentanyl-related murder.

Fentanyl is a new epidemic. The Riverside County DA’s Office is dedicated to informing, preventing, and prosecuting others to keep our community safe.

To learn more about the dangers of fentanyl, visit our website: [rivcoda.org/dangers-of-fentanyl](http://rivcoda.org/dangers-of-fentanyl)

## SAFE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTERS COMPREHENSIVE VICTIM ASSISTANCE

Over the last 16 years, the Riverside County SAFE Family Justice Centers (SAFE FJC) have been serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, child abuse, human trafficking, and youth who are at risk by the thousands with comprehensive multiagency services under one roof.

Riverside County was the first county in the United States to have more than one “Family Justice Center” and now serves as home to four regional centers. Three of the SAFE FJC office locations are hosted by the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office. This unique public and private partnership serves as a nationwide best practice service delivery model for victims of crime and ensures that victim safety is at the forefront in the pursuit of justice. The fourth center is sponsored by the City of Temecula and has been serving Southwest Riverside County since 1998, proving that local government agency sponsorships are invaluable to the sustainability of nonprofit victim service providers.

The SAFE Family Justice Centers were established to help increase victim reporting to law enforcement, reduce domestic violence-related homicide rates, provide

confidential services, address the needs of underserved populations, and provide more streamlined access to victim services in the community. While the centers are not a part of the District Attorney’s Office, these nonprofit centers are uniquely located within proximity to the District Attorney’s Office, courts, jails, and law enforcement agencies to help victims who are navigating the criminal justice system. The goal of SAFE FJC is to deliver urgently needed and confidential services to the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults who have become victims of abuse in our community and to help close the gap in services for those who must navigate the criminal justice system.

On average, a victim of abuse may be required to navigate upwards of 10 different systems and service providers at one time to obtain help that is critically necessary to support their safety, healing, and security following an act of violence. The SAFE Family Justice Center is designed to provide centralized services to the community so that residents do not have to retell their story multiple times and travel across the county with limited resources to obtain help while seeking justice. Working within each center, victims will find that they can access services from confidential domestic violence advocates, rape crisis centers, law enforcement officials, social workers, district attorney’s office prosecutors, victim service specialists, courthouse facility dogs, investigators, counselors, and other community-based organizations. Individuals seeking services obtain immediate and long-term relief services that are unique to their needs.

The SAFE Family Justice Centers experience high family violence recidivism rates and 25 percent of the client service population represents children ages 0-17 who have been directly abused or witnessed violence. Children exposed to violence and other adversities are substantially more likely to smoke, misuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in high-risk sexual behavior. They also have higher rates of anxiety, depression, other mental health problems, and suicide. It is a priority of the SAFE Family Justice Centers to not only treat people with immediate intervention needs but to provide prevention and education services as well. In 2020, SAFE Family Justice Centers began a partnership with the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office Crime Prevention Unit to provide in-depth case management, stability, and response services to at-risk children and their families. This partnership serves as an arm of the Riverside County Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council which is comprised of several government and community-based organizations that work together to provide prevention and intervention services for youth who are at risk and have experienced adverse childhood experiences.

Forging the collaborative relationships of both government and community-based organizations is the foundation for providing quality services to Riverside County residents. This multidisciplinary model increases service provider awareness and connects victims with expedited access to services.



**Students browse toys, school supplies, and personal products during an event held by SAFE FJC.**



**DDA Justin Morrill plays board games with students participating in CPU's Boys Council program.**



**SAFE Family Justice Centers teamed with Tame Barber Studio in Temecula to provide local families free back-to-school haircuts and school supplies.**



**Members of the Riverside SAFE Family Justice Center and the District Attorney's Division of Victim Services receive a proclamation from the Riverside County Board of Supervisors for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.**

## CRIME PREVENTION UNIT PROGRAMS PROVEN TO HELP MINORS

The most effective way to keep our communities safe is to prevent crime before it ever happens. That was District Attorney Michael Hestrin's purpose in creating the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU). Since its inception in 2015, the CPU has worked collaboratively with local schools, community-based organizations, and law enforcement partners to help at-risk youth avoid any involvement with the criminal justice system.

Our goal is to help young people stay in school, achieve academic success, and develop positive life skills. That is why the CPU has developed programs and strategies designed to suppress crime, prevent victimization, and address the disparate needs of at-risk youth and their families.

**School Attendance Review Boards (SARB):** There is a proven correlation between poor school attendance and the likelihood of criminal justice system involvement. Researchers and educators have long recognized that students who miss school at an early age are more likely to struggle academically and, in later years, drop out entirely. Studies have confirmed that for low-income elementary students who have missed five days of school, each additional school day missed decreased the student's chance of graduating by 7 percent. Without a high school diploma, these children are more likely to end up unemployed and at risk of becoming involved in crime, both as victims and offenders.

That is why, even during the COVID-19 pandemic and remote online learning, CPU attorneys and victim service specialists increased their collaborations with local school districts. By working with educators and implementing recognized best practices to reduce chronic absenteeism, there was a positive increase in school attendance for more than two-thirds of families that met with CPU members and school district representatives during the 2020-21 school year.

**Youth Empowerment and Safety (YES) Presentations:** "YES" presentations provide youth empowerment and anti-victimization education spanning a wide range of critical social issues like bullying, internet safety, fentanyl awareness, human trafficking, and teen dating/domestic violence. In 2020-2021, CPU members provided 222 YES presentations to more than 15,000 residents.

**Gang Awareness, Mentorship, and Education (GAME):** We are dedicated to reducing youth drug abuse and gang violence through the District Attorney's GAME program. As a testament to its effectiveness in 2020-2021, 98.1 percent of survey respondents said that GAME presentations made them want to stay away from gangs and 98.6 percent of respondents said the presentations made them want to abstain from illegal drug use.

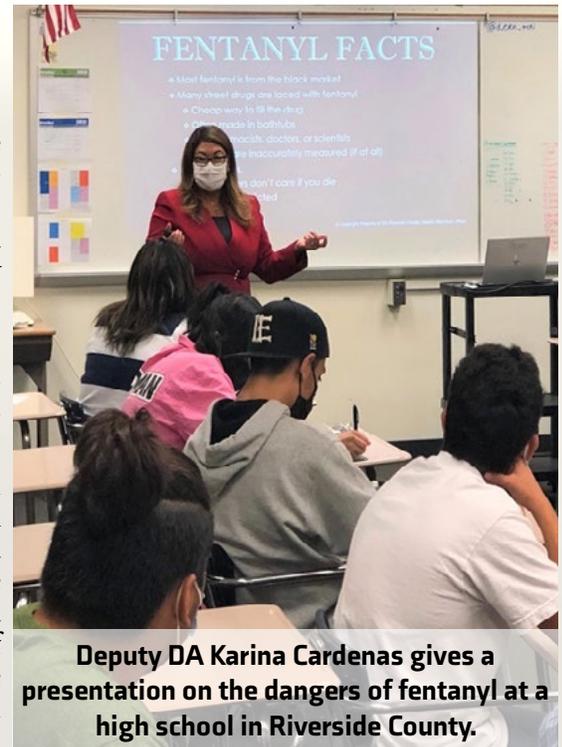
**Aware to Care Exchange:** In 2020 and 2021, the CPU partnered with the Riverside County Office of Education, first responders, and school districts to create the Aware to Care Exchange. The Aware to Care Exchange is a notification system supporting children exposed to violence and other adverse experiences. The system allows first responders (e.g., paramedics, fire, police) who encounter trauma-affected children to send a notification to the child's school district. The notifications do not provide confidential details about the incidents or identify the referring agencies. However, the Aware to Care Exchange alerts a child's school site that the student experienced a traumatic event and may require support from educators and counselors.

School staff can then observe the child's school performance and provide trauma-sensitive services and interventions if they believe it will be helpful and appropriate. In 2021, the Aware to Care Exchange received over 170 notifications of children experiencing trauma in our communities. Those notifications spanned 80 different schools across 20 Riverside County school districts.

**De-Escalation, Assistance, and Resource Team (DART):** Created and implemented during 2020-2021 in the Moreno Valley Unified School District, DART provides preventive anti-violence and anti-victimization education. DART also deploys an experienced Deputy DA and victim services specialist to school sites in response to school-related traumatic events. They provide students with social and emotional support as well as referrals to community resources.

**REStoring Opportunities After Rehabilitation (RESTOAR):** The District Attorney's Office is steadfastly dedicated to vigorous and ethical prosecution of every case. We also recognize a responsibility to help former offenders reintegrate back into society and make positive contributions to our communities.

The District Attorney's RESTOAR helps justice-involved adults move beyond their past transgressions. In 2020-2021, RESTOAR spearheaded its countywide collaboration which connects adults with resource providers who directly assist those with criminal backgrounds. RESTOAR attorneys also provide free webinars addressing how to obtain court relief for criminal convictions and how fair employment laws apply to those with criminal records.



Deputy DA Karina Cardenas gives a presentation on the dangers of fentanyl at a high school in Riverside County.



**Deputy DA Hunter Taylor gives a presentation on CPU.**



**Members of SAFE FJC and CPU**



**Deputy DA Karina Cardenas gives a presentation on human trafficking at a high school in Riverside County.**



**Deputy DA Carlos Corona and Victim Services Specialist Marshall Hamilton pose for a photo with students participating in CPU's Christmas Carol Field Trip in Temecula.**



## RECRUITING PROGRAM 2020-2021

The District Attorney is firmly committed to hiring only the most outstanding and ethical attorneys to serve the People of Riverside County. One of the primary ways the office ensures it is recruiting only the highest caliber of attorneys is through its Law School Summer Externship pipeline-to-employment program.

Each year, in anticipation of the Summer Externship Program, the District Attorney's Office embarks on an aggressive recruitment campaign. In both the Fall and Spring semesters of the law school year, the DA's Office recruits at every law school in California and Arizona, as well as dozens of law schools across the country, and at numerous large law school consortium public interest career fairs. Additionally, to ensure the DA's Office is as diverse and vibrant as Riverside County, the office actively collaborates with various affinity groups that advocate for groups that are historically underrepresented in law enforcement or the legal community. The District Attorney's Summer Externship Program has developed a reputation in the law school community as one of the most elite training grounds for future prosecutors in the nation. During the 2020-2021 recruitment season alone, the DA's Office interviewed 369 law students for approximately 40 summer law clerk positions.

Starting the Tuesday after Memorial Day, these high-performing students begin their clerkship with a week-long Extern Training Academy that includes courses on criminal procedure, evidence, legal research and writing, police and prosecutorial misconduct prevention, and oral advocacy, among other topics. In addition to classroom learning, they also participate in a research and writing workshop that has them practice drafting a sample legal motion and conducting a practice preliminary hearing. After this intensive training academy, they are assigned to our office locations in Riverside, Indio, Murrieta, and Banning for the duration of their 10-week externship.

While externing, first-year students assist attorneys with true legal research and writing assignments from various units throughout the office. Under the supervision of experienced prosecutors, first-year students can expect to draft several trial briefs, motions in oppositions to suppress evidence, objective research memorandums analyzing novel or unique legal issues, letters to the California State Board of Parole opposing the early release of a violent convicted felon, and various other similar legal assignments. First-year law students also engage in an oral advocacy training program weekly throughout the summer. At the conclusion of the summer, the highest performing first-year clerks are invited to participate in our second-year clerkship.

Second-year law students must be certified by the California State Bar to appear in court and appear in court they do. While the first-year program teaches first-year students the fundamentals of legal analysis in research and writing, the second-year program is centered on combining those fundamentals with real life oral advocacy in court. Under the supervision and with the guidance of experienced prosecutors, second-year clerks conduct preliminary hearings, argue legal motions, negotiate with defense counsel, advocate to the court in chambers conferences, and many even conduct jury trials either as first chair in select misdemeanor cases or as second chair in felony cases.

The summer concludes with the countywide Extern Closing Argument Competition for all first- and second-year clerks. Since 2007, this competition is not only a staple of the externship program, but also the highlight for most extern's summer. All externs give a closing argument and throughout the week top competitors advance further in the competition, receiving new police reports, exhibits, and witness statements to incorporate throughout their preparations. The final two competitors in the "championship round" give their closing argument to a panel of judges. Past judges have included the elected District Attorney, his Chief and Assistant District Attorneys, the Chief of the Bureau of Investigation, the Director of Victim Services, Superior Court Judges, Associate Justices of the 4th District Court of Appeals, and the Riverside County Public Defender.

Throughout this essentially 10-week on-the-job interview, each extern's ethics, legal acumen, research and writing ability, oral advocacy skill, commitment to excellence, dedication to public service, and work ethic are evaluated. Those that have demonstrated they meet the highest standards in all these categories will earn an offer to become a Riverside County Deputy District Attorney upon graduating law school and passing the bar exam.

# VETERANS TREATMENT COURT CONSIDERATION FOR INVISIBLE WOUNDS

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

These are just a few of the invisible wounds of military service that the Riverside County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) seeks to treat through a multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach to alternative sentencing. This court seeks to bolster public safety by treating the physical and invisible wounds of those who have entered the criminal justice system as a result of their dedicated service.

The Riverside County District Attorney's Office is joined by other partners including Riverside County Superior Court, Riverside County Probation Department, Department of Veterans Affairs, Riverside University Health Systems (RUHS), Riverside County Public Defender, and Reaching New Heights Foundation. The DA's Office has one dedicated Deputy District Attorney assigned to the department who is tasked with evaluating the eligibility and suitability of each case and each Veteran while ensuring that victim's rights continue to be a priority for the life of the case.

A defendant is eligible for VTC if the defendant was/is a member of the United States military, the defendant suffers from a mental health problem or substance abuse problem as a result of that service, and the defendant committed the criminal offense as a result of that service.

Once a case is referred for VTC consideration, the defendant is ordered to participate in a psychological assessment by a clinical therapist from RUHS and a case worker from Veterans Affairs. The Probation Department performs a risk assessment. Those reports are provided to the committee for review and discussion. An eligibility hearing is conducted at the Riverside Hall of Justice in Department 31. Victims are invited to present an impact statement to the court or may provide a statement in writing through the District Attorney's representative. The judge makes the ultimate decision to accept or reject the

defendant based on the recommendations of the District Attorney, Public Defender, and assessment team. If the defendant is accepted into VTC, the defendant must plead guilty/agree to a reinstatement of probation.

The program's length is a minimum of 12 months for misdemeanors and 18 months for felony matters. All participants are required to complete comprehensive individualized treatment based on the participant's needs, including court-mandated classes for anger management, impaired driving, or intimate partner violence. Frequent random drug/alcohol test results are used to evaluate progress. A dedicated probation officer closely supervises each of the Veterans. All participants attend frequent court progress hearings to ensure continued judicial intervention. The goal of the program is to provide ancillary services that prevent recidivism and achieve long term recovery.

The program boasts hundreds of graduates who have transformed their lives and returned as contributing members of our community. Here are just some examples: For the Vietnam War Veteran who has suffered from alcohol abuse disorder for decades, resulting in a felony charge for driving under the influence causing injury—this program has helped him attain sobriety and reunite with his family. For the three-time combat Marine who has suffered from PTSD, resulting in a felony domestic violence charge—this program has helped him acquire coping skills so he can regain the trust of his wife and his children. For the Army Veteran who was the victim of military sexual trauma during her service, resulting in a prescription drug addiction—this program helped her attain sobriety and maintain her nursing license.

The VTC has ensured that each Veteran has met their obligations to themselves, the court, and their community. The Riverside County District Attorney's Office is doing its part to support the VTC mission to serve those who have served through their military service.



Veterans salute during Veteran's Court graduation ceremony.



The Hon. Mark Johnson speaks to a graduating veteran.

## GERRY LOPEZ RECEIVES LEGACY AWARD

In 2021, Managing Deputy District Attorney Gerry Lopez was recognized with a Legacy Award from the Riverside County Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Commission (JJDC) for his outstanding service and dedication to youth.

Gerry was a prosecutor in our office for 31 years and supervised our Crime Prevention Unit, which was the first unit of its type when it was formed by DA Hestrin when he took office in 2015. Gerry Lopez is well known and respected in the community for the crime prevention work he has done with youth spanning over three decades.

Managing DDA Lopez created the Parent Power presentation, which has been recognized as a best in practice program by the White House and Harvard University. Gerry has received numerous awards, including Juvenile Prosecutor of the Year in 1999, recipient of the Chief Probation Officer's Award in 2012, the Riverside County Office of Education's Community Partnership Award, and most recently the Michael A. Hestrin Award by the SAFE Family Justice Center. Gerry Lopez retired in December of 2021, and he certainly has left a legacy in Riverside County.



Retired Managing DDA Gerry Lopez received a Legacy Award from JJDC.

## SUE STEDING & KEVIN RUDDY COUNTY SERVICE MEMORIALIZED

Certain individuals have made an indelible mark on the Riverside County District Attorney's Office and its mission. Two of those people are Sue Steding and Kevin Ruddy. On Nov. 8, 2021, DA Mike Hestrin recognized them for their enduring service with the unveiling of plaques honoring them in The Grover Trask Training Center in our downtown Riverside office.

Sue Steding served in our office from 1973 to her retirement in 2010 and was the first female prosecutor in our desert region. Her trailblazing didn't stop there as then-District Attorney Grover Trask appointed her our office's first female Assistant District Attorney in 1987. She also was the first person to be "second-in-command" serving as the Chief Assistant DA.

During her 34 years of distinguished service to our office and the community, Sue was known and respected as a tremendous mentor with leadership skills second to none. Her positive and undeniable influence as both a leader and a role model has made an everlasting impression on our office.

Sue not only influenced our office and those she worked with, but also the Coachella Valley. Her passion to serve was evident in the many accolades she received from various community and service groups in the valley. Even after retiring, she continued that service as the Dean of Students at the California Desert Trial Academy College of Law.

Kevin Ruddy served in our office from 1978 to 1988 and from 1992 to 2009, retiring as a Chief Deputy DA. Over his career as a prosecutor, he tried 31 homicide cases, including six death penalty cases. He was recognized as Prosecutor of the Year in 1993 and 1994.

Kevin was responsible for reorganizing the review process of homicide and death penalty cases and was instrumental in the development of our "lifer" parole hearing unit. Both of those crucial and far-reaching endeavors were recognized statewide for their innovations.

We thank and honor Sue Steding and Kevin Ruddy for all the amazing work they did for our office and our community.



Sue Steding  
Retired Assistant DA

Kevin Ruddy  
Retired Chief DDA

# PRIDE AWARDS

## 2020-2021

Traditionally, the outstanding work done by employees at the Riverside County District Attorney's Office is recognized at an annual PRIDE Awards banquet. In 2020 and 2021, this looked a little different due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Although we were not able to gather as a large group, it was still very important to recognize the achievements of our staff members. DA Mike Hestrin provided plaques to recognize the exceptional work done by our prosecutors, investigators, victim advocates, and support staff. We also recognized the outstanding work done by those in our community. Our Communications Division created videos so our staff could virtually celebrate these accomplishments of their peers.

The lists below recognize the recipients of the 2020 and 2021 awards. We are very proud of their dedication and commitment to excellence.



### 2020 RECIPIENTS

Prosecutor of the Year	Marcus Garrett
Appellate Prosecutor of the Year	Jesse Male
Crime Prevention Prosecutor of the Year	Evelyn Essenwanger
Juvenile Prosecutor of the Year	Breeanna Fujio
Misdemeanor Prosecutor of the Year	Adelaida Hernandez
Paralegal of the Year	Esperanza Garcia
Investigator of the Year	Paul Bracciodieta
Technician of the Year	David Junior
Advocate of the Year	Carla Aguilar
Clerical Employee of the Year	Janet Garcia
Clerical Employee of the Year	Diana Guerrero
Administration Employee of the Year	Ashley Smith
Volunteer of the Year	Linda Sherman-Nurick
DA Achievement/Leadership Award	Joshlyn Pulliam
Administration Group Award	Accounting/Budget
Administration Group Award	Technology Services Bureau
Administration Group Award	Human Resources
Western Region	Felony Prosecution Unit
Eastern Region	Felony Prosecution Unit
Special Prosecution Region	Brady Unit
Bureau of Investigation	Dispatch



### 2021 RECIPIENTS

Prosecutor of the Year	Jon Brandon
Prosecutor of the Year	Brittany Bulthuis
Prosecutor of the Year	Steve Sorensen
Appellate Prosecutor of the Year	Sophia Choi
Crime Prevention Prosecutor of the Year	Karina Cardenas
Filing Prosecutor of the Year	Lorie Ronce
Juvenile Prosecutor of the Year	Rick Majchrzak
Misdemeanor Prosecutor of the Year	Ashley Loret
SPR Prosecutor of the Year	Kristen Buie Allison
SPR Prosecutor of the Year	Timothy Mulhere
Paralegal of the Year	January Papanastasatos
Investigator of the Year	Angela Carranza
Technician of the Year	Thane Gallagher
Victim Services Specialist of the Year	Lorena Serrano
Clerical Employee of the Year	Reosha Campbell
Administration Employee of the Year	Devin Michaels
Administration Employee of the Year	Mike Romney
Community Hero of the Year	Dr. Karen Kirschinger
Community Hero of the Year	Dr. Chuck Fischer
Community Hero of the Year	Brian Sousa
Eastern Region	Special Victim's Unit
SPR Region	Child Abduction Unit
Countywide Group/Unit	RCCET

# **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

## **LIAISON OFFICER PROGRAM**

The Riverside County District Attorney's Office Bureau of Investigation has a Liaison Officer Program to generate and maintain positive working relationships with our allied law enforcement agencies and civilian organizations.

The goals and objectives of the program are to build professional relationships by promoting mutual respect, cooperation, assistance, and education. The Bureau of Investigation understands that cooperation and information sharing is key to increased public safety. As stated in our guiding principles, each member of the Bureau is committed to building strong and viable partnerships with other law enforcement agencies, every component of the criminal justice system, and the community we serve. We recognize that a united and cohesive effort to prevent and punish crime when appropriate allows us to achieve the highest level of public safety for our community.

The professional mandates and job functions of district attorney investigators are quite often misunderstood by our law enforcement partners. This misunderstanding can lead to a lack of communication, cooperation, and respect. The Bureau is determined to build partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and, by fostering improved professional relationships, the Bureau will be contributing to a higher level of service for Riverside County residents. As we work more collaboratively with our law enforcement partners, they will begin to understand the needs of the prosecutor and how valuable their input is to successful prosecution of the cases submitted to the District Attorney's Office. It is the goal of the Bureau to be a leader and innovator in our unique branch of the law enforcement community.



## **COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM**

The Riverside County District Attorney's Office recognizes that communication is an important part of the job. It is especially important to communicate with the 28 independent cities within Riverside County. District Attorney Mike Hestrin has created a new program known as the Community Action Team (CAT). Comprised of 28 Deputy District Attorneys acting as liaisons, the team keeps the county's 28 cities informed about the office, the criminal justice system, and how the criminal justice system affects each of them.

Every month, CAT reaches out to city officials. A CAT liaison designated for that city communicates with the city attorney, city manager, and police chief letting them know about the issues that directly affect them, discuss potential training for their law enforcement, and help with communication. CAT members have also addressed city councils to let them know they are available and offer to be a point of information. As a result of these communications, CAT members have helped cities work on issues from homelessness to understanding what COVID-19 has done to the court system. The CAT liaison for Menifee worked closely with their new police department when it started, helping the new department hit the ground running to protect the residents of that city.

CAT also created a monthly newsletter for cities. It has discussed issues including how SAFE/Family Justice Centers are available to help victims of crime, how the Aware to Care program works with schools to identify those kids who are victims of trauma that would benefit from services, and how our Crime Prevention Unit works to keep kids in school - so they don't become part of the criminal justice system.

Since 2019, cities have not only known that the DA's Office is listening and available, but who specifically they can reach out to when they need information. City managers, police chiefs, and city attorneys know that a CAT liaison Deputy District Attorney will reach out to them every month to see if they can help. If a city has a concern, they know that the District Attorney's Office is just a phone call away.

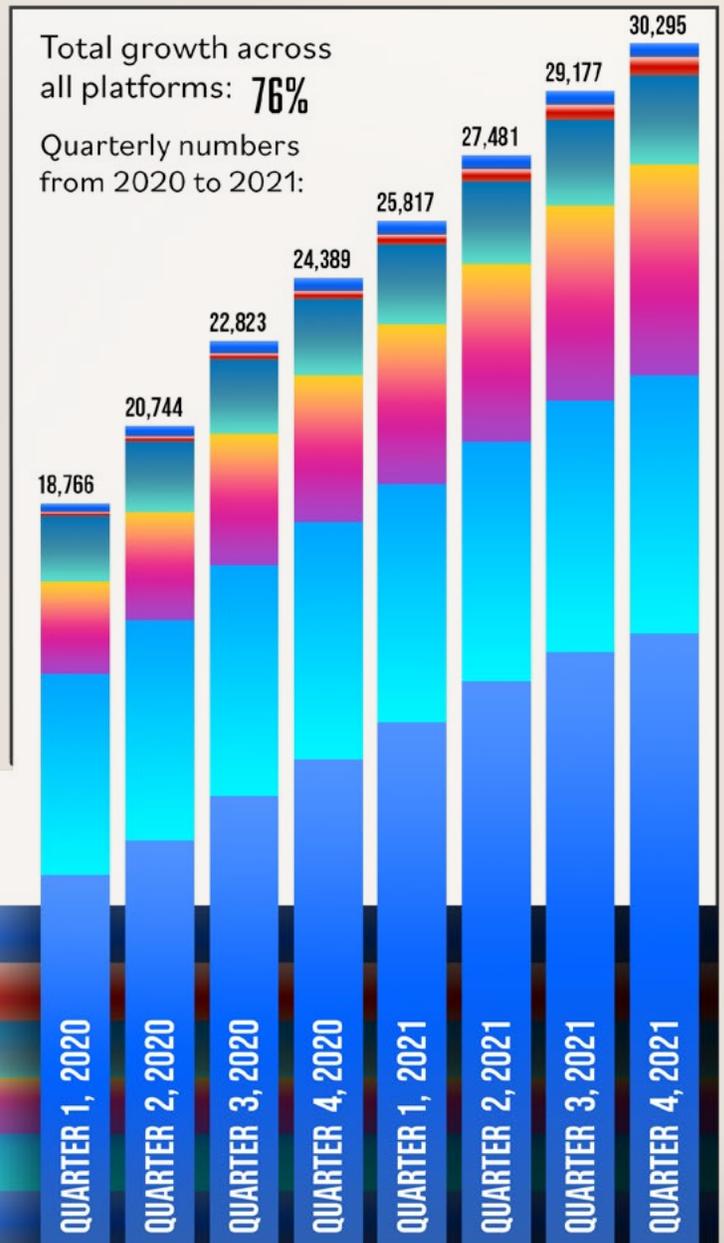
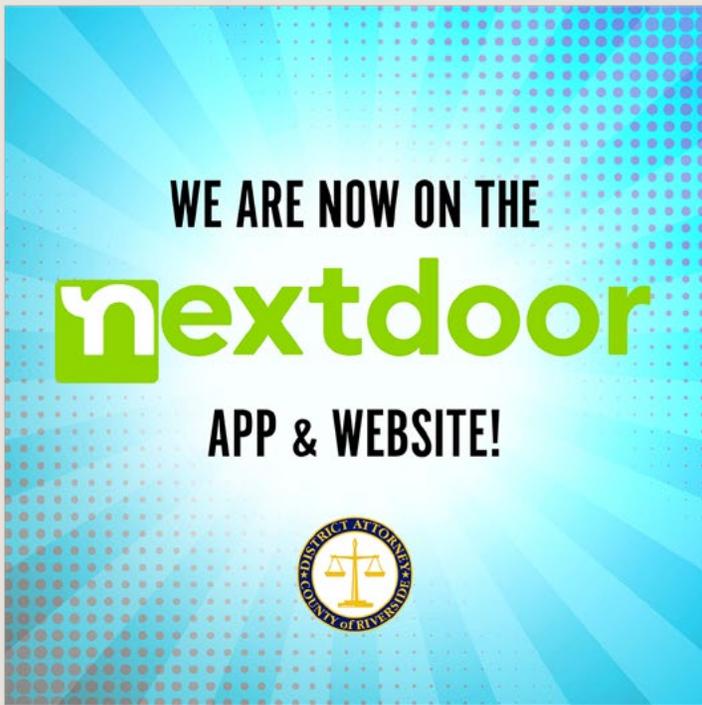
# SOCIAL MEDIA

Transparent communication with the community continues to be a priority at the Riverside County District Attorney's Office. Our Communications Division is dedicated to sharing important information with our community every day via our social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

In 2020 and 2021, our office heavily relied on our social media platforms to communicate during challenging times. For the first time ever, our offices were temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we utilize social media to immediately inform the public about critical incidents such as a large protest in front of our downtown Riverside office, an officer-involved shooting, and various high-profile cases.

Our office is proactive in reaching as many residents as possible. In 2021 our office joined a new service provider platform called "Nextdoor". This platform currently serves more than 1,500 different neighborhoods in Riverside County. Nextdoor allows us to send out pertinent information to geographic locations within the county. It delivers instant distribution of relevant content to subscribers in designated neighborhoods. Our office has shared public service announcements, case updates, and other important information about the criminal justice system and our office to the nearly 500,000 residents Nextdoor serves.

The continued growth of our social media audience is due to our commitment to consistently creating engaging, dependable, relevant, and timely information. Our Communications Division strives to publish innovative social media posts that inform and captivate our community members. This is evident in the growth of our social media platforms. We started 2020 with less than 18,000 followers on our platforms and ended 2021 with more than 30,000 followers – a 76 percent increase.



## ACCOUNT GROWTH & FOLLOWER COUNT

PLATFORM	GROWTH	FINAL COUNT
SPANISH FACEBOOK:	56.3%	361
YOUTUBE:	386.3%	462
LINKEDIN:	46.6%	2,246
INSTAGRAM:	157.5%	5,287
TWITTER:	30.3%	6,473
ENGLISH FACEBOOK:	79.1%	15,466



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