

DA NEWS

HOLIDAY 2024
SPECIAL EDITION



www.WestchesterDA.net

2024 Highlights

data from January to November 2024

17,464 Prosecutions **3,452** Investigations

320
Illegal firearms seized in County

*Westchester County Police Department Detective
Division Forensic Investigations Unit

189
Felony gun prosecutions

178
**Guns surrendered at
community buybacks**

1,823
**Domestic Violence
charges files**

883
**Served by the
Victims Justice Center**
65% new individuals

\$1.5 million
**Restitution secured on behalf
of financial and labor fraud
victims**

\$500,000
**Grant award for DA's Office
from Justice Department to
fight human trafficking over
three years funded to
Westchester law enforcement
to assist in investigations**

422
**24-hr TIPS line
complaints from the public**

Final Message from District Attorney Rocah



I'm pleased to bring you a special issue of DA NEWS to share the incredible work of this Office in these final months of 2024, and wish everyone a safe and joyous holiday season before I leave Office after serving for the last four years as your District Attorney.

I'm proud to celebrate the hard work by our prosecutors, investigators, analysts and support staff who work together with our law enforcement partners in the county, and throughout the state, to secure justice for crime victims and attain significant achievements beyond the courtroom.

In 2024, we had several firsts for the Office and Westchester County:

- we secured an indictment against a contractor for the death of a laborer in a trench at a construction site;
- we secured an indictment for murder and for inflicting torture upon a 27-year-old woman by her intimate partner;
- and we utilized a certified support animal to accompany a very young victim of sex abuse to testify against her abuser in court.

We also saw measurable successes with the expansion of groundbreaking initiatives and efforts that I began when I took office in 2021:

- the Violent Criminal Enterprise Bureau's coordinated work on search warrants with our many law enforcement partners throughout the County resulted in some of the largest seizures of illegal firearms and ghost guns;
- our Discovery Bureau processed more than 11,000 hours of body-cam video to keep this Office compliant, efficient and effective;
- and we diverted approximately 500 individuals out of our criminal justice system through rehabilitation and services through our innovative diversion programs working with our Fresh Start program for low-level and first-time offenders, and our problem-solving courts for youth, veterans, those with substance use disorder or mental health treatment needs.

These are noteworthy highlights of a transformed, modernized DA's office.

When I announced in late 2023 that I would not seek re-election in 2024, I promised that I would focus my final year as District Attorney on solidifying the transformative changes and progress we've made together. Change comes from more than just re-writing handbooks and changing certain policies and procedures. Change is most meaningfully achieved through changing culture. Through the new ADAs we hired (now more than 60% of the Office) and the revamped and expanded training they received as part of our restructuring of the office, I am confident that many of our changes are now part of the culture of the Office. Among other things, we placed an increased emphasis on timely and consistent victim outreach; a culture of robust approaches to violent crime and diversion for appropriate cases while balancing fairness and public safety; increased attention to and coordination across the county with hate crimes and bias incidents and living up to my motto to "do the right thing in the right way, for the right reasons."

Serving as the 67th Westchester County District Attorney has been an incredible honor. I am immensely grateful to the talented and inspiring members of this Office, and all my colleagues in law enforcement who have been excellent partners in the work we've achieved together in keeping Westchester County safe.

In gratitude,

Miriam E. Rocah, Westchester County District Attorney

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Mount Vernon City Employee, Former Employee Arrested and Charged in Alleged Deed Theft Scheme

City of Mount Vernon Building Department employee Damon Davis and former employee Charlene Humphreys were arrested by the DA's Office and charged on Dec. 18 in connection with an alleged deed theft scheme. According to a felony complaint, Davis and Humphreys allegedly falsified documents for the deed transfers of two residential properties in Mount Vernon, including signing the name of a deceased individual for one of the properties. As alleged in a second complaint, Humphreys attempted to transfer deeds for two abandoned single-family homes in Mount Vernon to an LLC she controlled. Humphreys was arraigned in White Plains City Court. Davis received a desk appearance ticket. Both defendants are due in court Jan. 7, 2025. **Public Integrity Bureau**

Man Indicted for Murder in Somers Triple Shooting

Fernando Andres Jimenez Meza, 40, was arraigned Dec. 5 on an indictment charging him with murder (second degree), attempted murder (second degree), assault and weapons possession charges in connection with the shooting of his girlfriend and her two teenage sons in her Somers apartment. One of the sons, a 15-year-old, was shot in the head and died from his injuries. The defendant remains remanded to Westchester County Jail. **Major Case Bureau and Violent Criminal Enterprise Bureau**

Peekskill Man Sentenced to 16 Years for Two Sex Crimes

Cristian Panza, 43, who was convicted for a 2021 rape of a woman in Peekskill and subsequently implicated by DNA in a 2018 attempted rape, was sentenced Nov. 14 to 16 years in state prison. The defendant was also sentenced to 20 years post-release supervision for the 2021 crime to run concurrently to 15 years in state prison with 15 years post-release supervision for the 2018 crime. The conviction followed the defendant's guilty plea in September to rape (first degree) for the September 2021 incident where he took a 20-year-old woman to a bar in town and bought several drinks for her until she became highly intoxicated. Under the pretense of driving her home, the defendant took the victim to Depew Park where he strangled and raped her. The defendant also pleaded guilty to attempted rape (first degree) for the 2018 incident where he encountered an intoxicated 39-year-old victim in a Peekskill bar, followed her and offered her a ride home. Believing the defendant was a cab driver, the victim entered the rear of the defendant's vehicle and provided a destination address. Instead of driving her to that address, the defendant drove to a wooded area. When the victim demanded to know where he had taken her, defendant climbed to the rear of the vehicle, strangled and attempted to rape her. After the defendant's arrest in 2021, prosecutors at the Westchester DA's Office noticed a similar fact pattern to the unsolved 2018 assault case and proactively moved to request lab comparison testing of the defendant's DNA developed from a cup he drank from at police headquarters following his 2021 arrest. The DNA matched. **Special Prosecutions Division, Sex Crimes Bureau**

12 Convictions Connected to Yonkers Detective Convicted of Perjury Vacated Following CRU Investigation

Judges vacated convictions and dismissed underlying narcotics-related charges for 12 individuals in cases connected to former Yonkers Police Department Detective Christian Koch, who was convicted of perjury in 2015. Following a thorough examination by her Conviction Review Unit (CRU), the District Attorney supported defense motions to vacate five felony and seven misdemeanor convictions out of Yonkers between 2011 and 2014 that were conclusively tainted by Koch's compromised credibility. The CRU's determinations were based on Koch's perjury conviction, factual discrepancies found in police records, and damning admissions he made under oath in a civil lawsuit suggesting he did not understand his responsibility for the truth and the facts in his affidavits. **Conviction Review Unit**

Up to 29 Years for Crime Spree and Hate Crime for Suffolk Man

Michael Bagley, 34, of Coram, New York, was sentenced on Dec. 10 to an indeterminate term of 14½ to 29 years in state prison for two robberies, a burglary and a hate-fueled violent attack of an Asian store owner in New Rochelle. The defendant's crime spree began March 16 in White Plains where he followed a victim into a stairwell of a commercial building on Maple Avenue and stole the victim's wallet, phone and headphones at knifepoint before fleeing. In New Rochelle that same day, he robbed a Main Street store in downtown New Rochelle while attacking the store owner, who is Asian, as he hurled anti-Asian slurs at her. The defendant then robbed a couple on the street of their wallet in the nearby neighborhood before entering a residential home where a woman and her child were home. **Hate Crimes Unit and New Rochelle Bureau**

Mohegan Lake Woman Sentenced to Prison for Embezzlement

ToniAnn Rosado, 54 of Mohegan Lake, was sentenced on Sept. 27 to a term of two to six years in state prison for stealing more than \$340,000 from CR Wallauer & Company, Inc., a North Castle-based paint supplier, where she was employed as the controller. The defendant was also ordered to pay \$170,000 in restitution to her former employer. After CR Wallauer owners discovered the fraud, the defendant was terminated in August 2019. The defendant was arrested in June 2022 in Orlando, Florida by the U.S. Marshalls with assistance from the Fugitive Unit of the Orange County Sheriff's Office and the Westchester County Department of Public Safety's Warrant Fugitive Unit. **Economic Crimes Bureau**

The New York Times

Mount Vernon Police's Strip Searches Were Unconstitutional, U.S. Says

A report by federal prosecutors found that a Westchester County police department violated the Fourth Amendment "on an enormous scale."

Three years after DA Rocah publicly called upon the Department of Justice to conduct a civil rights investigation of the Mount Vernon Police Department, DOJ and the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York on Dec. 12 announced their findings that MVPD engages in a pattern or practice of conduct that deprives people of rights secured by the U.S. Constitution by using excessive force, conducting unlawful strip searches and body cavity searches of individuals (at least until 2023), and making arrests without probable cause. The 34-page report also details concerning conduct related to vehicle stops, evidentiary practices and racial discrimination.

AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

A suburban police force in New York strip searched nearly everyone it arrested, DOJ says

By Associated Press

The report includes conduct that DA Rocah wrote about in a letter to the MVPD, shortly after taking office in 2021, expressing serious concern that members of the MVPD were illegally performing strip and body cavity searches as a matter of routine procedure.

The DOJ report also relies, in part, upon some of the findings from an investigation by the DA's Conviction Review Unit, which led to the overturning in 2023 of wrongful convictions for 27 individuals charged by the MVPD in a 2017 undercover narcotics operation.

"It is my hope that DOJ's findings will lead to improved MVPD oversight, management, and accountability," DA Rocah said. "Not only will it make Mount Vernon and Westchester County safer, but it will also help rebuild the much-needed trust between law enforcement and the communities we serve."

News12 shined a spotlight on the Westchester DA's Office for being one of the first prosecutors' offices in New York to regularly use support animals to assist victims.

news12

Westchester DA highlights use of support dogs after Labrador helps 7-year-old victim testify in sex abuse case

The Westchester County District Attorney's office is highlighting the use of an emotional support dog for the first time in county court history during a criminal trial to help a child victim testify about their sexual abuse.

Shane Gomez • Dec 10, 2024, 5:47 PM • Updated 5 days ago



FOUR-LEGGED TRAILBLAZERS HELPING VICTIMS AT WESTCHESTER DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

DAILY VOICE

Wilson Frias Given 5 Years For Briarcliff Manor Sex Assault

In a groundbreaking trial, a court-certified support dog named Eddie helped a young child testify against former NYPD detective Wilson Frias, leading to his conviction on charges of child sexual abuse in Westchester County.



Tuckahoe Police Chief Larry Rotta and court-certified support animal Eddie, a 2-year-old Labrador Retriever who accompanied the young victim for testimony in the People v. Wilson Frias trial in October 2024. Photo Credit: Westchester DA's Office

Lewis, a 6-year-old black Labrador Retriever, is a trained facility dog working at the DA's Office since 2021. Not only is Lewis a source of comfort for adult and child victims, he's a source of stress relief for many DA's Office staff.

Eddie, a 2-year-old blonde Labrador Retriever, is a certified support animal working at the Tuckahoe Police Department. He accompanied a very young victim of sex abuse to testify against her abuser leading to a successful conviction by the DA's Office in People v. Wilson Frias. The case marked the first time in Westchester County where the court allowed the use of a support animal to accompany a victim during a criminal trial.

Mid Hudson NEWS

Albany man gets 20 years in 1995 fatal Sing Sing stabbing

October 11, 2024 6:04 am Todd Bender

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Allah-son-Allah, 54 of Albany, was sentenced to 20 years in state prison for the 1995 fatal stabbing of 32-year-old Michael Jones when both men were incarcerated at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining.

"Thanks to the tenacity of the investigators and prosecutors dedicated to solving this cold case, we were able to secure convictions that finally hold accountable those responsible for the Christmas Eve death of Michael Jones at Sing Sing nearly 30 years ago," DA Rocah said.

After a five-week trial, a jury on May 20 found the defendant guilty of Manslaughter in the First Degree in the Dec. 24, 1995 incident inside Sing Sing Correctional Facility, where the defendant used a buck knife to stab Jones in the chest, puncturing his heart, and causing him to bleed to death.

The investigation—initiated in 1995 and reinvigorated in 2019 by the New York State Police and the Westchester County District Attorney's Office—determined that the defendant and the victim were purportedly members of the Five-Percent Nation, also known as Nation of Gods and Earth, a Nation of Islam breakaway group established in the 1960s. The day before the stabbing, the 5-Percent Nation voted to attack Jones after he violated the group's beliefs by wearing a cross.

New York State Police and the Cold Case and Homicide bureaus of the DA's Office traveled to multiple states to interview several witnesses who were incarcerated at Sing Sing at the time of the stabbing.



More than 200 students from high schools across Westchester County attended the African American Men of Westchester's annual criminal justice workshop series "From the Streets to the Courtroom and Beyond" at Sarah Lawrence College on Nov. 21. Deputy Chief Investigator Wade Hardy (left photo) led one of the sessions about the District Attorney's Office and joined panelists for a discussion about the role of law enforcement in the community.



DA Rocah delivered remarks at the 158th Basic Recruit School commencement ceremony at SUNY Purchase College on Dec. 6. In her address to the 49 graduates who completed their training from the Police Academy, DA Rocah emphasized the commitment of the DA's Office as partners supporting the new recruits as they begin their careers in law enforcement.



Cyber Crimes Bureau Chief Laura Forbes led one of the online safety workshops at a threat assessment training provided to school administrators in the Hudson Valley region, hosted by BOCES Regional Safety Services in partnership with the FBI at the Putnam Northern Westchester campus on Oct. 24.



The holidays can be a stressful time for those experiencing intimate partner violence. We encourage the public to keep an eye on vulnerable family members and help report crimes or contact the District Attorney's Office for any assistance.

Contact our **Domestic Violence Bureau (914) 995-3000**
Call 911 for emergencies.

DA Names Recipients of 2024 Office Achievement Awards



Pictured with DA Rocah from left: Assistant DAs Daniel Flecha and Brian Bendish, Crime Analyst Chloe McSwiney and Senior File Clerk Laura Hesmadt.

The District Attorney announced the recipients of the 2024 DA’s Office Awards on Dec. 4 at the DA’s Office annual holiday celebration held in White Plains.

The **2024 Patrick P. Moore Award for Excellence in Prosecution** was awarded to Cold Case Bureau Chief **Daniel Flecha** and **Brian Bendish**, Homicide Bureau Senior Trial Counsel, for their work in securing a conviction in *People v. Allah-son-Allah*. The three decades-long cold case, centered on the 1995 Christmas Eve fatal stabbing of Michael Jones inside Sing Sing prison, was solved last year. Allah-son-Allah was sentenced in October to 20 years.

The **Stuart Cohen Award for Investigative Excellence** was awarded to Criminal Investigator **Naomi Jimenez**, Senior Crime

Analyst **Toni Garcia** and Crime Analyst **Chloe McSwiney** for their work in an undercover narcotics operation that identified a dealer on Craigslist Marketplace linked to a number of fentanyl overdose deaths in the Hudson Valley. The team’s investigation led to the successful prosecution and felony conviction followed by a prison sentence this year.

The recipient of the **Priscilla Patrinos Staffer of the Year Award** went to **Laura Hesmadt**, the longest serving employee in the Westchester DA’s Office with more than 42 years of service. As Senior File Clerk in the Record Room of the DA’s Office, Ms. Hesmadt has become an instrumental member of the Office’s Administration team, and an office-wide holder of institutional knowledge .

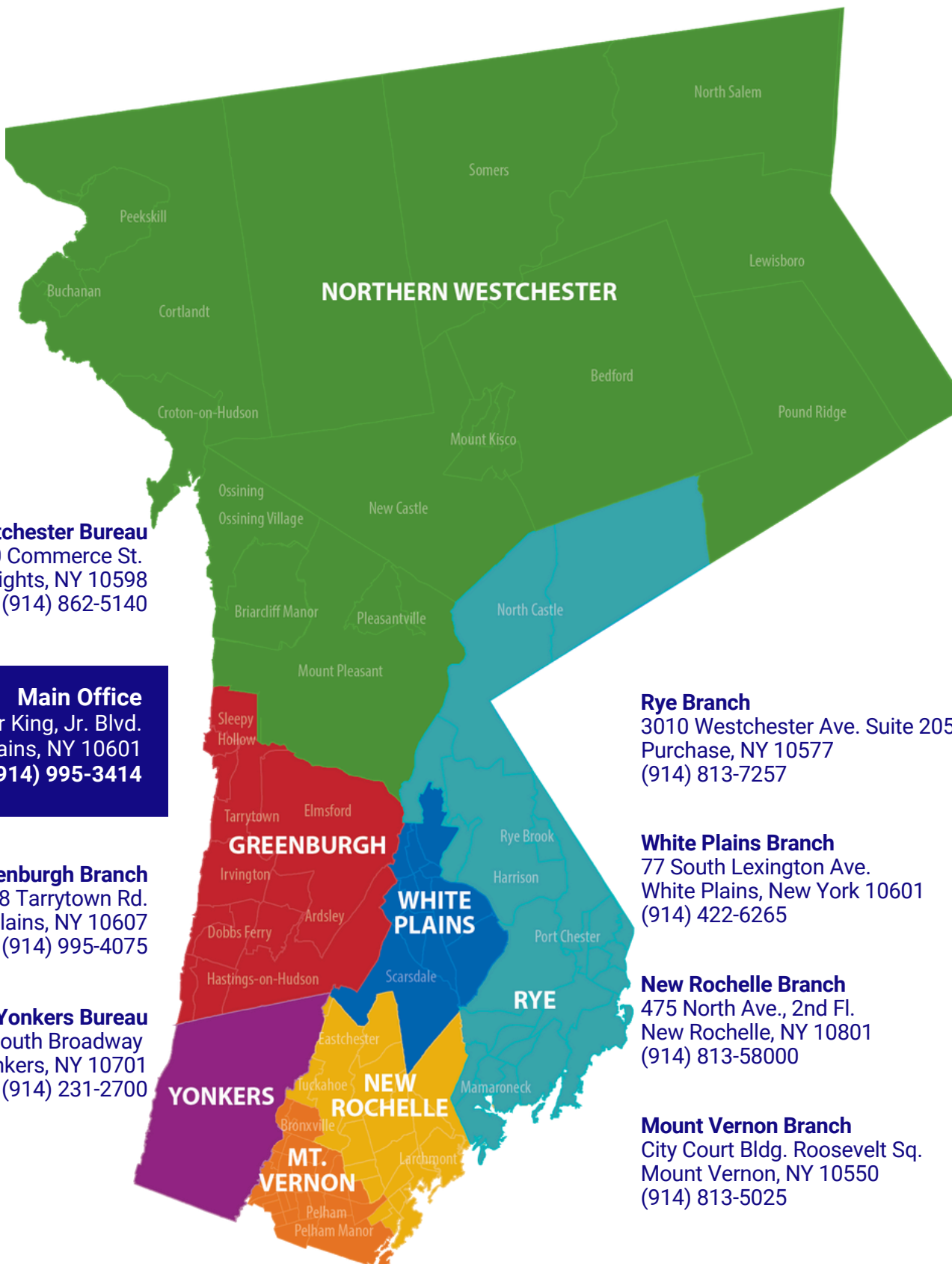
Westchester County Anti-Trafficking Task Force Honors DA



DA Rocah was recognized for her commitment to fighting human trafficking at the quarterly meeting of the Westchester County Anti-Trafficking Task Force in Croton Falls on Dec. 6.

Consisting of a multitude of service providers and law enforcement members across the county and state, the Task Force sets a national example for the collaborative and coordinated work of law enforcement personnel, social service providers, and child protection staff, to help victims and to investigate, identify and effectively respond to human trafficking.

In support of these goals, the DA was pleased to support local law enforcement conducting these important investigations with funding from the \$500,000 Department of Justice human trafficking grant awarded to the Office in 2024.



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The public can file a complaint directly with the DA's Office by phone or online

(914) 995-TIPS (8477)

www.WestchesterDA.net

For emergencies, please call 911