

# DA NEWS

WINTER 2024  
JANUARY



www.WestchesterDA.net

## 2023 in Review: Reflecting on Our Progress

As we ring in 2024, we're reflecting on how the Westchester DA's Office has achieved our goals of balancing public safety and justice throughout 2023. From prosecuting gun cases and sex crimes to expanding diversion programs and our community presence, we are proud to highlight some of our progress in this recap.

### Enhancing Public Safety

In 2023, the office prosecuted 280 cases of illegal weapons possession, including ghost guns. More than 267 illegal guns (includes 37 ghost guns) were seized in the County. As part of our broader gun safety agenda, we continued our training on New York's expanded red flag laws with local legislators, law enforcement, attorneys, school superintendents and administrators, as well as PTAs and students. As the number of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) being issued increased across the state and county, we expanded our red flag law training to mental health and medical professionals, including the staff at St. Vincent's Medical Center in December.



### Message from DA Rocah

In this first issue of 2024, we take a closer look at our continued progress at the Westchester County District Attorney's Office throughout 2023.

We had successful outcomes in our prosecutions and delivered justice for victims. We also created additional diversion initiatives to provide rehabilitation and treatment, expanded eligibility to serve more justice-facing individuals and reduced recidivism.

In the fall, I shared that I would not seek re-election in 2024. While this decision was difficult, it is the right one for me and my family and I will be dedicating this final year as DA to ensuring the transformative changes we've made together will continue past 2024.

I remain humbled and honored to continue serving in this role, and keeping Westchester safe for every community.

*Miriam Rocah*



### Supporting Crime Victims

As national crime reports noted an uptick in scams, particularly targeting the elderly, our Economic Crimes Bureau opened a record-breaking 133 investigations involving financial crimes where defendants allegedly stole approximately \$2.3 million from victims of wage theft and labor fraud, tax and investment schemes, and identity theft. Nearly \$1.6 million in restitution was ordered on behalf of the victims in our cases.



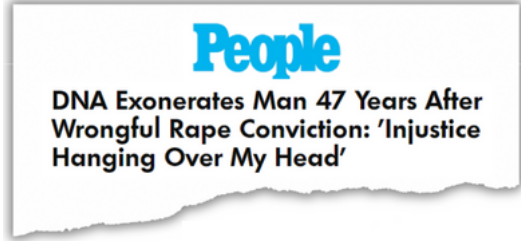
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2023 IN REVIEW

Delivering on her promise to bring some closure to the victims' families of more than 100 unsolved homicides in Westchester County, DA Rocah announced significant updates out of her Cold Case Bureau. They included outcomes in two cases that represented a combined total of 37 years of waiting by the victims' families for prosecutorial action.



**Increasing Equitable Outcomes**

The Conviction Review Unit—Westchester's first independent unit dedicated to conviction integrity—announced this fall with the Innocence Project, the exoneration of Leonard Mack, who served more than seven years in prison for a 1976 rape that he did not commit. The court vacated Mr. Mack's conviction - the longest wrongful conviction in U.S. history known to the Innocence Project to be vacated by DNA evidence.

Additionally, CRU sought to vacate the conviction and charges of 27 individuals stemming from a 2017 MVPD undercover narcotics operation triggered, in part, by a whistleblower's secret recordings of officers alleging misconduct.

The Westchester DA's Office is now fundamentally different in how we address root causes of crime.

In 2023, we made additional critical investments in creating and expanding initiatives that offer alternatives to incarceration and traditional prosecution, and providing rehabilitative services and treatment.

**Fresh Start**

Year	Pre-arraignment diversion
2023	310
2022	210

**Diversion Initiatives Launched in 2023**

- Westchester Misdemeanor Mental Wellness Court (Office of Court Administration)
- Overdose Prevention Treatment Initiative - OPT-In

**Participant in Ongoing Initiatives & Expanding Eligibility**

- Mount Vernon Emerging Adult Justice Part
- New Rochelle Opportunity Youth Part
- Veterans Court
- Felony Judicial Diversion Part (drug offenses)
- Felony Mental Health Court

**Strengthening Our Investigative Priorities**

From cybercrimes to cold cases and sex crimes, criminal investigations conducted by the DA's Office are led by our dedicated criminal investigators and crime analysts in the Investigators Squad and the Crime Strategies Center (CSC). Their critical role serves to proactively combat crime, support our precision prosecution strategies, enhance cases, and provide trial support with high-level data analysis. Fulfilling DA Rocah's promise to Westchester residents that every single complaint to the DA's Office would get a human response, our criminal investigators handled 250 civilian complaints this year, an increase of 22% from 2022.

**2023 CRIME STRATEGIES CENTER**

**357**  
CASES INITIATED

**753**  
INFO REQUESTS HANDLED FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT COUNTYWIDE & DA'S INVESTIGATIONS/PROSECUTIONS

ASSISTANCE BY HIGH TECH UNIT  
**234** CASES

**2023 PUBLIC INTEGRITY & LAW ENFORCEMENT INTEGRITY**

**102**  
CASES OPENED

**2023 HATE CRIMES UNIT**

**208**  
HATE & BIAS INVESTIGATIONS

**Combating Hate**

The Hate Crimes Unit continues to track data through the law enforcement info-sharing hate crimes portal launched in 2022. The portal is one example of how we are employing data to address crime, and study trends to aid in crime prevention—a key element of DA Rocah's agenda to modernize the office.

As we celebrate this year's milestones, we look forward to continued progress in 2024 with the same commitment and vigor.

Read the full 2023 in Review and the year in photos and headlines at [bit.ly/wcado2023yir](https://bit.ly/wcado2023yir)

## NOTABLE CASES

# Man Charged with Possessing Gun in Car Covered in Swastikas

Hani Saleh, of Elmsford, was arrested and charged on Oct. 25, 2023, with Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Second Degree for allegedly illegally possessing a loaded semi-automatic weapon and a loaded magazine containing 10 .40 caliber rounds of ammunition, which were found under the driver's seat of his vehicle. White Plains police apprehended the defendant after he was observed driving his car around White Plains. The vehicle was covered in writing and images, including swastikas. The case was investigated by the White Plains Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Joint Terrorism Task Force and the FBI's Westchester Safe Streets Task Force. **White Plains Bureau**

# Bedford Man Gets 34 Years to Life for Child Sex Offenses

Felix Barahona Rosales was sentenced on Nov. 28, 2023 to 34 years to life in state prison—three consecutive maximum sentences—for repeatedly sexually assaulting two children, and sending sexually explicit photos to another child. The defendant's repeated sexual conduct began when the victims were ages 5 and 6, and occurred in Mount Kisco, Ossining and Peekskill between 2005 and 2007 for one of the victims, and between 2013 and 2021 for the other victim. Between January and February 2018, the defendant also engaged in a series of sexually explicit conversations on Facebook Messenger with a third victim, who was 13 years old. During the conversations, the defendant sent naked photos of himself to the child. After a two-week trial, a jury in September 2023 found the defendant guilty. The case was investigated by the Westchester County Department of Public Safety, the Westchester County District Attorney's Office, the Ossining Police Department and the Peekskill Police Department. **Child Abuse Deputy Bureau Chief Owein Levin, Domestic Violence Deputy Bureau Chief Janelle Armentano**

# Mount Vernon Serial Burglar Sentenced up to 14 Years

Nathaniel Gordon was sentenced as a second felony offender on Nov. 30, 2023, to an indeterminate term of seven to 14 years in state prison for multiple residential burglaries in Mount Vernon. The defendant unlawfully entered a multi-family residence and stole a box of cookware on Jan. 3, 2023. The defendant, who was captured on home security video entering and leaving the property, returned to the same residence later in the day and stole a bag of tools. The defendant unlawfully entered another home on Jan. 20, 2023, through a basement window and stole three laptops and a laptop bag. He was captured again on a home security video walking down the driveway toward the property's basement window, and then walking out to the street minutes later carrying the stolen items. **ADA Leigh Wellington**

# New Rochelle Teen Sentenced to 19 Years for Fatal Shooting

Tommy Rivera was sentenced on Nov. 29, 2023, to 19 years in state prison for using an un-serialized 9mm semi-automatic pistol—a ghost gun—to shoot a 16-year-old victim four times, striking him in the lower back, knee, neck and shoulder as he walked on Fourth Street in New Rochelle. The incident was captured on surveillance video and the victim died shortly after being transported to Westchester Medical Center. The New Rochelle Police Department arrested the defendant shortly after the incident, recovered the gun from the defendant's waistband, and subsequently recovered tools used to build ghost guns in his home. **Senior ADA Catalina Blanco Buitrago**

# Bronx Man Who Murdered Roommate Gets 25 Years to Life

William Pryor was sentenced on Dec. 8, 2023, to 25 years to life in state prison for using a .40 caliber pistol to shoot his friend and former roommate, Marquis Muniz, 10 times in the victim's apartment in Yonkers. Approximately one month prior to the murder, the victim evicted the defendant from the apartment after two years of living rent-free. The defendant was convicted of murder following a three-week jury trial in October 2023. **Bureau Chief Dan Flecha, Senior ADA Catalina Blanco Buitrago**

# Former Mamaroneck Library Business Manager Charged

Mary Soto, the former business manager of the Mamaroneck Public Library, was arrested on Dec. 14, 2023, by the Westchester County District Attorney's Office and charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree for allegedly stealing approximately \$44,000 from the library's bank accounts in the form of credit card and recurring debit transactions, for personal expenses, between May 2016 and February 2023. **ADA Renee Hassel**

# Man Charged with Attempted Rape Following Child Sex Sting

Dustin Layme, of New Castle, was charged with attempting to rape a child in Greenburgh following an undercover operation by Homeland Security Investigations and the DA's Office Criminal Investigators targeting online predators. It is alleged that the 26-year-old defendant made contact online with an undercover law enforcement agent posing as the parent of a pre-school aged child. During the series of sexually explicit communications, the defendant discussed engaging in sexual acts with the child, including sexual intercourse, and arranged to meet who he believed to be the child and her parent at a hotel in Greenburgh. The defendant was arrested after attempting to enter the hotel room where he believed the child and parent were waiting. **Cyber Crimes Deputy Bureau Chief Laura Forbes**

IN THE COMMUNITY



ADA Mathieu Reno (left) of our Cyber Crimes Unit at the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School in Rye Brook on Nov. 15, 2023 and ADA Shea Scanlon Lomma at Tuckahoe Middle/High Schools (top) on Nov. 28, 2023 speak to students about internet safety and the dangers that exist online. This presentation was 2023's most requested by schools in Westchester County.



The DA's Office is proud to be an essential participant in Judge Jared Rice's Opportunity Youth Part at the New Rochelle City Court, which celebrated its third anniversary Nov. 3, 2023 with a moving ceremony for 10 "All Stars" who were lauded in a packed courtroom with graduation certificates. Since its inception in 2020, the groundbreaking diversion program, which offers justice-facting emerging adults ages 16 to 24 mentoring, behavioral health and substance abuse counseling, workforce development, job placement, academic support, English as a Second language education, housing and more has had more than 70 individuals complete their programs, of which 91 percent exited the OYP without a criminal record and 31 secured paid internships with local businesses. Left to Right: ADA Tai White, New Rochelle Branch Chief Craig Ascher, ADA Matthew Kukowski, Judge Jared Rice, OYP Coordinator Colleen Gardephe, DA Rocah, ADA Lily Zeqaj and ADA Gregory Allen.



Left: More than 50 pieces of winter apparel were collected from our office for the Westchester Women's Bar Association and Westchester County Bar Association's third annual winter coat drive benefiting local charities like Lifting Up Westchester and the Grasslands Homeless Shelter. Thanks to our organizers (left to right) ADAs Leigh Wellington, ADA Jill Oziemblewski (WWBA Vice President), ADA Elizabeth Z. Marcus (WWBA's past President) and Sr. ADA Catalina Blanco Buitrago; Top: ADA Omar Youssef (far left) joined colleagues from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Rockland DA's offices for a panel on the role of prosecutors at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University's Criminal Justice Society on Nov. 16, 2023.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



# 2024 SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

Full-time programs for law school and college students

June 3 - July 26, 2024  
Monday - Friday | 9am - 5pm



## Applications due March 1, 2024

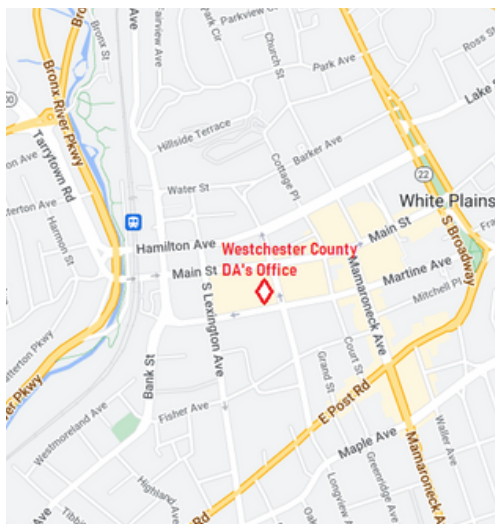
### Law school applicants

Send a cover letter, resume, law school transcript, professional references and a writing sample to:

### College applicants

Send a cover letter, resume and two to three professional references to:

Jackie Halper  
Chief, Development and Training  
111 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd., White Plains, NY 10601  
jhalper@westchesterda.net



### The Westchester County District Attorney's Office

111 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.  
White Plains, NY 10601  
**(914) 995-3414**

Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday 9AM - 5PM

The public can file a complaint directly with our office  
by filling out a complaint form online  
<https://www.westchesterda.net>  
or by calling

**(914) 995-TIPS (8477)**

Language assistance is available.

*In emergencies, please call 911*

## Branch Offices

### Greenburgh

188 Tarrytown Rd.  
White Plains, NY 10607  
(914) 995-4075

### Mount Vernon

City Court Bldg. Roosevelt Sq.  
Mount Vernon, NY 10550  
(914) 813-5025

### New Rochelle

475 North Ave., 2nd Fl.  
New Rochelle, NY 10801  
(914) 813-5800

### Northern Westchester

1940 Commerce St.  
Yorktown Heights, NY 10598  
(914) 862-5140

### Rye

3010 Westchester Ave. Suite 205  
Purchase, NY 10577  
(914) 813-7257

### White Plains

77 South Lexington Ave.  
White Plains, New York 10601  
(914) 422-6265

### Yonkers

104 South Broadway  
Yonkers, NY 10701  
(914) 231-2700

