



# ANNUAL REPORT

**NICK COX**  
STATEWIDE PROSECUTOR



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**“In 2024, OSP earned an overall conviction rate of 97%.”**

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## **OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF STATEWIDE PROSECUTION IN 2024**

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During 2024, the prosecutors and staff of the Office of Statewide Prosecution (OSP) continued their successful ways in the fight against organized crime. With referrals from law enforcement at its highest rate in the last 4 years along with the highest number of active cases, our prosecutors and staff have been very busy. Key priorities have seen notable increases in caseloads and convictions, sentencing results have been significant and measurably higher, and restitution ordered for victims has doubled in the last year. Advances have been made in legislative and gubernatorial priority areas and our efforts fighting drug trafficking and abuse continue to be a mainstay of our operations. In all, OSP has had another busy and productive year with a great deal of success.

In 2024, OSP earned an overall **conviction rate of 97%**. That number is consistent with previous performance as OSP routinely earns conviction rates in the high 90's. This number is much higher than typical conviction rates which is a result of our focus to hire experienced, career-minded prosecutors as well as the manner in which we handle cases. OSP enters case investigations as early as possible to support law enforcement. This leads us to not only address their legal needs, but to help direct the agents towards building an even better case. The high conviction rate is also noteworthy since OSP disposed of 13% more cases this year than last. There were only 12 defendants in 7 cases during 2024 whose cases were dismissed, the majority of which were persons who ended up cooperating with the State against bigger actors. There was only 1 trial acquittal. The total conviction results this year were remarkable.

The OSP is also in higher demand by law enforcement over the past 4 years. Requests for assistance by agents and officers rose over 13% to its highest point since the Covid pandemic. Pending caseloads are up almost 20%. Our attorneys and staff are very busy and there has been a noticeable increase in the complexity and size of many of our cases.





**“Since 2022, the agency has expanded precipitously, growing from 50 to 93 prosecutors. These new hires, together with the agency’s existing staff, are taking on new areas of responsibility like gaming, elections, organized retail theft and cybercrimes, all to better serve and protect the citizens of the State of Florida.”**







As mentioned above, cases being disposed of are up significantly and so are the sentences. Defendants sentenced to the Florida State Prison have seen a massive 65% increase in their sentences, the highest in the last 4 years. Sentences including county jail time are up 34%. Defendants sentenced to a form of community supervision (probation or house arrest) have seen significant increases in conditions ordered on their sentence including a 51% increase in community service hours. Fines assessed rose a massive 93%, totaling almost 9 million dollars. Court costs and costs of prosecution ordered increased 121% and 139% respectively. Court orders to recover costs of the law enforcement investigation increased by 98%. Restitution requested and assessed by the courts to recover victim losses doubled this year, totaling over **20 million dollars**. The total costs assessed on OSP cases increased 97% in this one year alone, totaling over **32.5 million dollars**. Just those numbers far exceed the total budget of the OSP, but more importantly put significant dollars back in the victim's pockets.

However, many of the OSP cases do not have victims who lost financially. For instance, drug cases have long been a primary focus within OSP. Both licit and illicit drug prosecutions have been our focus, with the most recent efforts targeting fentanyl as much as possible. Focusing on fentanyl alone, OSP charged 129 people in fentanyl cases during 2024. Of those charged, 88 faced 204 fentanyl specific charges. Keeping in mind that OSP does not typically handle simple possession and delivery cases, most of these will involve drug trafficking and racketeering. Additionally, OSP specializes in cases, primarily narcotics based, utilizing electronic and wiretap tools with local, state and federal law enforcement. These matters require a great deal of investigative time for us as the work needed to get these highly complex court orders is significant. During 2024, OSP obtained **147 wiretap orders**, the highest in the last 4 years. The previous high was 102 in 2023. Active opioid/pill cases have increased 60% in 2024, and opioid convictions are up 40%. Which all adds up to the OSP fight against drugs is significant and highly successful.

Some other priority areas are worthy to note as well. Human trafficking remains a front line, zero-tolerance priority for OSP. Our number of active human trafficking cases continue to steadily rise with a 24% increase in 2024, along with the number of defendants convicted in these cases rising 46%. Active organized retail theft cases have increased yet again by 7% along with a 12% increase in defendants convicted. Cases involving illegal gaming are on the rise along with elections fraud and Medicaid fraud matters. Our cyber-crime enforcement unit has found it's footing after just a couple years and has seen a dramatic increase in active cases at almost 400%, defendants and targets at 245%, and convictions rising 133%.

Essentially, OSP is busy and finding significant success in the courtroom. We have again asked our prosecutors to report on areas they specialize in as a more detailed update of our operations.

~ Nick Cox, *Statewide Prosecutor*

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## TWENTY-FIRST STATEWIDE GRAND JURY

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In June of 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis petitioned the Florida Supreme Court to empanel the Twenty-First Statewide Grand Jury to investigate illegal immigration into the State, as related to transnational criminal organizations, criminal activity and human trafficking, especially of unaccompanied alien children. The Twenty-First Statewide Grand Jury met one week every month for 18 months and issued seven public Presentments which are publicly available on the website of the Florida Supreme Court. Its term concluded in March of 2024.

The Grand Jury's findings have been referenced in bills introduced in the Florida Legislature and several of its recommendations were incorporated into Florida Statutes passed during the 2023 legislative session as well as multiple bills passed during the 2024 session. Its Third, Fourth, Fifth and Seventh Presentments were widely reported and cited by multiple members of the United States Congress and expert witnesses during both House and Senate hearings. They have also been entered into the Congressional Record on multiple occasions.

~ Richard Mantei, *Special Counsel*



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## TWENTY-SECOND STATEWIDE GRAND JURY

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In December of 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis petitioned the Florida Supreme Court to impanel the Twenty-Second Statewide Grand Jury, charging it to investigate criminal wrongdoing with respect to the development, manufacturing and administration of Covid-19 vaccines. This Grand Jury was impaneled on June 26, 2023, and it produced three publicly available reports:

The First Interim Report was published on February 2, 2024. It addressed: (1) the true infection and disease risks associated with the SARS-CoV-2 virus; and (2) the effectiveness of various nonpharmaceutical interventions like lockdowns, masking, social distancing and indoor air filtration at ameliorating those risks. The Grand Jury ultimately concluded that whatever minor and ephemeral benefits were derived in terms of infection reduction were not worth the numerous second- and third-order consequences of many of these NPIs.

The Second Interim Report was published on May 21, 2024. It addressed the rise of infection-derived immunity and the development of effective treatments for Covid-19 disease. The Grand Jury concluded that both these factors profoundly reduced the risks of infection, disease, severe disease and/or death presented by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. These factors, however, were not adequately explored and addressed by high profile “experts” and our federal public health apparatus. These profound failures of messaging led to widespread mistrust in public health and very likely caused harm to individuals.

The Final Report of the Twenty-Second Statewide Grand Jury was publicly released on January 6, 2025. It addressed a number of issues, including: (1) the contract “derby” and federal development money provided for the development of Covid-19 vaccines by the federal government in Operation Warp Speed; (2) the clinical trials and approvals of those vaccines and subsequent booster formulations; (3) pharmacovigilance and safety signals discovered after those vaccines had gone to market, including vaccine-related myocarditis & pericarditis; and (4) failures and inaccuracies in media messaging around the safety and effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines. The Final Report made several recommendations at both the state and the federal level. The federal recommendations focused primarily on changes to the FDA approval and pharmacovigilance process, which is in dire need of reform. The state recommendations focused primarily on providing future statewide grand juries with the tools to more effectively investigate wrongdoing by multinational corporations and bad actors outside our state whose actions have harmed Floridians.

~ Jeremy Scott, *General Counsel*

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## GENERAL COUNSEL

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The General Counsel serves as a point of contact for outside litigation, resolves public records requests received by the agency, assists in the administration of statewide grand juries and provides legal advice to prosecutors dealing with “hard problems” involving complex, unsettled areas of criminal law and agency-specific questions involving multi-circuit authority.

Since 2022, the agency has expanded precipitously, growing from 50 to 93 prosecutors. These new hires, together with the agency’s existing staff, are taking on new areas of responsibility like gaming, elections, organized retail theft and cybercrimes, all to better serve and protect the citizens of the State of Florida. The General Counsel will play a key role in addressing the administrative and legal consequences of that growth. In the coming year, the General Counsel plans to update the agency’s Policy & Procedure Manual, modernize its new attorney training program, readdress the relevance of the professional development seminars offered to all Assistant Statewide Prosecutors, build out a legislative pipeline for suggestions involving new criminal statutes and set up a central point of contact to deal with extradition requests from other states.

~ Jeremy Scott, *General Counsel*





## WIRETAPS AND ILLICIT DRUGS

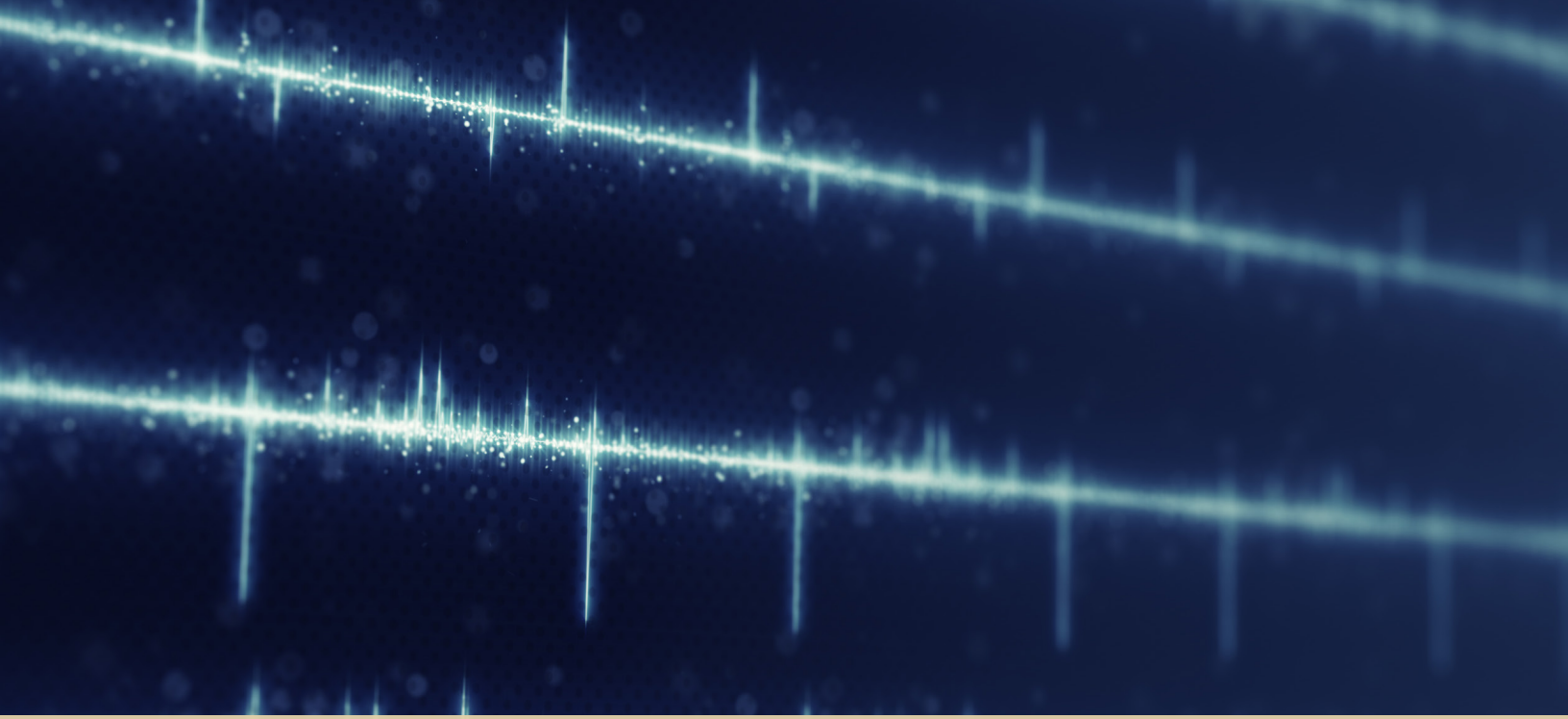
The Office of Statewide Prosecution (OSP) continues to collaborate with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting criminal organizations involved in bringing illicit drugs into this state for distribution in our communities. Fentanyl and heroin continue to pose a lethal threat to the citizens of Florida and OSP understands the importance of utilizing all available investigative and legislative tools to systematically dismantle these organizations. One such tool often employed by OSP and its partner law enforcement agencies is electronic surveillance of oral, wire and electronic communications (commonly referred to as wiretaps). Over the past year, OSP, working alongside law enforcement agencies, has sought and obtained authorization to intercept communications on 70 telephone lines, three social media accounts and an audio interception covertly placed inside a vehicle that was being used to facilitate organized criminal activity.

In 2024, court-ordered wiretaps provided evidence necessary to not only hold those individuals found in actual possession of illicit drugs accountable, but also provided evidence sufficient to hold accountable—through criminal conspiracy prosecutions—insulated individuals higher up in the organizations' hierarchies that were directing the activities of the criminal organization and realizing the vast majority of ill-gotten gains derived from the organized criminal activity. For example, in September of 2024, OSP's Tampa Bureau, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration utilized the judicially authorized electronic interception of communications in conjunction with undercover law enforcement purchases of illicit narcotics to dismantle a criminal organization of 34 individuals trafficking in fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine. The investigation resulted in the removal of 60 ounces of fentanyl, 28 ounces of cocaine and eight ounces of methamphetamine from the streets of that community. Similarly, in Tallahassee, OSP worked with the Leon County Sheriff's Office to intercept the unlawful communications of a drug trafficking organization operating in that community which resulted in the arrests of seven members of that criminal organization and the seizure of a kilogram of fentanyl.



An ongoing and prevalent issue OSP continues to encounter around the state are drug trafficking organizations utilizing pill presses to manufacture counterfeit prescription pills meant to mimic legitimate pharmaceutical medications. These counterfeit pills are often made by mixing fentanyl and other dangerous drugs with a "filler" ingredient, often resulting in the unintended overdose and or death of the unsuspecting consumer. For example, OSP, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), the Tampa Police Department and the Clearwater Police Department used a judicially authorized interception of the oral, wire and electronic communications to investigate a criminal organization operating in the Tampa Bay area believed to be engaged in the trafficking of fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine. Upon executing search warrants at various locations operated by the drug trafficking organization, law enforcement located and seized 250 pounds of "filler" ingredient, which would have been enough to manufacture in excess of 500,000 counterfeit pills destined for consumption by unsuspecting citizens of this state.





**“Upon executing search warrants at various locations operated by the drug trafficking organization, law enforcement located and seized 250 pounds of “filler” ingredient, which would have been enough to manufacture in excess of 500,000 counterfeit pills destined for consumption by unsuspecting citizens of this state.”**







In 2024, OSP directed investigations with our law enforcement partners which resulted in the seizure of large amounts of illicit narcotics utilizing investigative techniques other than the judicially authorized interception of oral, wire and electronic communications. In October of 2024, for example, OSP partnered with the Venice Police Department, the Manatee County Sheriff's Office and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office to conduct several undercover large quantity fentanyl purchases from an unsuspecting drug trafficking organization utilizing the assistance of a confidential informant. At the conclusion of that investigation, search warrants were executed at locations utilized by the drug trafficking organization to facilitate its criminal activities and law enforcement were able to seize approximately 22 ounces of methamphetamine, 30 ounces of fentanyl, numerous firearms and United States currency. In a similar investigation of a separate drug trafficking organization involving the collaborative efforts of OSP, FDLE, the Tampa Police Department, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the United States Department of Homeland Security and the Florida Highway Patrol, a narcotics trafficker, Robert Cox, sold fentanyl to a law enforcement officer acting in an undercover capacity. When he was later arrested for this transaction, Cox was actively engaged in transporting 306 grams of fentanyl into the State of Florida.

The utilization of the judicially authorized interception of oral, wire and electronic communications and other associated investigative tools to gather sufficient evidence to prosecute drug trafficking organizations in this state for their trafficking activities have resulted in substantial criminal penalties. Robert Cox, for example, was sentenced to 27 years in the Florida Department of Corrections. Similarly, many members of a drug trafficking organization investigated by OSP, the Volusia Bureau of Investigation, the Volusia Sheriff's Office and the Lake County Sheriff's Office received lengthy sentences for dealing in fentanyl, including 20-year prison sentences for Drew Daly, Jarrick Ross & Brandon Carter, an 18-year prison sentence for Preston Ingram and 15-year prison sentences for coconspirators Lauren Toce, Vernon Woodward, Darrell Woodward, Fernando Lagunas, Terell Ross & Devin Owens. OSP sought and received a 15-year prison sentence for Christina Guess, a former corrections officer, who trafficked methamphetamine in Volusia and Marion Counties. In addition, following a lengthy wiretap investigation conducted by OSP and Orlando's Metropolitan Bureau of Investigations, Emely Jimenez was sentenced to 15 years in prison for her role in a heroin trafficking organization operating in and around central Florida.



In addition to being an effective tool in narcotics investigations, the judicially authorized electronic surveillance of communications has proven to be useful prosecuting other types of organized criminal activity investigated by OSP and its law enforcement partners. One area in which this investigative tool has been especially useful is in combatting human trafficking. For example, in February of 2024, OSP and Orlando's Metropolitan Bureau of Investigations utilized electronic surveillance to intercept oral communications inside a human trafficker's vehicle, gathering sufficient evidence to arrest and prosecute a prominent bail bondsman in the Central Florida area. This individual had been using his position of power within the criminal justice system to sex traffic female jail inmates in exchange for posting surety bonds in their cases. In another human trafficking investigation conducted by OSP in partnership with FDLE, the Department of Homeland Security and the Manatee County Sheriff's office, the judicially authorized interception of oral, wire and electronic communications was used



to gather evidence, arrest and prosecute two individuals who were utilizing a massage parlor and a barber shop as a front to facilitate human trafficking offenses related to commercial sexual activity. OSP and its law enforcement partners have also utilized wiretaps to investigate Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) offenses involving a prostitution ring that had been operating illegally for decades throughout South Florida. That investigation and subsequent prosecution led to the arrests of multiple individuals and the seizure of approximately \$3.95 million in assets.

OSP will continue to relentlessly pursue drug trafficking organizations that are involved in the manufacturing, importation and distribution of fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and other illicit narcotics in this state. This agency, alongside our local, state and federal law enforcement partners, will continue to utilize all tools at its disposal, including electronic surveillance, to identify and dismantle any organization involved in such criminal activity. Upon doing so, OSP is committed to seeking lengthy prison sentences for the members of those criminal organizations who are most culpable.

~ David Gillespie, *Special Counsel*

~ Mary Sammon, *Special Counsel*

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## CYBER FRAUD ENFORCEMENT UNIT

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The Cyber Fraud Enforcement Unit (CFEU) continues to successfully fulfill its mission of Prosecution, Disruption and Prevention of cybercrime that targets Floridians. In 2024, the Unit initiated 70 new cases including criminal investigations and cryptocurrency forfeitures, facilitated the arrest and filed charges against over 20 criminal defendants, froze \$8.5 million in illicit cryptocurrency from transnational criminals in nine different countries, seized dozens of scam domain names (websites) and provided educational presentations to hundreds of law enforcement officers and Florida residents.

Additionally, over the last year CFEU has been recognized several times as a leader in the United States when it comes to combatting cyber and cryptocurrency crimes. Our Unit was repeatedly recognized as leaders and pioneers in this sphere at national and state conferences where our unit members received multiple awards, and we were invited to give presentations on our success and how it was achieved. This included the National


Cybercrime Conference sponsored by the National Association of Attorneys General, International Association of Financial Crimes Investigators Annual Conference, National Crypto Coalition Conference, SunshineCon, the Florida Alliance for Blockchain Safety and numerous other state conferences. Our innovative and aggressive approach to fighting transnational targets and protecting our citizens from the ever-emerging field of cybercrime has made the State of Florida and OSP a global frontrunner for cybercrime disruption with unrivaled results.

### PROSECUTE

Our Unit continues to successfully investigate, prosecute and convict cybercriminals who prey on unsuspecting victims using innovative cyber schemes. For example, this year we prosecuted the case of State v. Andrew Zeng. In December of 2021, the defendant discovered an exploit that allowed him to gain unauthorized access to the United Parcel Service (UPS) tracking platform. This access allowed Zeng to enter fraudulent tracking information for merchandise shipped by UPS on behalf of victim-retailers. In less than five months, this fraud scheme caused nearly 10,000 fraudulent returns, resulting in more than \$5 million in losses and over \$8 million in lost sales revenue to the victim-retailers. The defendant was convicted and sentenced by CFEU.

An extremely significant case occurring in our Unit is the prosecution of Roshado Durrant, Kevin Clayton and Michael Nevarez. A diligent investigation by CFEU prosecutors uncovered three bank insiders who had been employed for decades within a nationally recognized bank, all while selling customer information on the dark web. The defendants in this case are





**“In 2024, CFEU has not only prosecuted complex and high-impact cyber fraud cases, but it has also led the charge in disrupting financial networks used by overseas criminals and preventing future crimes.”**



**SECURITY**

VIRTUS



facing 80 years in Prison for charges of RICO, Conspiracy To Commit RICO, Organized Fraud, Grand Theft and Unlawful Use Of A Two-Way Communication Device.

An additional notable case is the investigation and arrest of yet another bank insider, Tamer Elia. At the time of offense, the Defendant was employed at Fifth Third Bank as a Personal Banker and was a student at Saint Petersburg College. Using his authority as a bank employee, the defendant accessed customer personal identification information and uploaded the personal identification information of approximately 20 customers to his Saint Petersburg College student account. 13 of the 16 victims were 60 years or over at time of offense. He is currently being prosecuted by CFEU in the Sixth Circuit.



Additionally, this Unit has uncovered an enterprise operating out of Florida in conjunction with Ghanaian nationals. This group operates as a large-scale romance type scheme, wherein unknown members of the criminal group target men and women who are retired and have access to large amounts of cash but little to no income. The members begin online romantic relationships and convince the “romantic partners” to send all their available funds to other members of the enterprise, leaving them with little to no money to maintain their lifestyle and pay their bills. The “romantic partners” then use webs of fraudulent businesses and shell companies in order to recover the stolen money. The subjects moved more than \$8,100,00.00 through these accounts in furtherance of the scheme, paving the way for the fraudulently obtained money to make its way to China and Ghana in the form of cash and vehicles, as well as the purchase of cryptocurrency.

In another notable case, defendants Jaqueline Burge, Janice Pittman and Nora Quimby were recruited by individuals to impersonate elderly victims using stolen personal identification information to conduct fraudulent withdrawals and cash bad checks at numerous Truist Banks throughout the State. The defendants were given earpieces and fed identifying information during the transactions to perpetuate the fraud. The losses exceed \$150,000.00 and involve 18 senior victims. All codefendants are under prosecution in the Fifth Circuit.

James Mack is another CFEU defendant who defrauded Verizon by filing over 178 false credit applications using fictitious social security and personal identification information. These credit applications allowed Mack to travel throughout Florida and obtain inventory from Verizon including cellphones and other products. Resulting in a total loss of \$78,237.00.

CFEU open a large-scale case against defendant Daniel Skinner after receiving a complaint from a business owner in Key West, Florida who had been victimized due to a vendor suffering a business email compromise. Due to the compromise, the victim company was tricked with false wire instructions in an email from the vendor that appeared authentic. The investigation revealed the defendant had received the stolen funds. He then proceeded to conduct a series of financial transactions to obfuscate the source of the funds and purchase over \$85,000 worth of cryptocurrency and withdrawing thousands of dollars in cash from ATMs.

Similarly, due to another business email compromise case, James Desilus and Junior St. Fluerose have been charged by CFEU in the Sixteenth Circuit. The victim in this case was tricked with false wire instructions in an email from the vendor that appeared authentic. The investigation revealed James Desilus received the stolen funds. He then proceeded to conduct a series of financial transactions to obfuscate their source. These financial transactions were in violation of Florida’s anti-money laundering laws and were conducted with the assistance of codefendant Junior St. Fleurose who ultimately received most of the stolen funds and provided kickbacks to Desilus via the Zelle phone app after the proceeds were laundered. Both codefendants are charged and are facing a maximum of 45 years in Florida State Prison.

CFEU initiated a multi-circuit investigation against Raymond Ortiz and Thomas Simmons upon receiving a complaint from a victim in Brevard County who had been victimized due to a “Sim Swap,” a type of identity theft where an attacker tricks a mobile phone carrier into transferring a victim’s phone number to a SIM card that the attacker controls, permitting the attacker to control the victim’s phone number and bypass two-factor authentication on various accounts, including email, banking and social media. Raymond Ortiz, a cellular phone retail store employee, was able to use this technique to compromise a victim’s bank account and drain it of \$278,590.67. Thomas Simmons directed these funds into accounts he





controlled and then laundered the money by writing cashier checks to check cashing “mules.” Both codefendants are facing a maximum of 35 years in Florida State Prison.

Donald Johnson was arrested and charged with Organized Fraud by our Unit and now is a convicted Felon serving in Florida State Prison for an elaborate scheme targeting local Florida businesses. This fraudster stole checks from mailboxes of local businesses and meticulously examined them. He then went to Sunbiz.org and changed the registered agent names of these businesses to his own name. Next, he endorsed these checks as if they were meant for him and proceeded to scam local banks by claiming since he was the registered agent of the business, the check could be cashed and the funds could go directly to him.

Jose Batista is facing numerous charges from CFEU for implementing a grandparent scam by calling seniors pretending to be their grandchild in trouble and needing money. Batista claimed to have been in a car crash with a pregnant woman and needed bail money from the seniors — sending couriers to retrieve the money that Batista instructed the victims to withdraw. This heinous crime specifically targeted elderly victims by using family members in trouble to get quick cash. We are proud to say we will hold him to justice.



## DISRUPT

CFEU has been very successful this year in seizing fraudulent domains, also known as “website takedowns.” Most notably, CFEU was responsible for the takedown of the infamous Sunpass “smishing” texts. Citizens of Florida are constantly being “smished” with text messages that are then directed to fraudulent clone websites in an attempt to steal their identity and financial information. This investigation remains ongoing with our partners at FDLE, however, we have taken enforcement actions against numerous fraudulent domain name websites and will continue to do so vigorously.



Another important domain name seizure case of 2024 was where CFEU shut down a fraudulent cryptocurrency trading website that mimicked legitimate sites. The website falsely showed substantial financial gains for victims, convincing victims to deposit more money that ended up going directly to scammers’ bank accounts. Several elderly victims were targeted, but our Unit was able to prevent future victims by seizing this site forever.

CFEU also has an internationally recognized cryptocurrency asset recovery procedure wherein the unit recovers stolen funds obtained via cryptocurrency and returns those funds to their rightful owners. CFEU is able to do this by partnering with civil forfeiture attorneys and implementing a very specific combination of criminal and civil proceedings that work only due to the nature of the OAG and our specific organizational layout. Through this process we have secured \$10.6 million since the inception of our unit with \$8.5 million worth of illicit cryptocurrency being frozen in 2024. This number is increasing at an exponential rate as we become more familiar to our law enforcement partners around the State and work to increase the efficient of the process in order to get the money back to the victims as soon as possible. Our cryptocurrency cases mostly include elderly victims who are tricked into sending US dollars via cryptocurrency to bad actors, albeit via an investment scam, a fake pop-up, or grandparent scam.

For example, in one CFEU case, an elderly victim was tricked into believing Russia had hacked his computer and placed child porn on it. He was told he had to pay \$10,000 to stay out of prison, which he did. We traced this fraudulent payment to the scammer on the blockchain and returned all the victim’s money. Another Senior Victim lost \$122,000 to an investment scam. We traced her funds to a scammer in India where they do not accept Florida legal process. Rather than be deterred, we obtained a Mutual Legal Assist Treaty with the Office of International Affairs who is now enforcing our Seizure warrant in India to ultimately return the victims’ funds in full.



The CFEU is also constantly assisting in the takedown of fraudulent online accounts even where they do not result in prosecution. Just this year alone, CFEU shut down four separate profiles on Meta purporting to be the former Attorney General herself.

### **PREVENT**

CFEU is committed to empowering our communities to preemptively fight these growing cyber threats, which is why we prioritize educational outreach in our State and beyond. Just last month, over 600 Seniors attended an informational seminar warning the senior residents of On Top of the World of trending threats we are seeing in the cyber fraud landscape. Similar events occurred last year at the Villages and other regional locations.



In 2024, CFEU has not only prosecuted complex and high-impact cyber fraud cases, but it has also led the charge in disrupting financial networks used by overseas criminals and preventing future crimes. We collaborate as needed with other states, as cyber criminals do not respect jurisdictional limits on the internet. This includes, for example, working with the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office and the District Attorneys' Offices in New York to ensure Florida victims' restitution funds are not sent back to criminals overseas. The CFEU also collaborates with our neighbors to the north in Georgia by consulting with their Georgia Bureau of Investigation to advise them on how to develop a more robust cyber fraud unit in order to ensure cyber criminals do not transit between our state borders to collect money from our citizens. Through relentless investigation, aggressive prosecution and innovative asset recovery techniques, the CFEU has dismantled transnational criminals, shut down fraudulent digital platforms and seized millions in stolen funds to return to victims. Our success is a direct reflection of the dedication, expertise and tireless commitment of the entire CFEU team. Specifically, credit must be given to Tyra Gaymon, John Paul, Hannah Casey, Kellie Llona and Tyler Spencer. The above cases are just a glimpse at the passion and ambition each of these CFEU members brings to work every day. Florida is lucky to have each of them fighting for her. As cybercriminals evolve their tactics, so too will we—leveraging cutting-edge forensic technology, expanding international partnerships and continuing to set the standard for cybercrime enforcement nationwide. Florida has become a global leader in cybercrime prosecution and cryptocurrency asset recovery and with the unwavering commitment of our team, our future is brighter than ever.

~ Whitney Mackay, *Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*

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## **ORGANIZED RETAIL THEFT**

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2024 was a big year for OSP and the Florida Organized Retail Crime Exchange. Cases charging Organized Retail Theft, RICO and associated crimes rose in 2024. The collaboration between OSP, law enforcement and the retail industry has resulted in increased awareness and prosecution of this ever-increasing crime.

OSP's team of Organized Retail Theft prosecutors grew to four dedicated prosecutors located in the largest metropolitan areas across the state. This team of prosecutors assisted with multiple investigations and filed charges against organized theft rings. Additionally, new changes in the legislation have provided OSP and local prosecutors with new tools to efficiently prosecute retail theft.



In the Orlando Bureau, Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Rebecca Addison has worked closely with FDLE's Organized Retail Theft Task Force on multiple investigations and cases. These cases often involve sophisticated theft schemes that not only result in significant financial losses but also impact market prices due to supply shortages. Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Rebecca Addison is currently prosecuting one such organization, where the victim retailer was able to track the rising cost of a targeted item as repeated thefts created a low-supply, high-demand





scenario. These prosecutions highlight the broader economic impact of organized retail theft and the need for aggressive legal action to disrupt these criminal enterprises.

Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Darryl Torres of the Fort Lauderdale Bureau obtained lengthy prison sentences for a six-codefendant group that was targeting Ulta Beauty Stores in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade Counties. The offenders stole more than \$220,000 in products from Ulta, taking fragrances and other items to resell on social media platforms at discounted rates. Ulta Beauty reported at least 55 related incidents, some of which turned violent. One defendant, Jameilya Mallory, was convicted of one count of Dealing in Stolen Property, one count of Conspiracy to Deal in Stolen Property, three counts of grand theft and one count of misdemeanor battery. She was sentenced to 75.15 months in Florida State Prison followed by five years of probation. Restitution to Ulta Beauty was ordered in an amount of \$98,588.44. Another defendant in the case, Shavares Johnson, was convicted of the same felony charges and was sentenced to 48 months in Florida State Prison followed by two years of house arrest followed by five years of probation.



In the Tampa Bureau, Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Eric Ross, in conjunction with the Polk County Sheriff’s Office, led an elaborate investigation into a complex scheme, which resulted in the arrests of four defendants—three of which were from China—who all now face first-degree felony charges in Polk County for RICO and Conspiracy to Commit RICO. During step one of the scheme, the defendants fraudulently obtained gift card codes from victims all over the country (including elder victims) via phone and/or internet scams that obtain gift card numbers from victims via false pretenses or extortion. Within minutes from obtaining the gift card codes, the defendants would use them to purchase large amounts of electronics at local Target stores. They also bribed Target employees to obtain illegitimate employee discounts to maximize the amount of products they could purchase with the stolen gift card codes.

During step two of the scheme, the defendants would take the products home, swap them with counterfeit versions of the product, repackage the counterfeit merchandise to appear unopened, go back to Target and return the counterfeit products for a refund. If identified by Target employees, the returned counterfeit products would be intercepted before going back on the shelves as depicted in this photo, which illustrates a counterfeit product side-by-side with an authentic one.



During the final step of the scheme, the suspects would ship the real products that were swapped with counterfeit products back to China via FedEx. During a search warrant, law enforcement located over 500 counterfeit Bose, Sony and Cannon products contained in shipments containers that came directly from China. In the end, Target suffered losses of over \$200,000 in the past year as a result of this scheme and victims of these scams collectively lost over \$25,000.

In 2024, Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Chris Olowin of the West Palm Bureau, filed and obtained prison sentences for a number of prolific organized retail theft offenders. One of these cases included multiple felony charges against Defendant Jerome Downing Jr. for stealing heavy equipment, including stump grinders, trenchers, boom lifts, excavators and other machinery from Home Depot stores across the state. Downing claimed to be a wholesaler and sold the equipment on



Facebook Marketplace at discounted prices. The scheme resulted in more than \$460,000 in losses to Home Depot and thousands of dollars in losses to civilians buying the equipment under false pretenses.



Downing sent straw purchasers into Home Depot with prepaid credit cards to rent a piece of heavy equipment, for a rental typically lasting between 24 and 48 hours. Downing then immediately listed the equipment for sale on Facebook Marketplace, which was purchased by unsuspecting civilian buyers. During the investigation, the scheme resulted in the theft and sale of 21 different pieces of rental equipment, targeting multiple Home Depot stores all across the State. The scheme affected the Tenth, Eleventh, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Judicial Circuits. Downing and two coconspirators were arrested on multiple felony charges. All three defendants entered guilty pleas to felony charges including Downing, who pled guilty to one count of first-degree Organized Scheme to Defraud, one count of second-degree Conspiracy to Commit Organized Scheme to Defraud and three counts of third-degree Unlawful Sublease of a Motor Vehicle. Downing was sentenced to 48 months in Florida State Prison followed by 48 months of probation and was ordered to pay \$259,174.41 to Home Depot and the civilian victims he defrauded.

In addition to courtroom success, our Assistant Statewide Prosecutors have taken steps to assist with numerous trainings of law enforcement and their retail partners. Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Rebecca Addison presented regarding our agency's jurisdiction and case building at an Organized Retail Crime Intel meeting with over 50 law enforcement and retail partners in the Orlando metropolitan area. Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Chris Olowin also presented legislative updates with a specific focus on the changes to the Organized Retail Theft Statute at several law enforcement trainings and intel meetings in Palm Beach and Broward Counties.

- ~ Christopher Olowin, *Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*
- ~ Darryl Torres, *Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*
- ~ Rebecca Addison, *Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*
- ~ Eric Ross, *Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*

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## **GANGS**

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OSP has been a leader in the fight against violent street gangs for decades. We led the Eighteenth Statewide Grand Jury in 2007 through 2009, which focused on a holistic evaluation of the violence associated with the growth of street gangs in Florida and the best approaches to combat that development. The results of that Statewide Grand Jury were broad and impactful, including legislative amendments, program support/development and indictments issued which initiated the prosecution of violent criminal enterprises, i.e. street gangs. This lengthy investigative process through the Statewide Grand Jury shined a light on the unavoidable admission that street gangs had taken hold in Florida and were growing at an alarming rate which necessitated a coordinated approach to combat, control and reduce this threat. This directly led to legislative recommendations and enactments such as revamping the Florida gang statute contained in Chapter 874, Florida Statutes and amending the witness tampering statute so that gang members who routinely intimidated witnesses of their crimes would face harsher penalties than previously provided. This involvement of OSP has continued through the



frequent prosecutions of gangs and the integral role our prosecutors have played in educating and instructing Florida's law enforcement communities. OSP has successfully employed the strategy of utilizing RICO statutes to prosecute street gangs and dismantle their criminal enterprises. The collaborative efforts of OSP with local and federal prosecutors along with all levels of law enforcement led to a considerable decrease in violent gang activity in the years to follow.

Unfortunately, some permissive policies have led to the influx of violent gang members and the increased proliferation of their criminal behavior within our Florida communities once again. This is especially true of transnational gangs migrating from South and Central America. Whether American-born gangs such as MS13 or foreign-created violent associations, they have evolved into national security threat groups equal to terrorist organizations. OSP stands prepared to partner with all our law enforcement and intelligence communities to combat this growing menace. Strong immigration positions focused on ridding communities of violent gang members are an important tool in this fight. Our efforts against these multi-faceted criminal enterprises are more successful when they incorporate all the tools at our disposal. Our communities are safer when all our law enforcement agencies work together toward this common goal and share not only our knowledge, but also our efforts. OSP is uniquely suited to accomplish this objective given our statewide reach and consistent methodology. Regardless of the specific threat or region from which it originates, our OSP team can quickly adapt to not only a focused defense but also a direct attack upon that threat. OSP will continue to work cooperatively with all our partners to represent the entire state in combating those violent criminal organizations who prey upon our citizens.

~ Brian Fernandes, *Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*

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## ORGANIZED FRAUD

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While new and advancing technologies have led OSP to cast an ever-widening net in its sphere of prosecutions, the Assistants whose primary area of practice is centered in the realm of white-collar cases are continually reminded that traditional fraud cases, from the most primitively executed to those of multi-layered complexity, will always be a staple of this agency. At their most fundamental level, these crimes are grounded in human interaction, with the fraudster's objective being to use charm and persuasion to overcome the victim's natural suspicions and resistance. One of our veteran OSP prosecutors always reminds juries that "hope is a powerful inducement," for hope is oftentimes the currency in which fraudsters deal. The past year brought forth more examples of this unfortunate truism in cases worked by OSP.

In a case out of our West Palm Beach Bureau, hope took on the form of backyard swimming pools. Despite having no experience in the industry, the scammers—a husband and wife team—opened a residential pool building company. The operation was fraudulent from its inception, as their contractor licenses were obtained through the use of forged signatures and false information on the application paperwork. From there, customers were swayed by photographs of glamorous swimming pools with extravagant features as well as by promises of rapid completion times. These pitches were buttressed by the classic scammer trope of appeals to a victim's emotions; in this case, stories of personal tragedies and obstacles the defendants had overcome in the process of building their business. Large initial deposits were taken in but customers were oftentimes rewarded not with their desired pool, but instead a backyard in complete disarray after being converted to a permanent construction site in which the project was scarcely begun, much less completed. These two individuals then further demonstrated their criminal intent by using a third-party check cashing store to convert customer deposits into cash, thus hastening the theft. Some of these same homeowners were further victimized when their signatures were forged on permit applications and notices of commencement. The final ignominy in this sordid tale was several victims ending up with liens on their property when the bogus company, as would be expected, failed to pay its vendors.

This particular case provided at least two teaching points. To the citizens of Florida: Always do your research on a company, don't put an excessive amount of money down on a large-scale home project and don't be swayed when a major component of a sales pitch involves appeals to sympathy, patriotism, religious faith, or other such emotions. To the would-be cons who promise services but only take money: dedicated law enforcement investigators and prosecutors throughout the state know these scams well and are ready to use all great efforts to bring you to justice. This case had a particularly satisfying outcome for the agency. Earlier, the husband had been tried, convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison. In



2024 it was the wife who faced a jury and our prosecutors, and after being convicted of—among other counts—Organized Fraud, Money Laundering and Criminal Use of Personal Identification Information, she was also sentenced to 30 years in prison. This remarkable outcome is a tribute to the relentless efforts of those OSP prosecutors and their law enforcement partners.

Another tremendous victory was secured by our Ft. Myers Bureau following a three-week trial in which over 135 witnesses testified for the State, an extraordinary total which included reverends, ministers, priests and sisters. While this case did not involve the dynamic of face-to-face deceit, the conduct was no less reprehensible. Here, a Romanian crime ring stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from the mailboxes of over 250 schools and churches while the covid pandemic was raging. The money was later laundered through the use of 59 bank accounts which had been opened through the use of fraudulent documents. For some of these victims, the stolen money was how they sustained themselves in the abbey. Needless to say, during the trial of three of the codefendants last summer in Lee County the jury viewed this conduct with an extreme disfavor as it returned guilty verdicts for charges including RICO, Grand Theft, Money Laundering and Aggravated White Collar Crime. The judge took a similar view, as all three were sentenced to 40 years in the Department of Corrections. The investigation had been named Thou Shalt Not Steal, a most appropriate moniker given the result.

A case in the Orlando Bureau continued these themes. In another pool fraud case, a company owner fraudulently purchased a general contractor's license and took in nearly \$3 million over a multi-year period from hopeful homeowners. The "lucky" victims had no work at all started on their project, while those less fortunate had holes dug but little else accomplished before the job was abandoned. Both sets of victims obviously suffered financial harm as well as significant aggravation. Shortly before his arrest was to occur, this scammer fled out of state. Thanks to the swift follow-up of law enforcement, he was soon captured and returned to Florida to face justice. Not wanting to accept our prosecutor's offer or confront OSP at trial, he entered a plea directly to the Court and received a 15-year prison sentence from the judge in Seminole County.

Another case out of that Bureau, this one filed in Volusia County, stands as an example of the efforts made to hold all participants accountable for their roles in a criminal enterprise. A previously reported case involved the unlawful purchase of Kia automobiles utilizing stolen personal identification information. After the case against the actual purchasers was resolved, it remained an open question as to how the ringleader had obtained the victim information that was used in these transactions. Given the ubiquity of that data on the internet and the infinite scenarios in which an innocent party must share it with others and take it on faith that their trust will not be abused, it is a regrettable reality that the point of compromise in these cases often goes unsolved. In this instance, however, the combined efforts of OSP and law enforcement led to the charging of an out-of-county individual just prior to a looming statute of limitations deadline. She had been employed in a medical office and is alleged to have provided the patient information that effectuated the car purchases. She retains her presumption of innocence ahead of a trial set for early 2025.

This last case also serves as a stark reminder that even the seemingly safe milieu of professional services poses potential pitfalls and dangers. Back in West Palm Beach, OSP has secured arrests on fraud-based charges for incidents in settings such as dental and tax preparers offices. On the Suncoast, even the simple act of utilizing a mailbox led to the initiation of a scam in which rent checks were stolen from 16 separate locations which encompassed nearly a hundred victims. One such location was a community for residents over 55 years of age. OSP's Tampa Bureau levied charges including Aggravated White Collar Crime, Grand Theft and Burglary; that defendant is currently awaiting sentencing. Our message cannot be amplified enough: Personal identification information is gold to a fraudster. OSP will always pursue these types of cases, but it is our hope that the citizens of Florida will take every precaution possible to not become victimized in the first place.

~ Robert Finkbeiner, *Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*





## GAMING

OSP routinely works closely with the Florida Gaming Control Commission (FGCC) to investigate violations of Florida gaming laws. Since many of these matters are active at this time, we will not discuss cases or details at this time. However, the subject matters being investigated by the FGCC are varied, broad and often complex. We generally approach most of these cases on a Statewide basis, but we do not rule out providing these cases to local State Attorneys as necessary once the investigation is complete.

We have also worked many cases with local and state level law enforcement agencies. Some are low level organizations, some are larger scale and complex. Very few agencies have people that specialize in these types of cases so we have worked with the FGCC to encourage them. However, if the agency has detectives who have experience with fraud cases and money laundering, they can easily learn the gaming side and effectively investigate these cases.

We anticipate several large scale matters to come to fruition in 2025. As the FGCC discovers more of these operations and advances their abilities to handle these matters, OSP will continue to do anything we can to assist them and bring these cases to court as necessary.

## ELECTIONS

Since 2022, OSP has worked closely with key entities including the Florida Department of State's Office of Election Crimes & Security (OECS), the Solicitor General's Office, FDLE's Election Crime Unit (ECU), local law enforcement agencies and the 67 county Supervisors of Elections across the state to continue safeguarding the integrity of Florida elections through the investigation and prosecution of election-related crimes. This past year, OSP has successfully investigated, arrested and charged numerous targets involving payment-per-signature petition schemes, the trafficking of personal identification information and signing another person's name to secure a particular ballot position.

OSP achieved notable success in 2024 prosecuting these offenses, including:

- Numerous guilty pleas against defendants who committed identity theft by fraudulently signing voter names to petitions in an attempt to secure a ballot position for various proposed constitutional amendments, including proposed amendments to legalize recreational use marijuana and to limit government interference with abortion.
- Convictions against several convicted felons for illegally voting.
- A prison sentence after a plea to the bench involving a defendant who was knowingly trafficking in the personal identification information of unsuspecting victims.

Additionally, through the hard-fought efforts of OSP attorneys at the trial level and Solicitor General attorneys at the appellate level, both the Third and Fourth Districts ruled in 2024 that OSP has jurisdiction to prosecute convicted felons who unlawfully affirm that they are eligible to vote and then illegally vote in our elections, since those crimes involve related transactions occurring in more than one judicial circuit and/or affect more than one judicial circuit.

In 2024, elections fraud team placed greater emphasis on investigating and prosecuting individuals and organizations engaged in fraud and the trafficking of stolen identities with the goal of getting enough signatures to put their constitutional



initiatives on the ballot. Our investigations and subsequent interviews with defendants have revealed that one of the primary drivers behind these crimes is money. In one case, a paid petition circulator admitted that while she had submitted hundreds of seemingly valid petitions, she had not personally engaged with even one voter. Her motivation for engaging in this fraud was the promise of being paid by an organization for each petition she successfully submitted.

It should be noted that, during the 2024 primary and general elections, OSP attorneys were in close communication with our partners at OECS, ECU and the local Supervisors of Elections to receive and advise on isolated incidents occurring at the polls, as well as potential election law violations. While the 2024 elections appear to have been some of our most secure to date, we will continue working with our partners in the coming months to review and advise on prosecutorial actions that can be taken as a result of any election laws that were violated this fall.

OSP continues to aggressively pursue organizations involved with election fraud with the ultimate goal of maintaining high voter confidence in the integrity of elections across the State of Florida. OSP's success could not have been possible without the strong relationships formed with our law enforcement and executive branch partners. This effort has proven an outstanding example of State agencies, law enforcement and prosecutors working together in a highly productive and effective manner. With weekly, and often daily contact between the OSP, the Department of State and FDLE, this joint effort has been highly coordinated and effective.

- ~ Sophia Birriel-Sanchez, *Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*
- ~ Pota Papakos, *Special Counsel*
- ~ Jonathan Bridges, *Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor*

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## COLD CASES

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On February 29, 2024, Attorney General Moody announced the formation of a Cold Case Unit within OSP. Since then, the attorneys and detectives assigned have, in conjunction with fantastic partners in the Florida Sheriff's Association and FDLE, been meeting with law enforcement agencies, scientists, family members and next of kin, authors, profilers and podcasters to provide a force multiplier to Florida's unsolved murders and disappearances. We look forward to continuing our efforts.

- In the past eleven months since its announcement, the Cold Case Unit has reviewed, assisted and/or consulted on **47** cases throughout the state, assisting more than 30 separate agencies, in cases ranging from five to 50 years old. Statewide Prosecutors have provided training on investigations, prosecution and resolution of these types of cases to multiple agencies.
- **Six** cases have been successfully resolved. Statewide Prosecution is the prosecuting authority on four out of the five cases where arrests have been made and formal charges filed. Statewide Prosecution assisted with securing an indictment in one Alachua County case, however, Alachua County is prosecuting it.
- Multiple other cases are awaiting lab results from state or private labs, depending on the techniques required. We have established relationships with government agencies and private DNA labs to have critical scientific work done that is often a lynchpin to these cases. With scientific advances, it is very important to rely on government and private partnerships in order to be sure we are applying the most effective and up to date science possible.

- ~ Richard Mantei, *Special Counsel*



## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Florida has once again taken the lead in combatting Human Trafficking. When alerted to potentially missed leads on human trafficking tips, Attorney General Ashley Moody spearheaded the creation of the state's own Human Trafficking hotline (1-855-FLA-SAFE) which became operational in 2024. Staffed through FDLE, under the oversight of the Attorney General, calls are routed directly to essential partners to assist the victims and to engage the appropriate law enforcement officials.

OSP continued its aggressive stance on human trafficking, making the rescue of victims and successful prosecution its forefront concern. In 2024, OSP opened 16 new multi-circuit large scale investigations, and by the end of 2024, OSP was investigating and/or prosecuting 46 cases.

In April of 2024, OSP was part of a multi-agency investigation through the Human Trafficking Strike Force that resulted in the arrest of six individuals who profited from the exploitation of females at massage parlors and barber shops through Manatee and Hillsborough counties. These defendants were arrested for RICO and the owner, Lina Payne, was also arrested for Human Trafficking. The case remains pending.

Law enforcement heightened their proactive efforts by conducting operations that resulted in several arrests of individuals who offered to purchase sex acts with children but were instead met with undercover detectives. The Tampa Bureau successfully prosecuted Bobby Lowell Barnes who answered a social media ad thinking he was meeting with a minor, but instead was apprehended. He pled guilty to Solicitation to Commit Human Trafficking, was designated a sexual predator and is serving five years Florida State Prison. Further, Daneal Lanier pled to Solicitation to Commit Human Trafficking and received a six-year Florida State Prison sentence. Edgar Troncoso pled guilty to wanting to pay \$200 for sex with a child and was met with an undercover detective. He was sentenced to seven years Florida State Prison and has a deportation hold.

OSP also successfully brought to conclusion nine multi-jurisdiction human trafficking operations. In January 2024, the Orlando bureau tried and convicted Alan Dixon, a human trafficker who transported two adult women from New York to Florida for the purpose of exploiting them throughout Central Florida. Dixon was charged with and convicted of two counts of Transporting from outside the State of Florida for the Purpose of Human Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Activity and Owning or Operating a place for prostitution. He was sentenced to 15 years in the Department of Corrections. His codefendant Shantell Woods eventually pled to her charges and is now serving an 18-month prison sentence to be followed by 15 years of supervised probation.

Also, in January of 2024, OSP Orlando tried and convicted Joselito Martinez Gonzalez of two counts of Human Trafficking of adult victims, Deriving Proceeds from Prostitution and Tampering with a Witness or Victim. Martinez-Gonzalez bought victims from other traffickers and recruited victims from the local county jails by allowing them to live at his home with his spouse and codefendant. Eventually, Martinez-Gonzalez forced the victims into prostitution by threatening to throw them out if they did not comply. Martinez-Gonzalez even made one victim get a disparaging tattoo because she was getting too much attention from the websites on which he posted her. Joselito Martinez-Gonzalez was sentenced to 55 years in the Department of Corrections. His codefendant pled to Tampering with a Witness or Victim and is on the verge of successfully completing a human trafficking program and getting her life back on track after being manipulated in the life of Human Trafficking.

In June of 2024, the West Palm Beach Bureau prosecuted Elize Mizrachi for Human Trafficking and the judge sentenced the defendant to eight years in Florida State Prison. Further the Tampa Bureau successfully prosecuted Roannil Fentress who was trafficking an adult victim by use of force, and as he was incarcerated, he attempted to sway this victim's testimony. Fentress met the victim while in his photography and record producing business and began to exploit her. He would use violence when the victim would reject any dates or would not bring enough money back. He pled guilty open to the court on the eve of trial and sentencing was set off until 2025.





## 2024 Statewide Prosecution Annual Report

Additionally, the Tampa Bureau successfully prosecuted codefendants Candi Holmes and Dourian Butler in Citrus County. The victim was introduced to defendant Butler by the trafficker Candi Holmes and was victimized by him over the course of a three days. The victim knew defendant Holmes as a family friend and was staying with her while her mother was in a rehab facility after taking a fall and breaking her hip. Unbeknownst to the family, the victim was being used by defendant Holmes as a sex partner for defendant Butler. In September 2024, Candi Holmes pled guilty and was sentenced to 27 years Florida State Prison for providing the victim to the co-defendant and in December 2024 Dourian Butler, after being convicted by a jury, was sentenced to life.

OSP's commitment also extended outside the courtroom. In October 2024, the Department of Homeland Security recognized one of our prosecutors as their prosecutor of the year, an honor never-before given to OSP. Additionally, OSP trained multidisciplinary partners in anti-human trafficking measures. For example, in July medical staff of the Tampa General Hospital welcomed OSP to their annual training as part of their "100 percent" club, and in October OSP provided valuable insight to participants during the Human Trafficking Summit.

As in the past, OSP remains committed to aggressively combatting Human Trafficking. The prosecutors at OSP continue to investigate and fully prosecute and most importantly, continue to rescue victims from the depths of the horrific circumstances of their trafficking and put them on the road to recovery.

- ~ Rita Peters, *Special Counsel*
- ~ Nicole Pegues, *Special Counsel*

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## CLOSING

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OSP was very busy in 2024 with a high level of success. We anticipate similar results in 2025 and will work hard with the new Attorney General and his administration to ensure it.

Thank you Senator Moody, and welcome Attorney General Uthmeier!

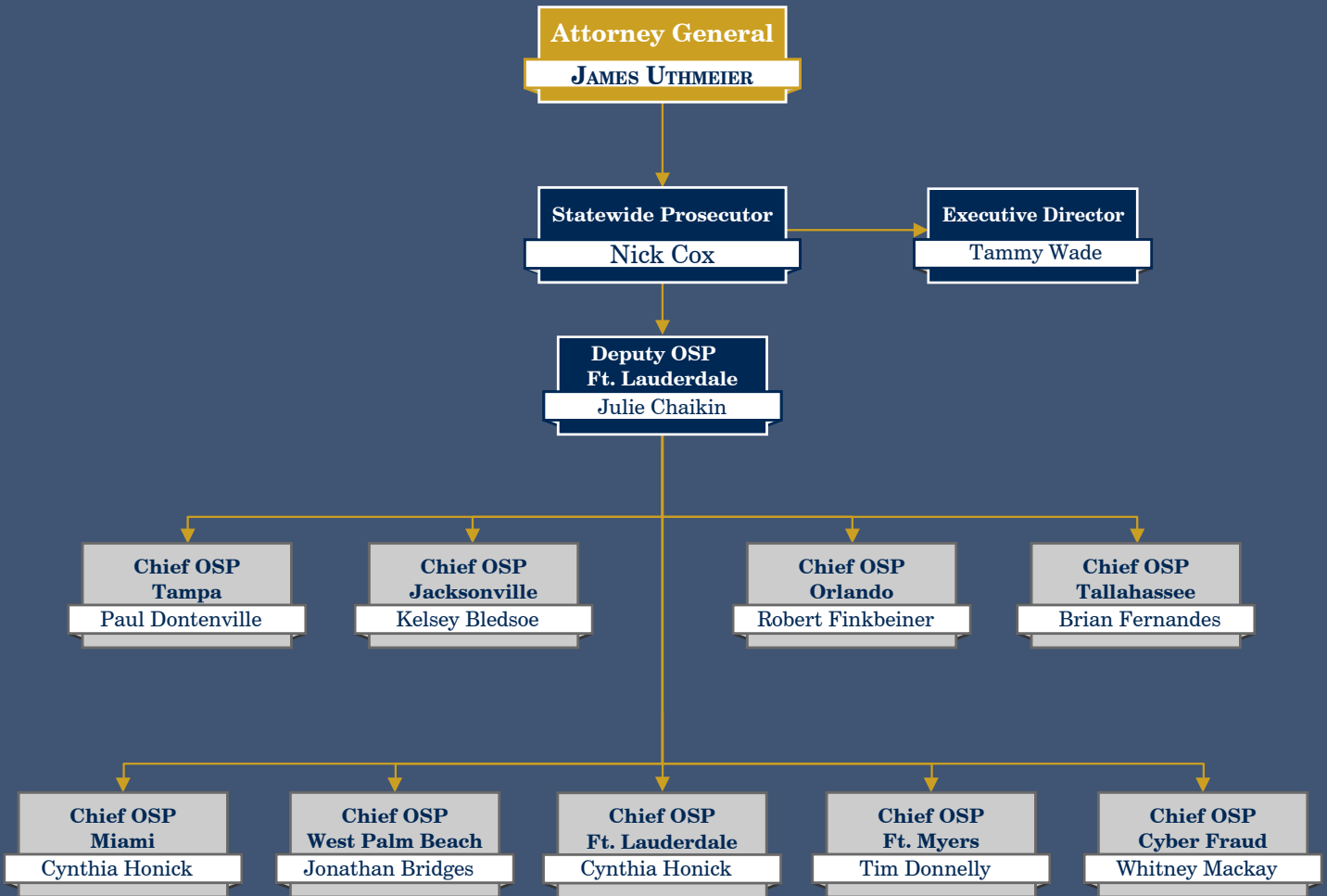
- ~ Nick Cox, *Statewide Prosecutor*



# OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL



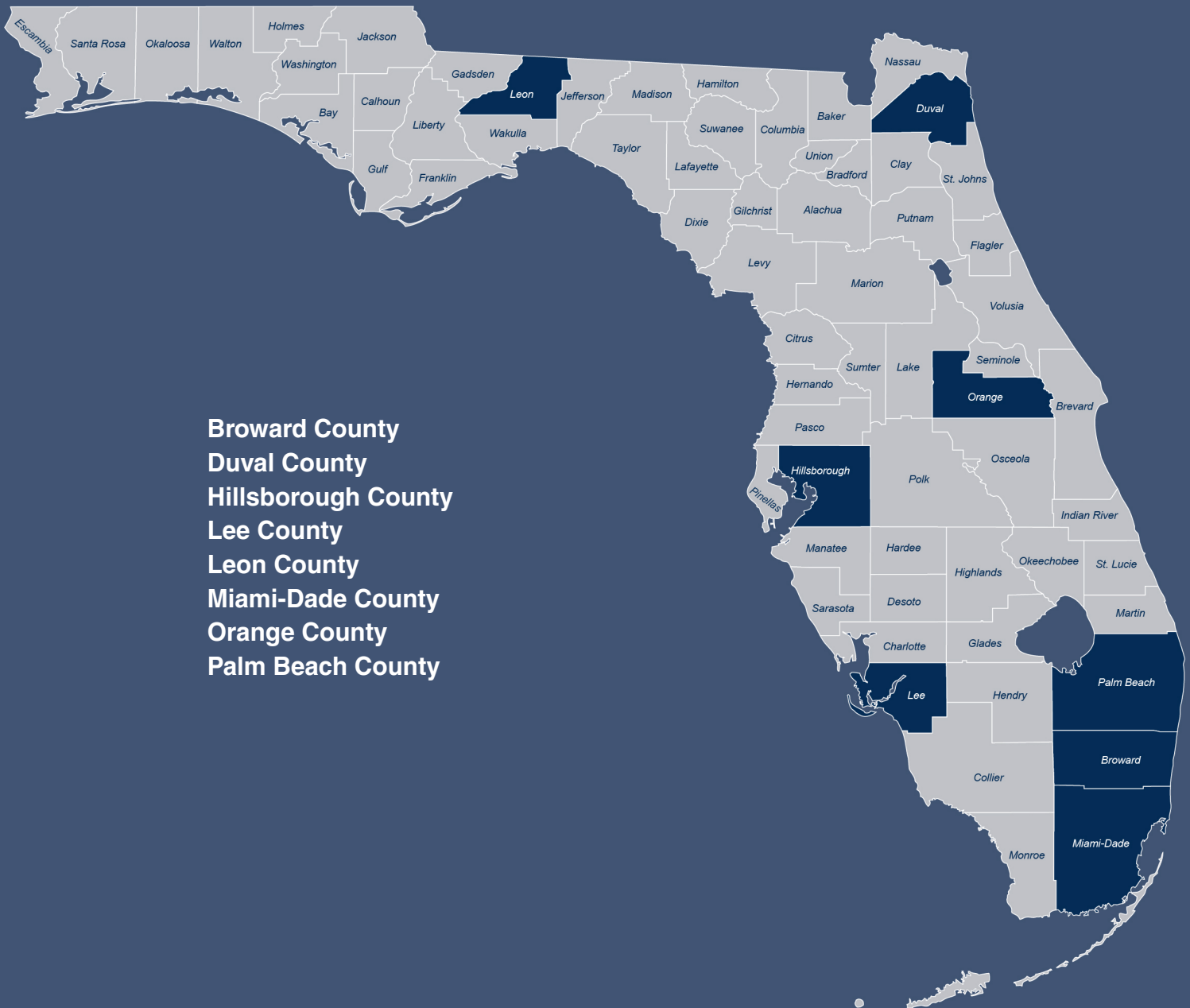
## Office of Statewide Prosecution



As of: 2/28/2025



# OFFICE OF STATEWIDE PROSECUTION BUREAU LOCATIONS



**Broward County**  
**Duval County**  
**Hillsborough County**  
**Lee County**  
**Leon County**  
**Miami-Dade County**  
**Orange County**  
**Palm Beach County**





