

2018

# ANNUAL REPORT



Nick Cox  
Statewide Prosecutor



## **OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF STATEWIDE PROSECUTION IN 2018**

In 2018 the Office of Statewide Prosecution (OSP) continued to find itself on the forefront of the Attorney General's priorities and initiatives. Opioids, heroin and other illicit drugs, human trafficking, retail and cargo theft, and many other crimes and scams continue to be areas of particular interest. In doing so, the OSP litigated a greater number of jury trials than normal while still maintaining a very high conviction rate. This success, as usual, is due to the hard work and dedication of our highly experienced Assistant Statewide Prosecutors and legal staff. As you will read, this office has a very diverse legal team with expertise and specializations in many areas of primary interest.

One of the most cited statistics in measuring the effectiveness of a prosecution office is their conviction rate. During 2018 the OSP found itself attaining the highest conviction rate we have experienced at 98%. This is the highest conviction rate for OSP during Attorney General Bondi's administration, and the highest we are aware of in the recent history of OSP.

Additionally, this success was accomplished in a year when we routinely found ourselves in jury trials. This becomes much more significant when you consider the nature and length of the jury trial typically tried by our prosecutors. Racketeering, narcotic wire taps, money laundering, drug trafficking, large scale frauds, and many other complex cases are the most common cases tried before juries by Assistant Statewide Prosecutors. Additionally, these cases are not completed in a matter of days, but usually in multiple weeks. For example, two of the cited trials were handled by two of our prosecutors from our West Palm Beach Bureau. These large fraud matters were most challenging and were tried within months of each other against the same defendant. One took

just over 7 weeks to try, the other approximately 5 weeks. The defendant was convicted after almost 3 months of trials. OSP cases are not small and almost always are complex criminal prosecutions.

During the last two quarters of 2018 our office went through a significant IT change. Before last year, the OSP case management system was very old and outdated. The system was inefficient and resulted in excessive prosecutor time being spent trying to navigate and work with archaic software. Opening a case, maintaining case notes, and closing a case could take hours due to the outdated software we were using. As a result, we sought the legislatures approval to grant us the ability to purchase a new case management system/software that would be more user friendly and greatly reduce attorney time spent with administrative duties. Our new system was installed in 2018, and while most of our prosecutors are still learning how to navigate it, we are excited that it will make OSP even more productive and efficient.

With regard to some of our other statistics and measures for OSP, our initial data shows that we had reductions in areas involving charges filed (down 22%) and number of defendants whose cases were disposed of (down 21%). We believe this is due to the fact we have had some difficulty in capturing our complete data for 2018 due, in part, to the software changes and the user learning curves. As we continue to search for the cause of this issue in the software, as well as provide more training to our staff, we will also examine this to see if we actually have had true reductions in any area and why. However, despite that concern, it is very clear that Assistant Statewide Prosecutors are working hard and achieved excellent results.

In 2018 OSP assisted preparing and prosecuting more than twice the number of wiretaps, primarily for narcotics violations, than in 2017. In addition to 47 wires in 2018, the office also saw an increased number of wiretap trials and drug cases where very significant sentences were obtained. In fact,

during a 6 – 8 week period in the summer of 2018, OSP reported 7 sentences for major drug traffickers where a 25 year minimum mandatory sentence was imposed.

Additionally, in another of the Attorney General's priorities, Human Trafficking, the numbers thus far show a 30% increase in the number of active cases. This is due in large part to several of our prosecutors who are human trafficking specialists who understand the need to not only prosecute these cases, but to work with and help the victims of these crimes. These cases represent a whole new style of prosecution for our profession due to the need to be more sensitive than ever to the needs of the victims, resulting in our attorneys having to sometimes take on the role of a quasi-social worker to help the victim and thus maintain our case.

Opioid prosecutions have stayed very consistent over the past 5 years as well. With almost 60 active pill cases and over 400 defendants charged in these cases, our "zero tolerance" policy since 2011 towards opioids has kept our prosecutors very busy.

The financial portions of the sentences obtained by OSP in 2018 was the highest in 5 years. The numbers thus far show our highest court assessments overall totaling over 26 million dollars. This includes court costs, costs of prosecution and investigations, and fines. However, victim restitution was the largest of these numbers. In 2018, with the numbers thus far, courts ordered \$17,859,317 in criminal restitution on our cases, a 12% increase over 2017. Our total court ordered financial assessments for 2018 was \$26,124,062, again, the largest in the last 5 years.

Our prosecutors and legal staff are the key to this success. As such, we have again asked many of them to address certain priorities and cases handled by our office. We will also highlight a few new initiatives and some information about the experienced and varied people who make up the OSP team.

~ Nick Cox, Statewide Prosecutor

## Cold Cases & Homicides

Historically, the OSP has not prosecuted many homicide cases as most of these cases are handled by the homicide teams at the State Attorneys Offices. However, since 2011 the OSP has engaged in hiring practices that focus on hiring attorneys who value and enjoy taking cases to trial. In doing so, the OSP has many prosecutors join our staff of lawyers who have backgrounds prosecuting all levels of homicides, from Manslaughter, to Murder in the First Degree, to Death Penalty litigation. While such crimes would typically be reserved for prosecution by the local State Attorneys, OSP has handled matters where the jurisdiction of the homicide was unclear, the location of the homicide and the ultimate location of the victim were in two different judicial circuits, or the case was a "cold case" that has been long unsolved. None of these cases would be handled by our office unless done so in agreement with the State Attorneys for the affected circuits. But, with our strong relationships with our State Attorney colleagues, this has not impacted our handling these homicides.

Accordingly, the OSP has handled numerous cases involving criminal homicide. Several cases have been tried involving crimes of Manslaughter and Second Degree Murder (without an empaneled grand jury, we have not been able to indict and First Degree Murder cases). Each of these cases have resulted in convictions and prison sentences for the offender.

Then, a little over 2 years ago, the Governor ordered the reassignment of more than 20 Capital First Degree Murder cases from one judicial circuit to be handled by the State Attorney for the Fifth Judicial Circuit. When this happened, the Statewide Prosecutor and Attorney General Bondi offered the assistance of the OSP and its numerous prosecutors with Capital litigation experience to assist in prosecuting some of these cases with the authority of the Fifth Circuit State Attorney. One of these cases was presented to a jury by a team of

prosecutors including the Statewide Prosecutor, and several more are still pending trial or sentencing proceedings. Thus far the case tried resulted in a conviction and recommendation of death by the jury for the murder of a 3 month old baby, although the trial court overruled the jury's unanimous recommendation at the final sentencing. These cases will likely continue into 2020 given the nature of capital litigation. But regardless how long this takes, OSP prosecutors have the experience and skill to handle these cases.

More recently, the OSP has become much more involved in the investigation and prosecution of "cold homicides". These homicides are typically cases that have gone unsolved with no arrests for 15 to 20 years, or more. OSP has also become an active member of the State of Florida's Cold Case Homicide Commission which is chaired by the Sheriff of Alachua County. One of our Assistant Statewide Prosecutors, Cass Castillo, has been appointed to this commission due to his extensive background in homicide prosecution, with an emphasis on cold case prosecution and homicides with no corpus delicti, where the victim's body is not found. As such, ASP Castillo has assisted law enforcement with the investigation and ultimate prosecution of several single circuit matters.

In 2018, Mr. Castillo, with the authority of local State Attorneys, prosecuted Andrelo Witcher, a man fairly well known to law enforcement, in North Central Florida. The case involved a woman who disappeared approximately 20 years ago, was last seen or heard with Mr. Witcher, and who no evidence was ever found of her existence or remains. Interestingly, there have been 3 other women connected to Witcher who have also disappeared. After significant investigation and legal research, Mr. Castillo charged Witcher with Manslaughter and the case proceeded to trial in Alachua County, assisted by a 7th Circuit Assistant State Attorney. Following his conviction, Mr. Witcher was sentenced to 30 years in the Florida State Prison. Bill Cervone, the State Attorney in

Gainesville, credited OSP for the conviction, and law enforcement was, to say the least, appreciative. We are convinced that this conviction saved lives. So we will continue to assist any State Attorneys and work on these cold cases as long as we continue to make a positive contribution as we have thus far.

~ Nick Cox, Statewide Prosecutor

## **Fraud**

During 2018, by way of investigations, charges filed and trials, OSP handled a galaxy of cases which fit the ever-expanding criteria for fraud. Each of the seven bureaus dealt with cases including traditional organized schemes, identity theft, mortgage and timeshare frauds, retail theft, fraud against the government, and public corruption—as well as the seemingly limitless permutations associated with each. Working in partnership with local, State, and Federal law enforcement agencies, the work of the Office provided vivid testimony to the oft-repeated mantra that the universe of white collar crime is limited only by the creativity and criminal industriousness of those who commit it.

Among the year's highlights was a remarkable trial in Martin County, noteworthy for both its length [twelve weeks] as well as the added burden of opposing a pro se defendant. The Assistants in that case prevailed, securing a conviction on four felonies related to the filing of fraudulent quit claim deeds and the receipt of deposits and rental payments from good faith buyers. The defendant even lived at times in some of these homes which he had, in effect, stolen from banks, deceased owners, and other rightful title holders.

A week-long trial in Volusia County yielded convictions against a father and son conspiracy for orchestrating a gift card scam which was responsible for over a million dollars in stolen merchandise. The two were sentenced to 5.5 and 10 years in prison, respectively.



In Ft. Myers, a defendant is facing Statewide charges numbering over thirty counts of Identity Theft for using dozens of fake credit cards during a 6-month period. He also possessed, and was charged with using, card re-encoders, skimming devices, and the equipment needed to make skimmers.

Finally, proving the Office's adherence to the adage that 'you can run but you cannot hide', an Orlando couple charged with three dozen Identity Theft counts in an enterprise investigated by the U.S. Postal Service was captured after being fugitives for nine years. One pled to a prison sentence while the other is awaiting trial.

One observation to be gleaned from the Office's work in this area over the past year—though perhaps not rising to the level of being termed a trend—was the number of instances in which frauds were perpetrated due primarily to the existence of a previously established relationship between victim and scammer. This has led to many an Assistant advising victims to adopt yet another truism to guide future behavior: 'trust but verify'.

~ Robert C. Finkbeiner, Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor

## **HIDTA**

In 2018, Statewide Prosecution continued its successful partnership with the North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Program (NF HIDTA). HIDTA is a program created by Congress through the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 to provide assistance to Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies operating in areas determined to be critical drug-trafficking regions of the United States. Each of the 28 HIDTAs is a federally-funded law enforcement coalition coordinating, combining and leveraging the resources and capabilities of federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to disrupt and dismantle Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering Organizations. There are four HIDTAs in Florida: North Florida HIDTA,

Central Florida HIDTA, and South Florida HIDTA, while the Gulf Coast HIDTA is headquartered in Louisiana, the area includes two Florida counties as well as counties of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Beginning in 2006, OSP partnered with the NF HIDTA to create the Prosecutorial Initiative. In 2014, this initiative absorbed the Cash and Asset Seizure Team, a group of experienced law enforcement officers who specialize in tracking, locating, and assisting in the lawful seizure of narcotics-related illicit proceeds. In 2018, two experienced forfeiture attorneys (one State and one Federal) joined the CAST Team to lend pooled, learned support to the CAST investigators. The continued mission of the Prosecutorial Initiative/Cash and Asset Seizure Team is to assist all NF HIDTA initiatives in the development of sound, effective, prosecutable cases against major Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering Organizations. Beyond case development, this combined initiative produces and provides training and legal analysis to officers and prosecutors, reflective of the current needs of the law enforcement community. Additionally, the Prosecutorial Initiative, when called upon, participates in the specific issues throughout the State to fight drug trafficking, including legislation to combat dangerous drugs such as in 2016, Synthetic Cannabinoids ("Spice", "Incense") and Substituted Cathinones ("Flakka", "Bath Salts"); in 2017, Fentanyl Derivatives; and in 2018, tableting and encapsulating machines. In 2018, this Initiative assisted in defending the sound constitutionality of the class prohibitions in Circuit Courts. This successful, federal grant-funded initiative has been continuously lead by Shannon MacGillis, Special Counsel to the Florida Attorney General's OSP.

The OSP partnership with NF HIDTA directly promotes and fulfills the stated and intended directive of Florida Statutes, Section 16.56(1)(c). This partnership provides OSP with an excellent source of well-developed, complex cases involving organized crime affecting the NF HIDTA 12-county

footprint, as well as promotes the on-going great relations with numerous State Attorneys' Offices, and overall enhances the cooperation and understanding between investigating agencies, forensic laboratories and prosecution offices throughout the State.

~Shannon MacGillis, Special Counsel

## **Human Trafficking**

In October 2018, on behalf of the OSP the Statewide Prosecutor, was named the Prosecutor of the Year by the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking. This award recognized the OSP for its significant impact on the issue of human trafficking through its successful investigations and prosecutions of human traffickers and OSP's commitment to work with the public to raise awareness. Throughout the year, several Assistant Statewide Prosecutors provided training and presentations on various topics and case studies to local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and provided awareness training to the public. In addition, members of the OSP serve on the Board of the Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force and work closely with State and Federal Investigators on both the west and east coasts of Florida.

### **ARRESTS**

2018 proved to be an active year in the area of Human Trafficking. This is evidenced by several arrests and trials by Assistant Statewide Prosecutors. These include the arrest of Daniel Alphonse, who was charged with Human Trafficking and Deriving Support from Proceeds of Prostitution. Alphonse established a Backpage account for a 17-year-old female who was in foster care. Through investigation, it was learned that Alphonse scheduled the sexual encounters, took all proceeds and even sexually battered the victim and her 14-year-old sister. Alphonse is currently in custody and awaiting trial.

The arrest of Alphonse led to the arrests of

Cassandra Jones and Robert Smith who have been charged with Human Trafficking and Deriving Support from the Proceeds of Prostitution. Jones and Smith had also trafficked the same 17-year-old in foster care. It was learned that the minor met Jones and Smith while visiting a friend in the hospital. Jones and Smith relocated the minor to Colorado and advertised the minor on Backpage. Jones took photographs of the minor while Smith was responsible for posting the ads and scheduling the sexual encounters. Both Jones and Smith are currently in custody and awaiting trial.

Finally, Javaree Bell was charged for Human Trafficking and Deriving Support from Proceeds of Prostitution. This case was also developed from the investigation of Alphonse when it was learned that Bell played the role of "boyfriend" to the minor victim while advertising her on Backpage and taking the proceeds. Bell is currently out on bond and awaiting trial.

In addition to these arrests in 2018, Robert Miner continues to await trial in Broward County on four counts of Human Trafficking, 5 counts of Deriving Support from Proceeds of Prostitution, Money Laundering and Sexual Battery. Hopefully 2019 will bring closure to these cases so that the victims can continue to heal.

### **TRIALS**

In April, 2018 Assistant Statewide Prosecutors tried Ryan Gemelle Poole who was found guilty of Human Trafficking, Deriving Support from Proceeds of Prostitution, Unlawful Use of a Two Way Communications device to Facilitate a Felony, Sexual Battery and Branding.

The Trial was based upon an investigation which revealed that Poole met the victim on a dating website and shortly after engaging in a romantic relationship, started a grooming process to introduce the victim to the sex industry; starting with introducing the victim to cocaine and demanding she work as a stripper in Orlando. He

forced the victim was to engage in web casting sex acts and to have multiple sexual encounters for money which he facilitated through the use of the now defunct Backpage.com. Poole forced the victim to travel from Marion County to Alachua, Orange, Hillsborough and Charlotte Counties for the purposes of prostitution for his financial gain. Additionally, he forced the victim to have his initials tattooed on her body to show that she was his property. When the victim made her move to break free from Poole, his final act of punishment and control, was to rape her.

Poole was sentenced to 30 years in the Florida Department of Corrections. He will be required to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life.

#### **PLEAS**

Manolo Santillan pleaded guilty to Human Trafficking, Deriving Support from Proceeds of Prostitution, Racketeering and Conspiracy to Engage in a Pattern of Racketeering Activity. Santillan was the head of racketeering operation which engaged in the trafficking of women for commercial sex, including minors. Santillan coerced the victims to engage in commercial sex acts by threatening physical harm and by withholding narcotics. Santillan pled open to the Court and an Orlando judge sentenced him to 12 years in state prison. Santillan will be required to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life.

Jose Tapia Mora pleaded guilty to Human Trafficking and Traveling to Meet a Minor. Tapia Mora responded to an advertisement posted on Backpage and then through text messages set up an appointment to have sexual intercourse with a person he believed to be a 14 year old girl. Tapia Mora arrived at the agreed upon location with cash and condoms where he was arrested. Tapia Mora was sentenced to 69 months in the Florida Department of Corrections to be followed by 5 years of sex offender probation. He will be required to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life.

In June 2018, Kelvin Williams pleaded guilty to two counts of Human Trafficking, two counts of Deriving Support from Proceeds of Prostitution and Unlawful use of a two way communications device. Williams ran a venture that trafficked 4 women, including one minor. Williams arranged for the women to be posted on Backpage and for hotel rooms to be rented. He would stay close to the hotel so that he could collect all funds from their sexual encounters. He used physical violence, intimidation and threats to keep the victims from leaving. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison, followed by 2 years of community control and 12 years of sex offender probation. He will be required to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life.

As we look to 2019, OSP will continue to participate in pro-active investigations with local, state and federal law enforcement to identify persons engaged in human trafficking. OSP remains committed to community outreach and will continue to provide training and education to law enforcement, non-governmental organizations and the public to raise awareness in effort to prevent, detect and report human trafficking. In addition, OSP will be partnering with many law enforcement and non-governmental organizations in preparation for the upcoming Super Bowls in Miami and Tampa.

~ Julie Sercus, Assistant Statewide Prosecutor

#### **MFCU**

As we have explained previously, since Attorney General Bondi took office in 2011, the OSP and Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU) began increasing coordination with one another in order to increase the number of criminal healthcare fraud prosecutions. In doing so we recognized that utilizing MFCU attorneys with prosecutorial backgrounds would enhance this effort. Those lawyers most often have been assisting with the case since the inception of the investigation and have a solid handle on the evidence and witnesses involved, thus eliminating the need for a new



attorney to come on board and reassess this matter from the beginning. This effort has resulted in an increase in criminal prosecutions handled by the OSP/MFCU while at the same time more efficiently utilizing attorney resources.

In 2018, Attorney General Bondi directed that the OSP have more direct control over the criminal cases coming out of the MFCU. In doing so, she ordered that the OSP would be responsible for reviewing all criminal cases being referred for prosecution from the MFCU and would make determinations regarding the future of the case. This was to include charging decisions, venue determinations and whether the case should be handled by OSP, one of our State Attorney colleagues or the United States Attorney's Office. Additionally, the Attorney General asked that the OSP make final decisions regarding the plea negotiation of any case that would be settled outside of the criminal guidelines scoresheet range.

Initially this task was to be taken on by each of the regional OSP bureau chiefs. However, we soon thereafter changed the process in order to guarantee more consistency and accountability in the filing and negotiations approval process. As a result the Statewide Prosecutor appointed one Assistant Statewide Prosecutor, Kelly McKnight of the Tampa Bureau, to serve as OSP's Special Counsel for Medicaid Fraud. In this role, Ms. McKnight concentrates the majority of her time working with the attorneys and investigators in the MFCU reviewing cases, directing charging decisions, and assisting with trial preparation.

The MFCU and OSP continue to enjoy a solid working relationship and with the new process in place, we are seeing more consistency in our decision making with the Medicaid criminal cases. With the new administration taking over in 2019, we anticipate an increased desire to prosecute fraud cases, including Medicaid Fraud, as well as an emphasis on matters involving senior citizens as victims. In doing so, we believe the structure set

up last year should be altered to highlight crimes involving seniors and to improve general oversight of all MFCU cases.

## **Wire Taps & Illicit Drugs**

The OSP continues its partnership with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting those criminal organizations involved in bringing illicit drugs into this state for distribution in our communities. In many instances, the OSP and our law enforcement partners have utilized, among other available tools of investigation, electronic surveillance of communications (commonly referred to as wiretaps) to dismantle entire organizations or individuals trafficking in illicit drugs. By utilizing this investigative tool when appropriate, the OSP and our partners in law enforcement have been able to not only hold those individuals found in actual possession of illicit drugs accountable, but have also held accountable, through conspiracy prosecutions, those individuals higher up in the organization's hierarchy that are directing the illicit activities of the organization and realizing most of the ill gotten gains derived from the criminal activity. In 2018, the Statewide Prosecutor authorized forty-seven (47) wiretap applications to be made by law enforcement to a court of competent jurisdiction, inclusive of three (3) extensions of previously authorized intercepts.

Many of those wiretap investigations authorized involved heroin and fentanyl. The OSP continues to be at the forefront of the fight against opioid abuse by working with our law enforcement partners in identifying and prosecuting those responsible for trafficking in heroin, fentanyl and related dangerous substances. The OSP regularly utilizes all the investigative and legislative tools at our disposal to do so. For example, in March, prosecutors with OSP convicted two Orange County men of trafficking in large amounts of heroin and of human trafficking pursuant to a wiretap investigation. In that case, Keith Hamlet and Edward Redmond were each sentenced to twenty-five (25) years in state prison for their crimes.

Later that month, OSP prosecutors convicted another Orange County man, Hasan Nguyen, for trafficking in heroin in both Orange and Seminole Counties and he too was sentenced to twenty-five (25) years in state prison. Similarly, OSP prosecutors secured twenty-five (25) year prison sentences for heroin traffickers Jorge Rivera, of Hillsborough County, in April; Cedric Houston, of Manatee County, in September; Willie Marion Jenkins, of Pinellas County, in September; and Joseph Walker, of Duval County, in October.

In addition, the OSP continues the fight against criminal organizations importing vast quantities of methamphetamine into this state. In recent years, the OSP, along with many law enforcement agencies throughout this state, has seen a shift from clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in the state producing relatively small amounts of poor-quality methamphetamine to industrial size laboratories in Mexico producing large quantities of high-quality methamphetamine, which is then smuggled into the state for distribution upon our streets. The OSP continues to work with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, often utilizing electronic surveillance tools such as wiretaps, to effectively identify and dismantle the drug trafficking organizations involved in this criminal activity.

The OSP will continue to relentlessly pursue those individuals and organizations involved in the importation and distribution of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and other illicit drugs in this state. The OSP, along with our law enforcement partners, will continue to use tools such as electronic surveillance and the interception of communications to dismantle entire distribution networks put in place by these criminal organizations, and, upon convictions, will seek lengthy prison sentences for those most culpable.

~ David Gillespie, Assistant Statewide Prosecutor

## **OSP Support Staff**

The Office of Statewide Prosecution is comprised of sixteen (16) legal assistants, three (3) analysts, two (2) victim advocates and one (1) research associate/paralegal. OSP's support staff is comprised of some of the state's most experienced employees, five (5) of whom have been with OSP for over twenty (20) years and eight (8) for over ten (10) years, averaging over eleven (11) years of experience. OSP's legal assistants typically work with at least three (3) attorneys. They are routinely tasked with assuming the positions of paralegal, criminal analyst, victim advocate and witness coordinators. The support staff is usually on board from the inception of the case and remains an integral participant from the opening of the investigation, through the discovery process and then to coordinating all witnesses for trial. This includes the role of travel agent, financial coordinator, social worker, victim advocate and sometimes simply a smiling face during stressful times for victims and witnesses.

Not only do the support personnel assist from within the office, but they also travel with their assigned attorney for any trials outside of their home jurisdiction. In addition to legal secretaries, the office also staffs three (3) Criminal Analysts. Their roles include reviewing and analyzing documents for trial, creating spread sheets and charts based upon financial or other documents for evidentiary purposes, running background checks and establishing the history of targets, as well as locating witnesses or victims for investigation and/or subsequent trial. Not only does the analyst complete the above aforementioned projects, but they also often attend trial with the Assistant Statewide Prosecutor whether it be to assist with their electronic presentation or even to testify as to the evidence in which they have prepared and analyzed. Without the analysts, trial would be far more stressful and difficult to navigate for the attorneys.

Finally, The OSP employs one Legal Research Associate/Paralegal. This position is an example

of how our staff deliver valuable legal support for our office, and often for other prosecution and law enforcement agencies. Thelma Alvarado works out of the Fort Lauderdale OSP. Not only does she assist with researching and writing motions and responses, including post-conviction responses, but Thelma is also responsible for any and all extraditions related to our office throughout the state. She has participated in numerous trainings in this area and has become an expert in the field of extraditions. Thelma is very familiar with the ins and outs of the extradition laws and practices and stays in tune with speedy trial concerns. She is very organized and efficient in moving those in custody from place to place as well as assisting in bringing in-custody witnesses to court to testify and/or arranging for defendant's extradition for prosecution. Thelma is one of the top experts in extraditions within the State of Florida as evidenced by the continued request for assistance that comes from not only within the agency, but from many individuals outside the agency as well.

Overall, our support staff go above and beyond to make sure that the individual offices run smoothly daily and that the attorneys have what they need to be successful. They are truly the unsung heroes of the office and we could not do our jobs without them.

~ Julie Chaikin Hogan, Deputy Statewide Prosecutor &  
~ Tammy Wade, Executive Director

### **Assistant Statewide Prosecutors**

The OSP is comprised of 45 attorneys with a vast amount of prosecutorial experience who come from a broad range of professional backgrounds and expertise. This diversity in experience has allowed the OSP to rise to an elite level of prosecution. OSP currently employs a Commander and Judge in the US Coast Guard, a former high school teacher, several prosecutors with over 30 years of experience, a former appellate attorney who has argued before

the Florida Supreme Court, several former public defenders, several former judicial law clerks and many former Assistant State Attorneys.

During 2018 the office employed attorneys with anywhere from 2 to upwards of 35 years experience investigating and prosecuting criminal activities. By way of example, Jim Schneider, whose badge bears the number 2, has been working as a prosecuting attorney for close to 37 years. He has been with the OSP since 1988. Jim carries a great deal of institutional knowledge and acts as legal advisor to the Statewide Prosecutor and our Assistants. He is an expert in the law, particularly as it pertains to the RICO statute and public records.

Oscar Gelpi, badge number 3, has close to 35 years as a prosecutor and is the top Pharmaceutical Drug Diversion Prosecutor not just in the State of Florida, but throughout the country and beyond. Oscar has been working these cases involving the illegal movement of non-controlled pharmaceutical drugs through illicit channels of commerce for over 17 years. His Operation "Stone Cold" is well known by law enforcement as well as the perpetrators of these crimes, who often unsuccessfully remove themselves from South Florida in order to avoid Oscar Gelpi's grasp. To date, Oscar and his colleagues have targeted hundreds and have charged nearly as many.

One of the draws for attorneys to OSP is the opportunity they have to develop their cases. Typically attorneys and investigators work in concert while investigating a case. Assistant Statewide Prosecutors (ASP) proactively work cases, consulting with law enforcement and making evidence gathering decisions together. As a result the bonds created between law enforcement and the ASP become strong. Officers will seek out the same prosecutors again and again. By doing so, the attorneys develop expertise in the areas of law in which the officers work.

In addition to RICO and pharmaceutical drug diversion cases, areas of expertise within OSP include Electronic Intercepts, Pill Mill investigations, Organized Fraud, Human Trafficking, the investigation and prosecution of large scale drug organizations, the identification and prosecution of synthetic drugs, public corruption, forensic evidence and homicide, including cold case homicides. Additionally, in 2018 the OSP began working closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission tackling fraud related to illegal lobster trap licensing and Racketeering related to illegal hunting, poaching and animal abuse of the Florida alligator, the Florida black bear, and protected species of aquatic birds.

The expertise of this office is exemplified by the ongoing requests by law enforcement, community groups, legislative committees and government officials requesting both testimony, education and consultation on a variety of subject matters. In 2018, OSP attorneys were regularly called upon to teach in their area of expertise, not just on a local level, but state and even national levels. OSP was represented in trainings sponsored by The National Association of Attorneys General regarding, among other things, overdose death investigations and met with members of the Florida legislature regarding synthetic drugs and human trafficking.

Overall, the Assistant Statewide Prosecutors in the office take great pride in what they do. They don't only volunteer to share their knowledge and expertise, but they are sought after because of it. The OSP has a culture of sharing information and assisting both law enforcement and other prosecutorial agencies. This has led to the creation of strong relationships between prosecutors and police agencies and has established the OSP as a go to agency for all.

~Julie Chaikin Hogan, Deputy Statewide Prosecutor

## Conclusion

As we leave 2018, we wanted to take a moment to recognize and thank Attorney General Pam Bondi for all she has done for the OSP. Attorney General Bondi came to office in 2011 with a rich history in criminal prosecution spanning almost 20 years. With her knowledge and experience, she was well aware of the capabilities and need for a robust prosecutorial team. She recognized our efforts and did what she could to help us improve. And most of all, she helped assemble a solid team of prosecutors and staff who care about our mission, are passionate about prosecution, love to be in trial, and who value public service. AG Bondi made OSP a priority in the Office of the Attorney General. We will always be indebted to her for what she made us, and let us be.

As we move forward with our new Attorney General, Ashley Moody, we are very excited to embrace her priorities and continue to advance our fight against crime. While many of her priorities mirror those of 2018, particularly the battle against opioid related crimes and human trafficking, we are excited to expand our work in fraud cases, crimes against the elderly, and move into dealing with issues of mental health and substance abuse. It is clear that the people of the State of Florida are the centerpiece of her priorities and that serving the public is the basis of what we do. AG Moody brings a most impressive background as a criminal prosecutor and a highly respected Circuit Court Judge who completely understands our role and value within the Department of Legal Affairs and the legal system. Her vision is clear, her priorities are solid, and she wants to lead this office to the next level of its' public service to Floridians in 2019.

~ Nick Cox, Statewide Prosecutor







Below is a list of the Assistant Statewide Prosecutors assigned to each Office as of December 31, 2018.

Jacksonville	Orlando	Tampa	Ft. Myers	Ft. Lauderdale	Miami	West Palm Beach
Kelsey Bledsoe, Office Chief	Robert Finkbeiner, Office Chief	Diane Croff, Office Chief	Michael-Anthony Pica, Office Chief	Julie Hogan, Deputy Statewide Prosecutor		Stephanie Tew, Office Chief
Joanna Piscitello	Gary Malak	Joseph Ravelo	Audra Thomas-Eth	Oscar Gelpi, Special Counsel	Stephen ImMasche	Danielle Dudai
Shannon MacGillis	John Roman	Paul Dontenville	Jennifer Gutmore	Cynthia Honick	Jeremy Franker	Jonathan Bridges
Richard Mantei	Jim Schneider, General Counsel	Jessica Costello	Carrie Pollock Gil	Jessica Nordlund	Jennifer Fernandez	Alan Saladrigas
Brian Wolf	Nicole Phillips	Julie Sercus		Patricia Abdi		
	David Gillespie	Joseph Spataro		Priscilla Prado		
	Matthew Davenport	Kelly McKnight		Jeremy Scott		
	Rebecca Hameroff	Diana Bock		Richard Sherman		
	Mary Sammon	Rita Peters				
	Mitchell Cooper	Cass Castillo				
		George Bedell				

Below is a list of support staff assigned to each Office as of December 31, 2018.

Tallahassee	Jacksonville	Orlando	Tampa	Ft. Myers	Ft. Lauderdale	Miami	West Palm Beach
Brandon Greene, Secretary Specialist	Christopher Floyd, Criminal Financial Specialist	Sherrie Elmahmoud, Criminal Financial Analyst	Virginia Caswell, Administrative Assistant	Janine Hagerdon, Senior Executive Secretary	Barbara Goodson, Senior Criminal Financial Analyst	Georgina Clinche, Senior Executive Secretary	Lisa Cushman, Administrative Assistant
	Connie Bland, Senior Executive Secretary	Amy Romero, Administrative Assistant	Kristina Dalmau, Executive Secretary	Megan Lee, Executive Secretary	Thelma Alvarado, Research Associate	Barbara Jauregui, Executive Secretary	Rosemarie Larosa, Executive Secretary
		Antoinette Jackson, Executive Secretary	Debra Kersting, Executive Secretary		Omarelis Jimenez, Executive Secretary		
		Angelica Geremia, Executive Secretary	Barbara Bawgus, Victim Services Specialist		Rhonda Greene, Administrative Assistant		
		Katie O'Rourke, Victim Services Specialist	Tammy Wade, Executive Director		Melissa Cole, Executive Secretary		



**ATTORNEY GENERAL**  
**ASHLEY MOODY**  
FLORIDA OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL