



State Attorney's Office  
Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida

## **2021 ANNUAL REPORT**







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**Melissa W. Nelson**  
*State Attorney for Florida's  
Fourth Judicial Circuit*

MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY

**In this space last year, I noted that 2020 would largely be remembered as one of struggle. That conflict bled into 2021, but by the end of last year the struggle was replaced with resilience, transition, and hope.**

The pandemic that controlled our lives was itself mostly controlled through medical advances and human determination by the end of 2021. Although life has largely returned to normal, we continue to live with the scars of what COVID-19 inflicted. For the criminal justice system, that has included tackling a backlog of cases by prosecutors who remain committed to keeping the community safe.

Violent, illegal gun crime surged in 2020, ultimately leading to an unprecedented number of homicides in Jacksonville and other cities large and small across the country. We continued to work, target offenders, and leverage our partnerships to ensure violent criminals were incapacitated.

Those efforts paid off: while cities continued to see even greater violent crime spikes in 2021, Jacksonville trended downward. Murders declined by 30%. Shootings dropped by 17%. Trends can certainly change and a single murder or shooting is one too many, but this positive trend is worth highlighting and provides hope of continued better days ahead.

As you'll see in the pages of this, our fifth Annual Report, we continued to provide justice and closure to victims of a variety of cases that shocked and saddened communities throughout Clay, Duval, and Nassau counties.

We also set in motion our latest initiative — Strength in Support — to better increase how we support victims. Over the course of the next year, this multi-tiered initiative will result in more public-facing resources, increased community engagement, and better communication between our office and those we serve.

Juvenile civil citations continue to make an impact in more ways than one. Since an updated agreement was struck among law enforcement in mid-2017, their increased utilization has resulted in saving taxpayers more than an estimated \$13 million. We also know those who successfully complete the program re-offend at very low rates — making our communities safer now and in the future.

The successes of these programs and initiatives would not be possible without the hard work of the more than 300-plus attorneys, investigators, and staff of your State Attorney's Office.

We continue to innovate. We continue to collaborate. And, most importantly, we continue to work for you.

Thank you for your continued support.

*Melissa*



# Our Mission

The mission of the State Attorney's Office is to pursue justice for the citizens of the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida and to fairly and impartially enforce the law.

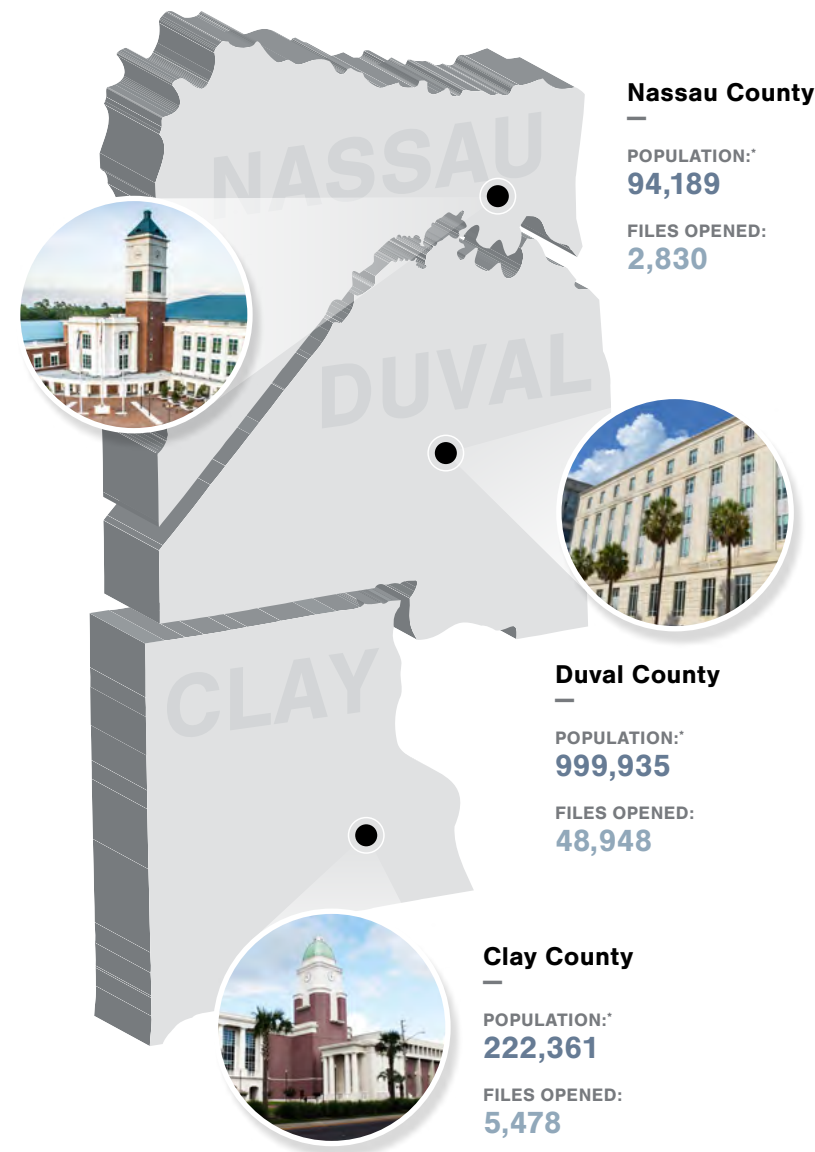
## Core Guiding Principles

We will:

- 1 Treat all participants in the criminal justice system with **RESPECT**
- 2 Empower crime victims, and treat them with **DIGNITY**
- 3 Strive for **FAIRNESS** and **IMPARTIALITY** in our use of prosecutorial discretion
- 4 Pursue just punishment and **ACCOUNTABILITY** for those guilty of crimes
- 5 Actively seek **INPUT** from the diverse communities we serve
- 6 Lead with **TRANSPARENCY** in our actions and decision-making
- 7 Seek **EFFECTIVE** and **INNOVATIVE** strategies for preventing and controlling crime
- 8 **SUPPORT** and **EXPLORE** alternatives to the penal system when appropriate
- 9 Act as good **STEWARDS** of public resources entrusted to us for our work
- 10 Stay abreast of **BEST PRACTICES** in our field and employ technology effectively
- 11 **COLLABORATE** with other government and law enforcement agencies and community partners to enhance public safety
- 12 Act with **PROFESSIONALISM**

## STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR FLORIDA'S FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

# 2021 Office at a Glance

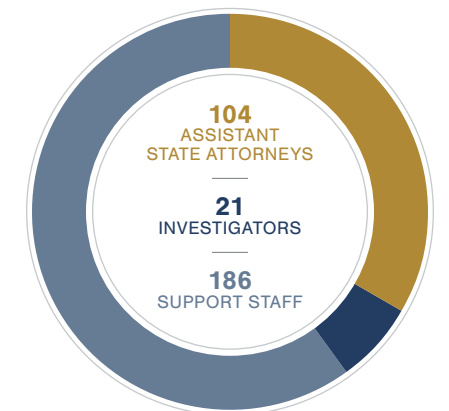


STATE ATTORNEY:  
**Melissa W. Nelson**

TOTAL POPULATION:  
**1,316,485**

TOTAL FILES OPENED:  
**57,256**

TOTAL EMPLOYEES:  
**311**



NUMBER OF PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS CLOSED:  
**2,060**

BUDGET:  
**\$32 million**

Our duty to the people of Northeast Florida comprises two main tenets. The first is to keep people safe by prosecuting those who disrupt our community. The second is to ensure our pursuit of justice is done in a transparent way that maintains the trust of those we serve.

State Attorney Melissa Nelson





## STATE ATTORNEY’S OFFICE FOR FLORIDA’S FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

# 2021 by the Numbers

To benefit our community, these four key programs and initiatives were priorities in 2021.



### Juvenile Civil Citations

This program allows youth with no previous criminal history to avoid a criminal record. Instead of an arrest, law enforcement officers can issue a civil citation.

SAVINGS:  
**\$3 million+**

CIVIL CITATIONS ISSUED TO ELIGIBLE YOUTH:

- **81%** – SAO4
- **66%** – Florida Average

JUVENILE CIVIL CITATIONS ISSUED:  
**657**

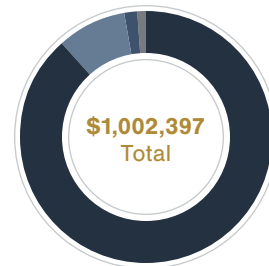


### Restitution Enforcement Program

This pre-arrest diversion program gives offenders the opportunity to pay restitution that is returned directly to victims.

COLLECTED FOR THE STATE OF FLORIDA IN RESTITUTION THAT GOES TO VICTIMS:  
**\$1 million+**

- **\$886,724.43** – Duval
- **\$88,911.54** – Clay
- **\$17,361.12** – Nassau
- **\$9,400** – SAO4



### KEYS 2 Drive

This program helps eligible offenders obtain a valid driver’s license and puts them back on the road safely and legally.

CASES REFERRED:  
**998**

VALID DRIVER’S LICENSES OBTAINED:  
**725**

SAVINGS:  
**\$59,000+**

PAID TO THE STATE OF FLORIDA:  
**\$660,000+**

	DUVAL	NASSAU	TOTAL
SAVINGS*	\$57,000	\$2,887	\$59,000+
COLLECTIONS FOR THE CLERK OF COURT	\$630,000	\$31,000	\$660,000+
CLIENTS SERVED*	950	48	998
RELICENSED*	703	22	725



### Let’s Drive Jax!

“Let’s Drive Jax” was a two-week driver’s license reinstatement expo that provided a one-stop shop for individuals to reinstate their driving privileges and get back on the road. The expo was a partnership between the Duval County Clerk of Courts, the Fourth Judicial Circuit, the State Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office, the Duval County Tax Collector, Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, the Salvation Army, and the Florida Department of Revenue.

PARTICIPANTS ASSISTED:  
**1,070**

COURT CASES RESOLVED:  
**621**

DRIVER’S LICENSES REINSTATED OR MADE ELIGIBLE FOR REINSTATEMENT:  
**299**



## Four-Year Taxpayer Savings Through Juvenile Civil Citations



**\$12.9 million+**

- 2018 – \$3.2 MILLION
- 2019 – \$4.6 MILLION
- 2020 – \$2.1 MILLION
- 2021 – \$3.0 MILLION

## Tax Dollars Saved in 2021



JUVENILE CIVIL CITATIONS:  
**\$3 million+**



KEYS 2 DRIVE:  
**\$59,000+**

## Money to the State of Florida in 2021



RESTITUTION ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM:  
**\$1 million+**



KEYS 2 DRIVE:  
**\$660,000+**

1. The cost to arrest a juvenile is \$5000. The cost to issue a Civil Citation is \$386, saving \$4614 for each juvenile issued a civil citation and not arrested. Florida DJJ Civil Citation Initiative, [bit.ly/3D7mPdi](http://bit.ly/3D7mPdi), September 22, 2014, pg. 27; Florida DJJ Roadmap to System Excellence, [bit.ly/3LqpxGt](http://bit.ly/3LqpxGt), August 1, 2013, pg. 32; Florida DJJ Civil Citations, May 2012. Estimated cost savings from using juvenile pre-arrest diversions rather than arrests is \$3,031,398. | 2. CC Dashboard | Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (state.fl.us) | 3. Due to COVID-19, the number of juvenile civil citations issued were less than prior years. 1005 juvenile civil citation were issued in 2019. | 4. Due to hardships created by COVID-19, the SAO4 granted an automatic 10-month forbearance for program participants who could not fulfill their restitution obligations. The SAO4 continued to collect restitution during this period but did not reject anyone for failure to pay. Payment plans were renegotiated to accommodate those defendants who wanted to remain compliant but had fallen behind on their payments. | 5. The Restitution Enforcement Program (REP) is a pre-arrest diversion program designed to give offenders the opportunity to pay restitution and avoid arrest. Restitution is collected by the office on behalf of several state agencies including the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Revenue, the Department of Economic Opportunity, and the Jacksonville Housing Authority. REP collected \$650,430. | 6. Court Options, KEYS 2 Drive data, Fourth Judicial Circuit, Duval County, Florida. | 7. Data provided by the Duval County Clerk of Courts. | 8. 510 participants were assisted in-person, and the others were assisted remotely. | 9. Duval and Nassau counties.





# Enhancing Public Safety Through TARGETED PROSECUTION

Since taking office in 2017, targeting, prosecuting, and incapacitating violent offenders has been the top priority of the State Attorney's Office. Although overall crime rates have been decreasing, homicides, aggravated assaults, and other instances of violence persist in Jacksonville. In 2017 and 2018, Jacksonville had more murders than any other city in Florida, and twice as many as Miami. In 2019 and 2020, the number of homicides and aggravated assaults continued to increase.

Drive-by shootings and shootings aimed at rival gang members are an obstinate and ongoing problem. Using the cutting-edge technology of ShotSpotter, we can [hear these shootings](#) in real time. Shockingly, fewer than one in five of these shootings are even called in to 9-1-1. We also know that many of the trigger-pullers are prohibited from having firearms because of prior felony convictions.

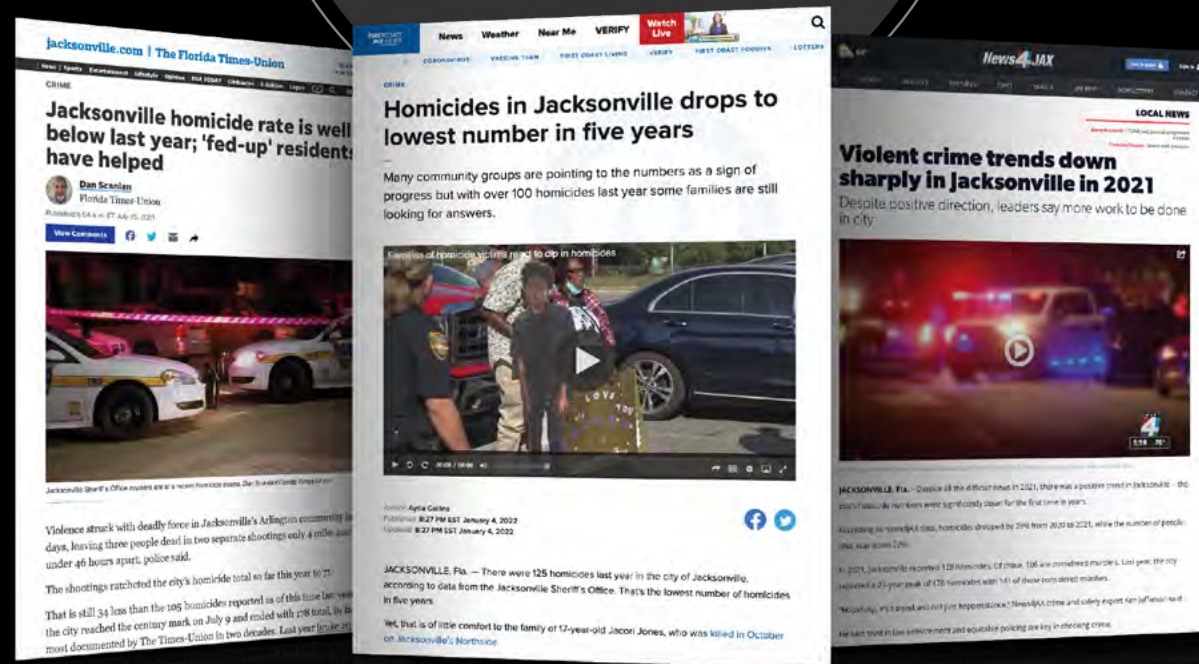
In 2021, with the backdrop of the pandemic still impacting the nation's way of life, the rise in violent crime and homicides experienced by many cities during the pandemic's outset bled into 2021.

Cities like Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Columbus, OH; Indianapolis, IN; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; Oakland, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; and

throughout Florida all experienced continued rises in homicides and violent crime.

But Jacksonville saw a dramatic drop of 17% in shootings and 30% in murders. We believe this significant decline has been achieved, in part, through policy changes, novel prosecutions, partnerships, and investments in technology.

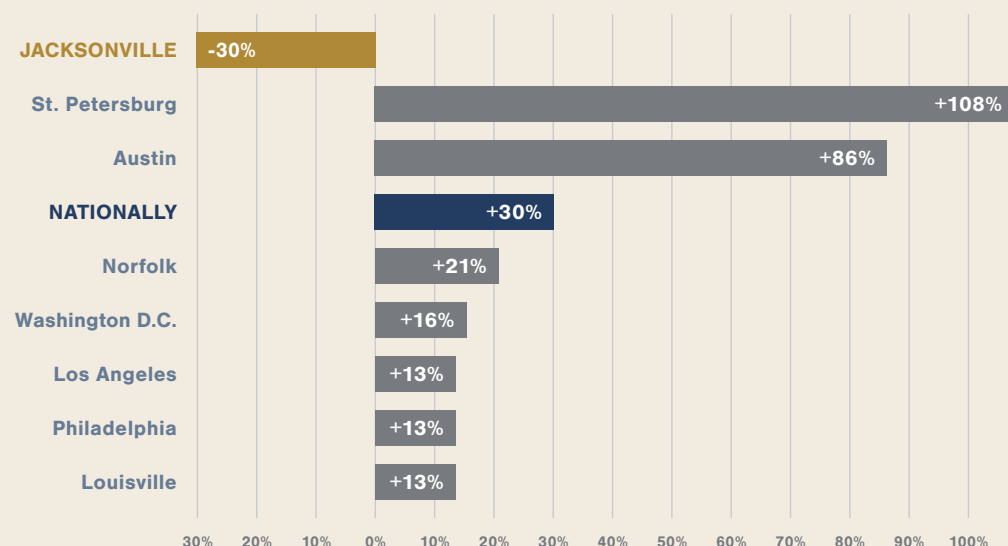
Shootings  
**17%** ↓  
Murders  
**30%** ↓



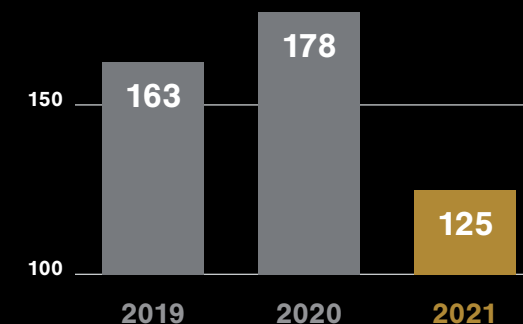
**We continue to aggressively pursue violent offenders and those who illegally use firearms to harm our community. While the 2021 drop in violent crime is welcome news, it is not enough — we will continue our work to drive violence down.** State Attorney Melissa Nelson



## U.S. CITIES' PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN HOMICIDES, 2020-2021



## HOMICIDES IN JACKSONVILLE







## TARGETED PROSECUTION (CONTINUED)



## 1 Targeted Prosecution Division: focusing our resources on the trigger-pullers

We created the Targeted Prosecution Division to **focus on those offenders who pose the most significant threat to society**. The experienced prosecutors in this division dedicate their attention to the offenders wreaking havoc and use every statutory tool available to address these serious, violent offenders.



Above & below: actual photos and video used to prosecute offenders. Center: Maayaki Raysor sentenced to 4 years prison



## 2 Aggressive Prosecution of Prohibited Persons

### VIDEO PROSECUTIONS

We frequently see convicted felons flagrantly showing off their long guns, rifles, and drum magazines on their social media platforms. They make videos — many of them produced professionally — and use them to threaten and celebrate murder as well as send messages between rival groups, thereby driving the cycle of retaliation activity. We have responded with novel prosecutions **using their own videos, words, and photos against them**. As a result of this prosecutorial strategy, we have successfully obtained prison sentences for prohibited persons.

### POLICY DIRECTIVES

We issued a policy directive that all prosecutors **“charge the most serious, readily provable minimum mandatory enhancements when making filing decisions [related to gun crimes]...”** We created a series of tools to enhance our investigative efforts, assist us in properly evaluating risk, and ensure convictions.



Tyler Simmons sentenced to 7 years prison

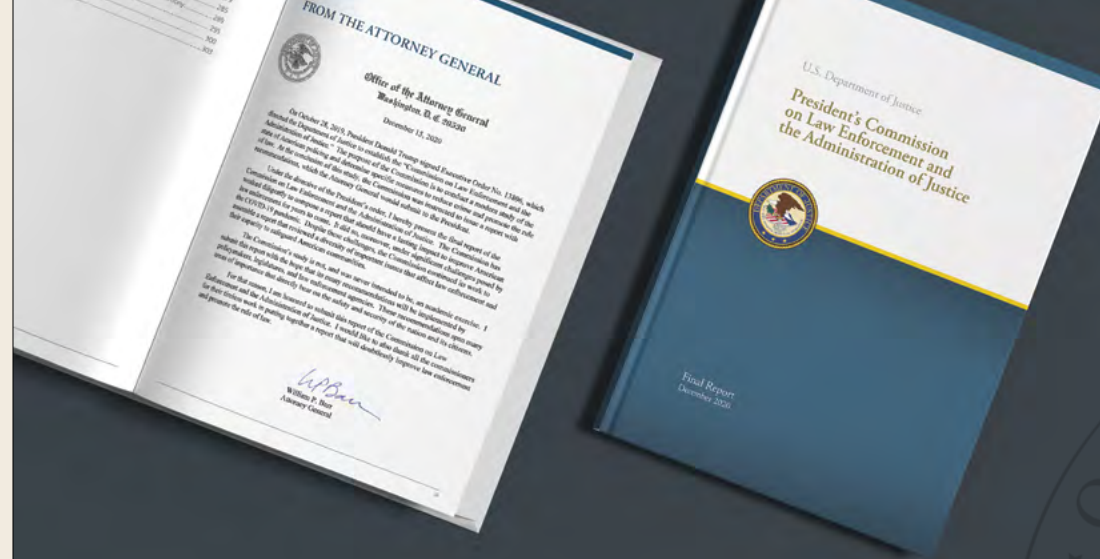
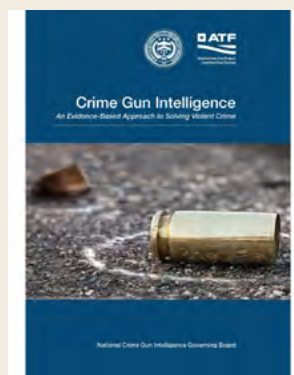


Channing Crowley sentenced to 8 years prison



## 3 Partnerships

We have forged new partnerships across all levels of law enforcement and **built Jacksonville's Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC)** with help from the City of Jacksonville in 2019. The CGIC is a hub that harnesses the power of intelligence, technology, and communication to investigate, solve, and prosecute gun crimes and focus on the drivers of the violence. Through these partnerships, we use cutting-edge technology to link guns to crimes and crimes to criminals and take shooters off our streets. Jacksonville's use of Custom Notifications, Call-Ins, and Cure Violence are all nationally recommended approaches to violence reduction. These collaborative strategies have given rise to a new atmosphere of information-sharing and coordination in Northeast Florida.

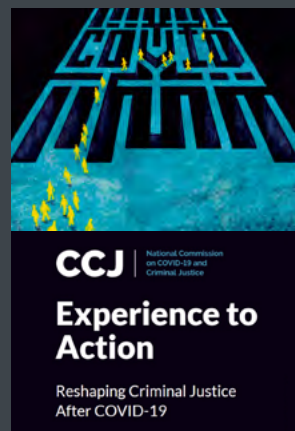


## 4 National Influence

Our influence was felt nationally when State Attorney Melissa Nelson provided **testimony to the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice** in 2020. Nelson told the group about prosecutorial strategies we have implemented that can be replicated in other jurisdictions creating a Targeted Prosecution Division, and using state-of-the-art crime-solving technologies.

State Attorney Nelson also **participated on the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice**, part of the work of the Council on Criminal Justice.

The Department of Justice recognized our office with its **“Outstanding Local Prosecutor's Award”** for the ongoing efforts in Project Safe Neighborhoods' key strategy areas. We were one of two prosecutor's offices in the country to win this prestigious award in 2020.

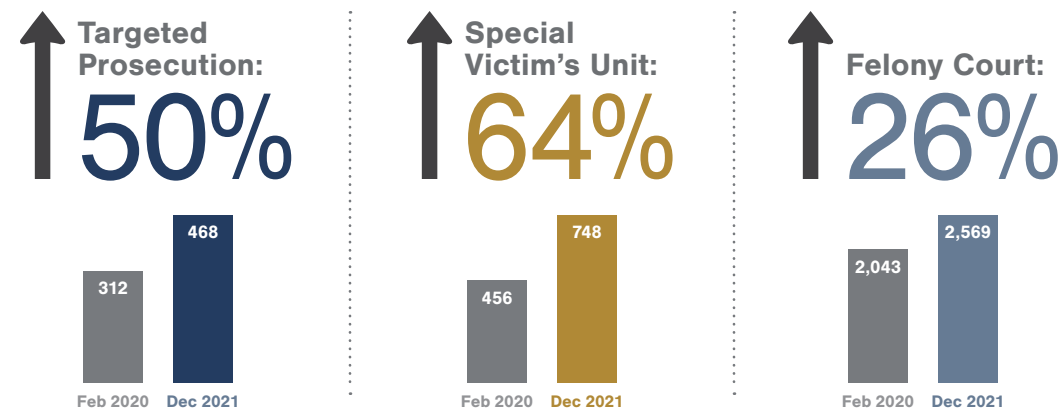


## But there is more work to be done.

During the pandemic, the State Attorney's Office saw a dramatic rise in pending felony cases. Jury trials were paused, and many cases were not resolved in the typical fashion. We remain committed to fighting Jacksonville's persistent violent crime problem by creating and applying innovative solutions, policy changes, novel prosecutions, partnerships, and investments in technology. As we continue our fight, we will leave no stone unturned in every gun case we encounter.



### INCREASE IN PENDING FELONY CASES, FEBRUARY 2020 TO YEAR-END 2021







# A MULTI-TIERED INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE VICTIM SERVICES

## VICTIM INITIATIVE

### Strength in Support

Pursuing justice for victims and their families is one of the most important roles of a prosecutor's office. Centering the voices of survivors in the criminal justice process is critical. Prosecutors' offices are often many victims' primary links to the criminal justice system. It is imperative that staff are well trained and the offices provide clear and empathetic communication with victims about their rights and the services available to them. The SAO4 and State Attorney Melissa Nelson remain deeply committed to victims and their families.

In 2021, the SAO4 created a dedicated position to coordinate all victim services the office provides, including serving as liaison between victims and prosecutors; performing educational and advocacy service to enhance community understanding of victims' rights; and supervising and training of staff who work with victims. This comprehensive initiative expands services, including the launch of a victim satisfaction program that uses feedback and data to inform internal improvements.

The initiative, launched in late 2021, is branded "Strength in Support." It's a multi-tiered initiative to improve victim services across all three offices in the circuit. Components of this initiative include plans for revamped website development and public-facing resources, improved modes of communication, tangible ways of honoring victims in Northeast Florida, community outreach, additional training, the expanded use of restorative justice, consistency in service and communication, a dedicated intern program, and organizational assessments.

**Crime victims do not ask for that label. One of our most important functions is to help them through a foreign process in a compassionate, dignified, and holistic way.** *State Attorney Melissa Nelson*

Mural by René Romero Schuler in downtown Jacksonville

website development  
public-facing resources  
better correspondence  
honoring victims in NEFL  
community outreach  
additional training  
restorative justice  
service and communication  
dedicated intern program  
organizational assessments





## VICTIM INITIATIVE (CONTINUED)

# Restorative Justice

The SAO4 partnered with the Center for Children's Rights to orchestrate restorative justice sessions. The program is mainly used as an alternative to prosecution in juvenile cases, although the office has been examining its use in adult cases. As is the case with so many things since the emergence of COVID-19, the pandemic and staffing issues have slowed expansion into the adult arena. However, as a component of Strength in Support, the office hopes to pursue a full-time position that will allow for the development of adult restorative justice programs (adult diversion and post-sentencing dialogues).

Restorative justice practices provide pathways to healing outside of and in addition to the traditional criminal justice process. The practice focuses on repairing the harm caused to a victim through defendant and survivor participation in a process that holds the defendant accountable without solely emphasizing punishment. In appropriate cases, restorative justice sessions can be used to help inspire forgiveness, reduce instances of revenge, and provide other psychological benefits.

The tenants, benefits of, and lessons learned from restorative justice were discussed in a June 2021 paper co-authored by State Attorney Melissa Nelson and Pennington County, South Dakota Sheriff Kevin Thom as part of the Columbia Executive Session on the Future of Justice Policy, hosted by The Square One Project.

The paper, *Protecting and Serving Victims — Their Way, Not Ours*, discusses ways law enforcement and prosecutors can better serve victims.



Excerpt from page 3, State Attorney Melissa Neslon:

Not too long ago, I observed a witness testifying during the sentencing phase of a murder trial. The witness, whom I will refer to as Jane Doe, had come to tell the court that she had also been attacked just a few years earlier by the defendant. While testifying, Jane shook uncontrollably—it appeared she had never fully processed nor recovered from the previous incident.



Dep. Josh Moyers

Joleen Cummings

Joni Gunter

Phillip Sims

Child Victims

Dep. Doug Oliver

Saad Kawaif

Leslie McCray

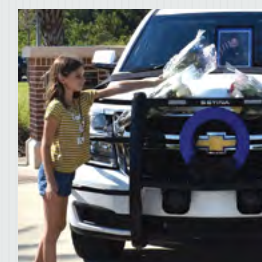
## 2021 NOTABLE CASES

Convictions – Sentencings – Justice – Those Not Forgotten

Dep. Joshua Moyers and his fiancée Ivy Carter



Right: Shelby Oliver, daughter of fallen Nassau County Deputy Eric Oliver (see page 16), visiting a memorial for Moyers



### First-degree murder charged in shooting of Nassau deputy

On Sept. 24, 2021, Nassau County Sheriff's Office Deputy Joshua Moyers was shot twice while conducting a traffic stop in Callahan.

He succumbed to his injuries two days later. An extensive multiagency, five-day manhunt was conducted, and Patrick McDowell, the alleged gunman, was arrested.

During the search, JSO K-9 Chaos attempted to apprehend McDowell, but McDowell shot Chaos.

Moyers was 29 years old. He began his service with the NCSO as a Sheriff's Office Explorer from 2011 to 2013, then joined the department as a deputy in 2015. In 2018, he received an "Above and Beyond the Call of Duty" award for his work on a narcotics case. Deputy Moyers was engaged to be married.

A Nassau County Grand Jury indicted McDowell with First-Degree Murder in the killing of Deputy Moyers.

McDowell was also charged with one count of Injuring or Killing a Police Dog and eight counts of Aggravated Assault on a Law Enforcement Officer.



JSO K-9 Chaos recovering from a rifle shot by McDowell during the manhunt.





## 2021 NOTABLE CASES (CONTINUED)

**Joleen Cummings was a loving mother, devoted daughter and sister, and friend. Her murder and disappearance at the hands of Kimberly Kessler shocked every corner of Nassau County. I am grateful for the work of law enforcement and our office to achieve justice for Joleen's mother, Ann Johnson, and everyone who loved Joleen.**

State Attorney Melissa Nelson

# Life in prison for Nassau County woman who killed co-worker

**It took a Nassau County jury a little over an hour to find Kimberly Kessler guilty of killing her co-worker, Joleen Cummings. Kessler was sentenced to life in prison.**

On May 14, 2018, Joleen Cummings' mother reported her missing when she did not pick up her children on Mother's Day. Cummings' SUV was found empty in the parking lot of a store. Surveillance footage from the early morning hours of May 13 showed Kessler leaving Cummings' SUV in the parking lot.

Both Cummings and Kessler worked as stylists at a Fernandina Beach salon. Cummings' blood was found throughout the salon, and there was evidence of an extensive cleanup effort. Days later, when Kessler was arrested in St. Johns County, she had physical injuries to her face consistent with a struggle. Kessler was initially arrested for stealing Cummings' car.

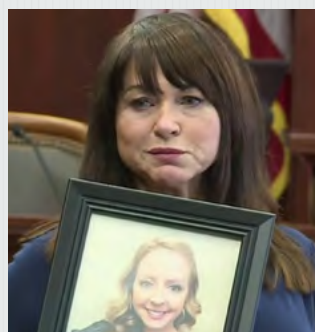
Over the next days and weeks, investigative efforts uncovered a host of additional evidence implicating Kessler in the murder of Cummings, among it: the "Jennifer Sybert" alias Kessler provided was false; Kessler had recently purchased a number of items — including an electric carving knife, zip ties, and garbage bags —

used to clean up the crime scene and dispose of Cummings' body; surveillance footage that showed Kessler disposed of several large garbage bags into a dumpster behind the business following the murder and cleanup; Cummings' blood was found on Kessler's salon scissors and boots; and Kessler used internet search engines to research murder- and missing-persons-related terms before and after killing Cummings, including "Joleen Cummings no body no crime."

Despite extensive efforts by law enforcement, including a landfill search, Cummings' body has never been recovered.

The case was investigated by the Nassau County Sheriff's Office, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and FBI Jacksonville Office. It was prosecuted by Assistant State Attorneys Donna Thurson and Ashley Young Terry.

Joleen Cummings above with her family and below



Ann Johnson, Cummings' mother during courtroom victim statement

## Convicted 'House of Horrors' killer gets 2 life sentences plus 30 extra years

**Russell Tillis received two back-to-back life sentences plus 30 extra years in prison for the First-Degree Murder, Kidnapping, and Dismemberment of 30-year-old Joni Gunter.**



Joni Gunter pictured on left

In February 2016, Tillis confessed to a fellow inmate in the Duval County Jail who was wearing a wire to the murder, dismemberment, and burial of a woman in 2015 at his Southside home. Jacksonville Sheriff's Office detectives searched Tillis's yard and found female remains buried in four holes behind his infamous "house of horrors." An autopsy and forensic investigation determined the death was a homicide by blunt force head trauma. DNA testing revealed the remains belonged to Gunter.

After numerous changes of counsel for Tillis and lengthy trial delays, Tillis was tried and convicted by a jury.

The case was investigated by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and prosecuted by Assistant State Attorneys Alan Mizrahi and Erin Wolfson.



Phillip Sims on left with his brother Antonio, Jr.

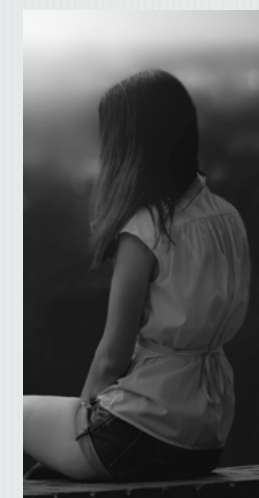
## Jacksonville man convicted of killing a father and son is sentenced to death

**On February 29, 2004, Thomas Bevel fatally shot Garrick Stringfield, his roommate and friend.**

He then fired several shots at Feletta Smith, who was with Stringfield. After shooting the couple, Bevel went into the living room and shot and killed 13-year-old Phillip Sims, Stringfield's son, who was on the couch playing video games. Bevel shot Phillip to eliminate him as a witness before fleeing. Smith, who feigned death and survived, identified Bevel as the person who shot Stringfield, Sims, and her.

The case was returned for a new penalty phase in 2021 after a ruling by the Florida Supreme Court. A jury unanimously recommended death for Bevel.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant State Attorney Bernie de la Rionda and Chief Assistant State Attorney L.E. Hutton.



## 'He is a monster:' Former Jacksonville officer sentenced for sex crimes against children

**Matthew Butler, a former Jacksonville Sheriff's Office officer and softball coach, was sentenced to 20 years in prison and another 20 years of probation after pleading guilty to Attempted Capital Sexual Battery.**

The case was investigated by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and prosecuted by Assistant State Attorney Adair Newman.

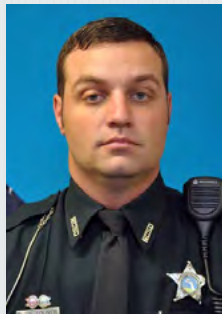
**A victim spoke of the scars that have lingered for years: But then I stop and remember I have to stay alive for this day to get justice not just for me but for every single girl in this courtroom. 15-year-old survivor**





## 2021 NOTABLE CASES (CONTINUED)

Dep. Eric Oliver



Doug Oliver, the father of Deputy Eric Oliver (pictured right), offers a victim impact statement during sentencing hearing.

## Man sentenced to 12 years for manslaughter in 2016 death of Nassau County deputy

[News4Jax](#)

On the morning of Nov. 22, 2016, members of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection questioned six men in a pickup truck at a Yulee gas station for their illegal presence in the United States.

Francisco Portillo-Fuentes ran from the truck. Nassau County Deputy Eric Oliver chased Portillo-Fuentes across State Road 200 during morning traffic. While running after him, Deputy Oliver was struck and killed by a car. Portillo-Fuentes was arrested following a multiagency manhunt.

Portillo-Fuentes was convicted of Aggravated Manslaughter in the death of Deputy Oliver and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Before asking the judge to impose the maximum 12-year sentence, Oliver's father, Doug Oliver turned to Portillo-Fuentes and said, *"my wife and family forgave you a long time ago. If we continue to have hatred toward you, it just tears us apart. But while you're down here, you've still got to abide by the laws. And God will take care of you one day."*

The case was investigated by the Nassau County Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol, and prosecuted by First Assistant State Attorney Stephen Siegel.



**Actions have consequences, and in this case, the decision to flee across a busy highway during rush hour with law enforcement chasing him resulted in the death of another human being—a human being that was a father, a son, a friend, a co-worker to other people.**

Judge James Daniel

## Cold cases are challenging, but they are not forgotten.

### Former JSO cop pleads guilty in 1999 murder of store owner, gets **life in prison**

In the early hours of May 17, 1999, William Baer and his then-wife, Melissa Jo Schafer, attacked Saad Kawaf in the garage of his Deerwood home.

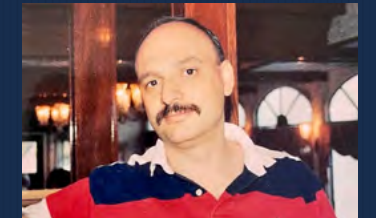
Kawaf's wife, Samar, heard screams, ran to the garage, and saw Baer stabbing her husband in a violent struggle. Samar tried to help her husband but was forcefully stopped by Schafer. During that struggle, Baer and Schafers left DNA evidence behind that would take years before its value would be unlocked.

Baer, a longtime detective with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, knew that Saad Kawaf, a local business owner, had large amounts of cash on hand. Baer held a knife to Samar's throat and demanded the

money and then duct-taped Samar's mouth and wrists before Baer and Schafer fled. Samar eventually freed herself and called police. Saad Kawaf died from his injuries.

The case sat cold for over 20 years. But thanks to recent advances in forensic technology, DNA evidence collected at the scene was reexamined and through genetic genealogy led to the identification of both Baer and Schafer, who were arrested over 20 years after the murder.

Baer was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to First-Degree Murder, Kidnapping with a Weapon, Armed Robbery, and Aggravated Battery with a Deadly Weapon in Saad Kawaf's murder.



Saad Kawaf

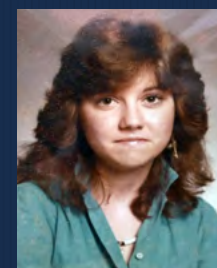
**Baer's actions are a disgrace to his name and to the badge. What he did is the ultimate betrayal.**

Chief Asst. State Attorney L.E. Hutton

Schafer pleaded guilty to her role and was sentenced to 30 years in Florida State Prison.

The case was prosecuted by State Attorney Melissa Nelson and Chief Assistant State Attorney L.E. Hutton.

### 1985 killing of Jacksonville teen leads to **first-degree murder** for man already serving 2 life sentences



Leslie McCray

After more than 35 years, David Nelson Austin was indicted on a charge of First-Degree Murder in the stabbing death of 17-year-old Leslie McCray.

On Christmas Eve 1985, Leslie McCray was kidnapped from her Avondale apartment and was found stabbed to death just hours later. But her family never gave up hope. In 2020, they reached out to Jacksonville-based Project: Cold Case, and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Cold Case Unit to request a reexamination of the case's evidence using new forensic technology. Thanks to a U.S. Department of Justice Cold Case Initiative grant to the State Attorney's Office, new testing was performed and a DNA profile matched Austin, an inmate in the Michigan corrections database, where he is serving two life sentences.

*"She was a kid, you know? She had her whole life ahead of her and she needed to live it, but she wasn't given the chance,"* said Joey Bray, a cousin of McCray, to News4Jax. *"I always have that question in the back of my mind – what happened to her; why. I wanted justice for her. I'm just glad we know. We have answers."*

Assistant State Attorney Lauren Anderson said the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the McCray family, and Project: Cold Case worked together to acquire results.

**They have never stopped pushing for this case to be investigated and they waited over 35 years for this day. Our pursuit for justice isn't over yet. Cold cases are challenging, but they are not forgotten.** Assistant State Attorney Lauren Anderson



# Federal Grant Leads to Additional SVU SUCCESS

Building on past successes, the Special Victim's Unit of the State Attorney's Office was awarded a \$3.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to continue investigating and prosecuting Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) cases.

THE FEDERAL GRANT WILL BE USED FOR THREE DISTINCT INITIATIVES:

INITIATIVE  
**01**

The first is continued support for the office's **SAKI unit**. With new federal funding of \$1.9 million, the multidisciplinary team will continue to investigate and prosecute Sexual Assault Kit cases and support survivors. The team was initially funded through a \$1.5 million federal grant. When the State Attorney's Office was awarded the grant in 2015, there were over 1,700 unsubmitted sexual assault kits. Since that time, all untested kits have been tested, which have resulted in:



**426**

COMBINED DNA  
INDEX SYSTEM  
(CODIS) HITS



**793**

ADDITIONAL DNA  
PROFILES UPLOADED  
INTO CODIS



**34**

CASES  
PROSECUTED;  
18 ARE PENDING

INITIATIVE  
**02**

The second is continued support of the office's **Lawfully Owed DNA Project**, which began with a \$881,000 federal grant. The new \$1 million in funding will further assist in collecting lawfully owed DNA from qualifying offenders whose DNA sample was never collected. Their DNA is uploaded to criminal justice databases, which often helps identify offenders and solve cases. The new funding will also help develop the office's victim-centered, trauma-informed approach to these types of cases.

INITIATIVE  
**03**

The remaining \$1 million is for the **investigation and prosecution of cold case sexual assaults**. To date, more than 165 cases have been identified for prosecution, with charges already filed on 34 cases. But more than 2,000 other cases could benefit from additional DNA testing, which may lead to the identification of new suspects and bring justice to victims.



SEXUAL  
ASSAULT  
COLD  
CASES



**165**

IDENTIFIED FOR  
PROSECUTION



**2,000+**  
COULD BENEFIT  
FROM TESTING



# MENTAL HEALTH OFFENDER PROGRAM

*Creates Stability, Security,  
and a Second Chance*

Photo: First Coast News

The Duval County jail is the largest mental health provider in Jacksonville. But Jacksonville's Mental Health Offender Program (MHOP) wants to change the landscape. Championed by the late Jacksonville City Council President Tommy Hazouri, Councilman Ron Salem, and Chief Judge Mark Mahon, MHOP hopes to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses cycling in and out of the Duval County Jail on nonviolent misdemeanor charges.

A pilot program that began in February 2021, MHOP is a collaboration between:

- Fourth Judicial Circuit
- Jacksonville Sheriff's Office
- State Attorney's Office
- Public Defender's Office
- City of Jacksonville
- Sulzbacher

The program boasted 20 participants and four graduates in its first year. With additional funding from the City of Jacksonville, MHOP hopes to expand to 40 participants.

— **These are the individuals that have fallen through the cracks of multiple systems. They just keep cycling between the crisis unit, the jail, the E.R., and back again. We're really trying to be that person that follows them throughout and tries to help them get that stability.**

Sulzbacher Medical Director Dr. Colleen Bell

Potential candidates for the program are identified by the Sheriff's Office and the SAO4. At their first appearance in court, they request to join the program. Participants then receive intensive wraparound services, including peer support, case management, housing guidance, and disability benefits navigation.

Stabilizing participants and securing services for them are in not only their best interests, but the interests of the community at large. One of the four successful graduates was arrested 97 times in the three years before entering the program but has not been arrested since entering the program. They have now successfully transitioned into an assisted living facility.

This decrease in arrests produces significant cost savings. Once participants enter the program, the monthly average number of arrests, days in jail, and booking costs drop dramatically — saving taxpayers money.

MHOP was inspired by Miami's Criminal Mental Health Project, which has been so successful that Miami-Dade County was able to shut down an entire jail due to decreased need.

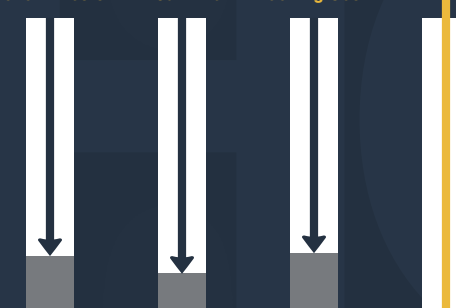
The Hon. Steven Leifman, an associate administrative judge with Florida's 11th Judicial Circuit, helped create the program and has been a champion for the model since.

Antron Hardrick, a recent graduate (below), received a tiny house through the program.

— **It really does everything it says it will do if you do it right. It saves money, it reduces recidivism rates, it spends taxpayer dollars more effectively, and it improves public safety.**

The Hon. Steven Leifman

**81%** Decrease in No. of Arrests<sup>1</sup> **87%** Decrease in Jailtime<sup>2</sup> **80%** Decrease in Booking Cost<sup>3</sup> **100%** of Participants Placed in Stable Housing



MONTHLY AVERAGE OF MHOP PROGRESS



"I'll be able to do more things for myself," Antron Hardrick said. "It's a great feeling." (First Coast News)



JUVENILE JUSTICE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEEJUVENILE DIVERSION  
TRANSITION COMMITTEE

# JUVENILE JUSTICE & DIVERSION

## *Collective Efforts & Exceeded Expectations*

State Attorney Melissa Nelson asked the community in 2017 to make recommendations about juvenile diversion best practices for our circuit. The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) was created and charged to investigate and report back on juvenile justice and diversion best practices.

When the group of 23 diverse community members was first convened, we did not know where the work would ultimately lead. The State Attorney hoped to use this group's collective ideas and expertise to develop juvenile diversion programming aimed at improving services and reducing recidivism and crime in our community.

Almost exactly two years after making its final recommendations, all eight primary recommendations from the JJAC's report were completed. On February 1, 2021, the new juvenile diversion system began accepting juveniles into its program at the Kids Hope Alliance.

The JJAC devoted over a year to attending committee programming and learning about a variety of topics relating to juvenile development and behavior. The JJAC issued a final report and recommendations on June 27, 2019. It comprised a comprehensive list of specific recommendations designed to serve as a roadmap to improve juvenile diversion practices. The chief recommendation was to transfer juvenile diversion from the State Attorney's Office to the City of Jacksonville's Kids Hope Alliance.

Also at the committee's recommendation, the State Attorney's Office led a Juvenile Diversion Transition Committee, represented by stakeholders in the local juvenile justice system. The goal of this transition committee was to transform diversion practices in alignment with the recommendations of the JJAC. It was a challenging project, and one that the transition committee spent an additional year working to realize.



To learn more about the JJAC and implementation of the specific recommendations by the committee, visit [bit.ly/3K4l436](https://bit.ly/3K4l436).

## FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE JUVENILE JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE TWO-YEAR POST-IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

In September 2017, State Attorney Melissa Nelson convened a Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) made up of 23 community members from diverse backgrounds to develop juvenile justice diversion programming aimed at improving services and reducing recidivism and crime in Jacksonville, Florida.

This committee was charged with meeting regularly, reviewing national best practices, and making recommendations to the State Attorney's Office based on their findings and discussion. After over a year of education and programming, the JJAC was tasked with issuing a written report to the State Attorney making best-practice recommendations.

In June 2019, the JJAC released its final report and recommendations, which comprised a comprehensive list of specific action items designed to serve as a roadmap to improve juvenile diversion practices, and the State Attorney's Office set about implementing the report's suggestions.

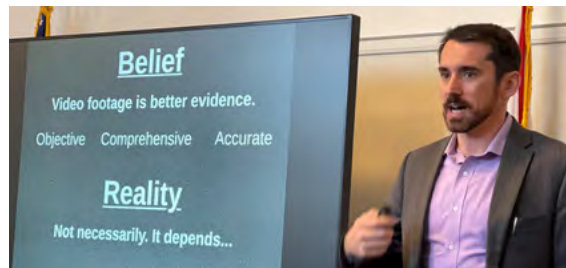
This update summarizes the progress made on the JJAC's recommendations since June 2019, all of which have been completed.

- 1 Transfer diversion programming from the State Attorney's Office to the Kids Hope Alliance.
- 2 Implement a case management structure for diversion that tailors services and programs based on a needs assessment instrument.
- 3 Develop a continuum of available diversion programs, to include restorative justice and credible messenger mentorship pilot programs, and a pathways-to-career program.
- 4 Limit the State Attorney's Office's role in diversion to front-end (referral) and back-end (successful or unsuccessful completion) only.
- 5 Eliminate the initial judicial hearing required for diversion participation.
- 6 Eliminate all jail tours from prevention and diversion programming.
- 7 School and community requests for diversion programming should go directly to the diversion provider, not to the State Attorney's Office, eliminating at-large referrals.
- 8 Make post-completion services available for children and families who choose to engage in the services beyond the child's completion of diversion.

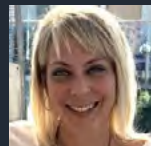
Update Released on April 8, 2021



# Staying On Top of Our Game



**Professor Seth Stoughton**, use of force expert and former police officer, returned to the SAO4 to provide training on body-worn cameras and the evaluation of police use of force. Professor Stoughton is a dynamic lecturer at the University of South Carolina Law School. He has testified in many cases, including the high-profile murder trial of Derek Chauvin, and lectured extensively in the field of body-worn cameras and use of force.



**Dr. Jennifer Dysart** provided additional training on **eyewitness memory**, building on the topics of the first training. She demonstrated how conditions such as lighting, weapons, cross-racial identification, and photo lineups can impact the encoding and retrieval of memory, and how the implementation of safeguards may reduce these errors.

Dr. Dysart, a tenured Associate Professor of Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has published and lectured extensively on these subjects and has testified as an expert witness on eyewitness memory in both state and federal courts.

## Lineup Theory

### What is the purpose of a lineup?

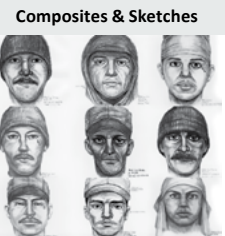
- The lineup is a memory test that is designed to give investigators more information than they had before they procedure was conducted.
  - It is **not** meant to be a reasoning task, but a recognition task.
- How do we know that the witness “recognized” vs. selected the suspect?

“The Science of Eyewitness Memory & Behavior” presentation by Jennifer Dysart, PhD

The SAO4 is committed to continuing education and best practices in prosecution—even during a pandemic. Over the past year, our prosecutors and investigators received training from experts in their fields. Some trainings were held via Zoom and others were offered as a hybrid of in-person and Zoom attendance.



Norwood, Massachusetts Police Department **Chief of Police William G. Brooks III** talked to us about eyewitness identification, the science behind human memory, best practices in witness identification, and why it matters in prosecution.



### Surveillance Cameras



Chief Brooks is a nationally recognized expert on eyewitness identification, a board member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and a member of several eyewitness evidence study commissions. He presents nationally on these topics and was the 2012 recipient of the Innocence Network’s Champion of Justice Award.



**Tom Edwards** is a local board-certified trial lawyer with one of the largest medical malpractice awards in the history of the state and the United States. He lectures extensively on jury selection and has received many awards and accolades throughout his career. Edwards offered extensive training for prosecutors on the art and nuances of jury selection. He is also the father of our very own ASA Jennie Edwards.



relax, escape, and dream

The more that you read, the more things you will know.  
The more you learn, the more places you'll go.

Dr. Seuss



## R.E.A.D. ROOM



In late 2021, an unused office was transformed into a very special space at the Jacksonville State Attorney’s Office. Smart Justice Coordinator Coral Messina, Chief Assistant L.E. Hutton, and his family, wife Kathleen and daughters Lauren and Eliza created a R.E.A.D. (Relax, Escape, and Dream) Room on the first floor, near the deposition area.

It was created as a safe space where children visiting the SAO4 for pending cases can select a book of their own to read and take home.

The goals for this special room are:

1

support child victims & witnesses

2

reduce the stress & trauma associated with providing information in a criminal case

3

promote early literacy to strengthen families & break the cycle of poverty, & thereby...

4

decrease the risk of criminal activity in our youth



Book donations poured in from across the office and community, and shelves were quickly stocked with tales for youngsters aged infant to teen. The Duval R.E.A.D. Room will be maintained in perpetuity, and Clay County is interested in creating their own as well!





# Community CONNECTIONS



## Food Drives Overflow

In March, the Community Crime Strategies Unit toured the Overflow Health Alliance and Making Ends Meet by Overflow grocery store. Overflow provides health, workforce development, financial literacy, medical resources, food, and other program benefits to help low-income neighborhoods in Northwest Jacksonville. The grocery store serves about 40 families each week, who are participants in Overflow services.



During the visit, staff told the CCSU they needed help keeping nonperishable food items stocked. In response, the SAO4 held a food drive for the grocery store in May. Again around Thanksgiving, when supply issues and shortages were putting pressure on much of the nation, the SAO4 held another drive for the grocery store. Out of the office's generosity, over \$600 of nonperishable food was donated to the organization.

Overflow and the Making Ends Meet grocery store are making a real impact on the lives of its neighbors in the Moncrief area. To learn more about their model, visit [overflowhealthalliance.org](https://overflowhealthalliance.org).

Students are able to explore important claims of actual innocence, learn first-hand about real-world prosecutions, and contribute to improving the administration of justice. As one participant put it, she wishes all law students had this kind of opportunity. *Dean Antony Page, FIU College of Law*



## Teaching University Law Clinics

For several semesters, the SAO4's Conviction Integrity Review has partnered with the Florida International University and University of Florida Levin colleges of law in the form of law clinics.

This partnership has been especially rewarding for our law students. Not every educational experience offers a hands-on opportunity to examine whether the criminal justice system is fulfilling its promise of justice. The CIR does just that.

*Sarah Wolking, UF Law Legal Skills Professor & Director of Externships*



This partnership exposes future lawyers to the real operations of a prosecutor's office in its function of holding responsible parties accountable while proactively reviewing cases for evidence of factual innocence. The students are an integral part of our CIR's review process, and the office has benefited from the students' time and efforts.

The SAO4 was represented at this year's event by ASAs Marcus Isom and Octavius Holliday as well as CCSU Coordinator Kiaira Nixon.



## Sheriff's Watch Annual Dinner

Once per year, the 19 JSO Sheriff's Watch subsector groups gather for a communal meeting and meal. It's a great opportunity to learn about other neighborhoods and meet involved residents across the city.



The SAO4 gave away 120 backpacks filled with school essentials — pencils, markers, papers, and folders donated by members of the office — to students at two local Duval County Public Schools elementary schools, George Washington Carver and S. A. Hull.

## Domestic Violence Awareness

In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, the SAO4 held its own Domestic Violence Awareness Day at each of our offices. Pictured are the Clay, Duval, and Nassau offices sporting purple as we stand in solidarity with survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Your voice and your story matter, and we will continue to pursue justice for you.



Top to bottom: Duval, Nassau, & Clay offices



## Mock Trial Skills Put to the Test

In November, the SAO4 hosted the William M. Raines and Jean Ribault high schools' Future Lawyers mock trial teams as well as their community mentors.



Credit: D. W. Perkins Bar Association

The students toured the Duval County Courthouse and State Attorney's Office, learned about the criminal justice system, and had a chance to hone their mock trial skills with their mentors. The year-long program teaches them trial advocacy skills in preparation for a showdown between teams.

## Patrolling the Waterways of N.E. Florida

The Clay County Sheriff's Office Marine Unit patrols about 40 miles of waterway in Northeast Florida. The unit teaches boater safety for Clay County's 11,000+ registered vessels, coordinates with neighboring agencies, and promotes boating safety education. The unit took a few members of the SAO4 out on the water to demonstrate its responsibilities and patrol areas.

## Lunch with our Partners in Diversion

In June, Smart Justice Coordinator Coral Messina and the office's diversion staff organized a luncheon and office tour to honor our Florida Department of Corrections Probation Officers who partner with our diversion programs. The event was a great opportunity for both to learn about the other's agency and strengthen partner relationships.



The event was enjoyed by all. Our visitors even stayed an extra hour longer to chat.



WCJ is dedicated to improving the lives of women through advocacy, support, education, and providing rape recovery services to Jacksonville. You can learn more about the organization, the event, and its efforts at [thewcj.org](https://thewcj.org).





## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS (CONTINUED)

Members of the SAO4 read to elementary students on two different dates during National Literacy Week.



### Reading to Kids for Literacy Week

Each year, members of the SAO4 enjoy participating in Fall Into Reading literacy week. In 2021, favorite children's stories were read at George Washington Carver and Samuel A. Hull elementary schools. Special thanks to both schools for allowing the office to be a part of this special occasion, spending time reading to your students, and to all educators for the impact you make in our community.



### Deepening Ties with our Jewish Community & Students

Homicide Director Alan Mizrahi and Community Engagement Coordinator Linzee Ott appeared virtually as guest facilitators for a Jacksonville Jewish Center Siyyum class in January. The program is part of high school seniors' study of the Talmud, strengthening their commitment to the Jewish community.



This year-long program addresses a range of societal topics with respect to Jewish faith, values, history, and culture. This class focused on the concept of justice, the strengths and weaknesses of the American criminal justice system, the role of the SAO, and the balance between the office's smart justice initiatives and enforcement strategies. It was exceptionally meaningful that Mizrahi was able to present to the group since his son was a member of the class.

### Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy Panel at UNF

As part of National Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April, Assistant State Attorney Terence Martin participated in a virtual panel discussion hosted by the University of North Florida's Spinnaker Center. The panelists aimed to raise awareness of sexual violence, educate viewers about reporting procedures, and answer questions about the long-lasting impact of sexual violence. Victim advocates, the UNF Police Department, and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office also participated in the "Victim Advocate Talks and Topics: Navigating Sexual Violence within the Criminal Justice System" panel.



### A Breakfast to Remember

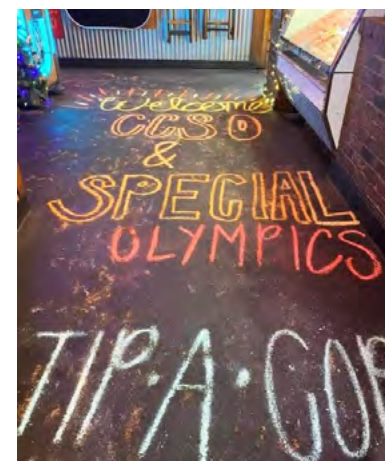
The Clay County office hosted a breakfast in October for the Green Cove Springs Police Department honoring the late Chief Derek Asdot. The date of the breakfast happened to coincide with National First Responder Day. The serendipitous timing was a special way to remember a great leader and spend time with community partners.



Members of SAO4 pose with Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies and their furry friend. The prisoner pooch was sentenced to a day of fun at the pumpkin patch.

### Paws for a Cause in Clay

ASA Randi Daugustinis and victim advocates Katie Reddish and Samantha Youel had a great time paw-secuting an inmate pup at the Howl-O-Ween Paws for a Cause event hosted by community partner Quigley House in October. The event featured games and prizes, as well as — everyone's favorite — a pet costume contest. Profits were applied to Quigley House's pet shelter renovation and to support their growing programs and services.



### Tip-a-Cop for Special Olympics Athletes

The Clay County Sheriff's Office held a three-day Tip-a-Cop event in December, waiting tables in exchange for tips to help support Florida Special Olympics athletes. Members of the Clay County SAO chipped in to help get tips.



Not only did deputies run food and refill beverages, they even line danced for this great cause.

### Learning & Strategizing with First Coast Tiger Bay Club



Part of the office's work in combating violent crime starts with awareness and education. In November, Targeted Prosecution directors Mark Caliel and Matt O'Keefe talked with the First Coast Tiger Bay Club about the office's combined proactive and reactive approach to intervening in and suppressing violent crime.

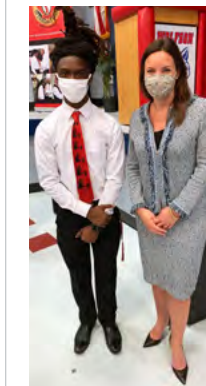


They provided an overview of the violent crime landscape in Jacksonville, outlined the office's strategy, and presented a few of the innovative programs law enforcement is using to address our most violent actors.



### 5000 Role Models Panel

ASA Erin Wolfson spent time at Wolfson High School to take part in a thoughtful panel discussion led by students in the school's chapter of the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project.



The focus was on professionals in the legal field. Wolfson discussed the importance of hard work, perseverance, and protecting one's reputation.



### Celebrating Black History Month & Alumni of HBCU

In February 2021, the office held its inaugural HBCU Day at the SAO4. Staff and attorney alumni of Historically Black Colleges and Universities represented their schools by wearing their colors to work.

In honor of Black History Month, they held photos of famous African American alumni of HBCUs who have made an impact on the legal system. The office was proud to begin this tradition this year.





## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS (CONTINUED)



Left to right: State Attorney Melissa Nelson, Sheriff Mike Williams, and JAX Chamber CEO Daniel Davis

In July, State Attorney Melissa Nelson was invited to participate in ALS Jacksonville's inaugural "CEO Soak" event to help raise awareness and funds for research to end this terrible disease. The ALS Association provides much-needed patient services resources, funds global, cutting-edge research, and much more to help those living with ALS right in our community. She took the plunge next to Sheriff Mike Williams and JAX Chamber CEO Daniel Davis in the pool atop the TIAA Bank Jaguars stadium. The event raised more than \$75,000 for research for a cure for ALS.

## CEOs Make a Splash for ALS



State Attorney Melissa Nelson &amp; Jaxon de Ville

### Double Gator Nelson Shares with UF Law Students

her undergrad and law degrees from the University of Florida. One of her favorite opportunities is getting to speak to her alma mater's UF Levin College of Law clinic students as part of the Virgil Hawkins Clinics Speaker Series.

State Attorney Melissa Nelson is a "double" Gator, having earned both



In February, she virtually shared with them a few of the most difficult, impactful, and funny lessons she has learned during her legal career thus far.



Staff in Duval (above) &amp; Clay (right)



### Proud in Pink for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The last Friday in October, the SAO4 were pink in observance of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. We proudly displayed signs supporting survivors and fighters of breast cancer and raised awareness in the office about the importance of screening for and treating breast cancer.



# CONNECTIONS

### Homicide Training & Conference

In November, assistant state attorneys Ashley Terry, Will Grauel, and Stacey French attended the Southeastern Homicide Investigators Association annual conference. The program featured speakers and presentations ranging in topics from the newest forensic technologies to data investigations, mental health in law enforcement to the effect of COVID-19 on investigations, cold cases, and more. They were able to bring the knowledge they gained back to the SAO4.



SEHIA 2021 Signature Conference Coin



### Strengthening Law Enforcement Partnerships Over Lunch

After a year-plus of postponed meetings and events, the State Attorney invited all area law enforcement agency heads to a luncheon to catch up and network. While it was a social event, the leaders discussed the residual effects of the pandemic on case counts and staffing. It was a nice time to be together and strengthen partnerships in Northeast Florida.

### Decking the J.P. Hall Christmas Party with Cheer



The Clay County office helped unload gifts from trucks and sort toys for the J.P. Hall Children's Charities Christmas Party. The J.P. Hall Children's Charities aims to improve the quality of life for underprivileged children in Clay County, with this annual holiday party being one of their two flagship events. Every child who attended the party received a gift. To date, the organization has provided toys to over 30,000 Clay County children.

### Quigley House Christmas Toys

Clay County office donated items of need, Christmas gifts, books, clothes, diapers, and formula to Quigley House.



Quigley House is a Fleming Island nonprofit serving as a comprehensive domestic violence and sexual assault center whose mission is to provide crisis intervention, temporary shelter, community education, and prevention programs to prevent domestic abuse and adult sexual assault.



### Christmas Giving Through FSS

For the Nassau County office's holiday event, the office partnered with Family Support Services of Northeast Florida (FSS), which is the leading child welfare agency in Northeast Florida providing adoption, foster care, and safe homes for children. FSS selected a family in their network, and the office donated gifts and money toward the foster caregivers' wish list. Although the children were unable to visit the office in person this year due to COVID-19, the gifts were picked up and delivered to the foster parents for the children to open on Christmas Day.

# COMMUNITY





# STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR FLORIDA'S FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



## 2020 Daniel E. Watts Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer Awards



In 2017, Sgt. Daniel E. Watts, known to friends as Dan, shared with State Attorney Melissa Nelson there was not an awards program for all of Northeast Florida's officers who protect and serve. He was right.

While individuals offer thanks and agencies celebrate their own internally, the State Attorney's Office wanted to recognize those who exhibit outstanding service in a more public fashion. And thus, the idea for the Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer Awards was born. The office now hosts an annual ceremony to honor the men and women selected for recognition of acts of service and bravery that took place the year prior.

The 2021 ceremony was graciously sponsored by Stellar and the Foster family.

A mere month before the 2021 ceremony, Sgt. Watts — friend to the SAO4 and inspiration for the event — passed away from COVID-19. The loss shook the law enforcement community and the SAO4.

Sgt. Watts was a decorated veteran of the Jacksonville Beach Police Department, having served there for almost 20 years, and with the Atlantic Beach Police Department for four years. In his honor, the Fourth Circuit Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer Awards was renamed for him. The announcement was made at the 2021 ceremony, where many other service men and women were also honored.



Sgt. Dan Watts pictured with his patrol vehicle.

**I cannot say enough about the good work performed by our Fourth Circuit law enforcement partners. Our goal with these awards is to showcase exemplary individuals for their efforts and say 'thank you' for their service to our community.** *State Attorney Melissa Nelson*

### Lifesaving Award

- JSO Officer Nolan Kea
- CCSO Officer Christopher Faircloth
- NCSO Deputy Ryan Goethe
- NCSO Deputy Brad Knight
- NCSO Deputy Trevor Zittrower

### Civilian Public Safety Award

- Garland Scott

### Investigative Excellence

- DEA Special Agent Bradley Boyle
- DEA Detective David Carpenter
- DEA Special Agent Kevin Roberson
- DEA Taskforce Officer Cristina Rosario del Valle
- JSO Detective Jessica Duncan-Robinson
- NCSO Detective Brandy Turman

### Leadership Award

- DEA – Michael Mayer

### Citizen/Volunteer Partnership Award

- JSO Auxiliary Officer Steven Sheffer
- Jimmy Willard / Willard's BBQ

### Bravery Award

- ABPD Officer Dustin Joiner





## STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR FLORIDA'S FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

# Commitment, Honor & Service



After multiple pandemic-related delays, Team SAO4 gathered (at a reduced size) for the first time since COVID-19 emerged to recognize friends and co-workers for their extraordinary efforts during one of the most challenging and unusual years in memory. Innovators, advocates, leaders, and quiet champions were acknowledged for their dedication over the years and their contributions during such a unique time.



## 2020 Employee Awards

**EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR**  
Becky Hurtado & Hope Kavalow

**DISTINGUISHED SERVICE**  
Matt O'Keefe

**STATE ATTORNEY'S AWARD**  
John Kalinowski

**MISSION VISION VALUES AWARD**  
Trey Atkinson

**WORD OF THE YEAR: "INNOVATION"**  
Katelyn Johnston

**MAJOR INVESTIGATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**  
Joel Cooper

**ROOKIE OF THE YEAR**  
Alexandra Fischer

**TRIAL ADVOCACY**  
Rachel England

**LEADERSHIP**  
Octavius Holliday

**UNSUNG HERO**  
Sheila Loizos

**SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT**  
Joe Licandro

**OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATION**  
Alan Harville

**OUTSTANDING TRIAL SUPPORT**  
Mary Fenoff

**OUTSTANDING TEAM MEMBER**  
Stephanie Beasley

**GROUP ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**  
Computer/IT Division & Chesser  
Island Landfill Investigative Team







## COMMITMENT, HONOR &amp; SERVICE (CONTINUED)

# 2020 Awards for Years of Service



35 YEARS

Angie Bastian

30 YEARS

Teresa Lewis  
Colin Markey  
Donna Thurson  
Kelly Williams

25 YEARS

Shannon Gibbs  
Valorie Miller  
Stephen Siegel

20 YEARS

Desiree Colon  
Chris Cooper  
Stacy Dale  
Sheila Loizos  
Lena Modelo  
Judy Vaughan  
Robbie Zukauskas

15 YEARS

Marcus Bodenschatz  
Natoya Clark  
Jason Kelley  
Adair Newman

10 YEARS

Sabrina Belton  
Stephanie Beasley  
Ernie Dukes  
Sierra K. Frisch  
Albina Gjerci  
Mike Hrin  
Devin Lybrand  
Shirley Mills

5 YEARS

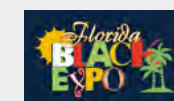
Trey Atkinson  
Mary Fenoff  
Marleigh Gulliford  
Zandra Hooper  
Renee Lewin  
Keith Nazworth  
Kierra Steele  
Christina Stifler  
Ronterious Williams

## A Shout Out for Our EMPLOYEES' ACCOMPLISHMENTS



### Top 20 Under 40 Class of 2021 Winner

**Kiaira Nixon** was named one of Florida Black Expo's Top 20 under 40. The Florida Black Expo selects nominees based on their leadership, community involvement, and the impact of their service in the city.



**Community Crime Strategies Unit Coordinator**

### SAO4 Team Recognized by National SAKI Organization

The SAO4's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) team was featured by the National SAKI Training and Technical Assistance organization in their email newsletter, highlighting the success of the program. Housed within the SAO4's Special Victim's Unit, the SAKI team was praised in the newsletter by the *Florida Phoenix* as "a leader in reforming the handling of sexual assault cases" and for the "real-world impact the SAKI program has on improving sexual assault response and promoting justice for survivors." The SAO's SAKI program, which began in 2015 thanks to federal grants, was launched to help clear a circuit-wide backlog of previously untested assault kits and to provide training for law enforcement to avoid a backlog of this type again. The SAKI team tested and catalogued over 2,000 kits, formed a network of services for survivors, and began the process of identifying perpetrators.



### Florida Bar's Outstanding Government Lawyer Award

**Division Chief LaTesha Campbell**

was honored by the Florida Bar's Young Lawyers Division (YLD) as the inaugural recipient of the YLD's Outstanding Government Lawyer Award.



This award recognizes and celebrates the "achievements of a government lawyer who excels in their field, possesses an excellent reputation for integrity, exhibits dedication to their community and their profession through bar-related or similar activities, and who demonstrates a commitment to the success and advancement of young government lawyers." LaTesha was honored virtually at the Florida Bar's Annual Convention.

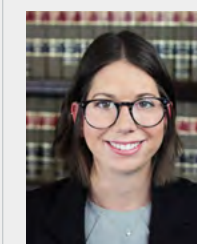
**We appreciate being called a 'leader in reforming' sexual assault response, but the progress made is due to the tireless work of not only the attorneys and staff at the SAO, but from the efforts countless other individuals who brought these issues to light and continue to pursue justice for victims.**

Quote from Florida Phoenix article



### Leadership Jacksonville Class of 2022

**Community Engagement Coordinator Linzee Ott** was selected for the Leadership Jacksonville Class of 2022. The year-long program further prepares community stewards for future leadership.



Laura Dadowski



Jennie Edwards

### Leadership Jacksonville Next Generation 2021

**Assistant State Attorneys Laura Dadowski and Jennie Edwards**

graduated from the Leadership Jacksonville Next Generation 2021 program. Participants interact with community leaders, network with professionals, and go behind the scenes to explore difficult issues facing Northeast Florida and learn from community successes.







## COMMITMENT, HONOR &amp; SERVICE (CONTINUED)

# Current SAO4 Investigators Featured on VICE Episode

In the late 1990s, a few Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) narcotics officers were suspected of drug dealing and the murder and robbery of a local convenience store owner. Three of the investigators who helped bring the dirty cops to justice are current SAO4 investigators. They helped then-Assistant U.S. Attorney, and former federal magistrate, Jim Klindt bring federal charges against these cops. The dirty cops pled guilty or were found guilty at trial and were sentenced to lengthy federal prison sentences.

This gruesome tale was chronicled in an episode of "Betraying the Badge" by the VICE Media Group. The episode, which is the eighth and final in the series, aired in April 2021. VICE is a television show that portrays the shocking stories and crimes of dirty cops.

Watch the episode at [bit.ly/3E3p81z](https://bit.ly/3E3p81z).



Above & below: clips from Vice's episode 8 of "Betraying the Badge"



## Ex-cop admits role in killing, robbery

Sinclair says he identified Safar to Waldon; didn't expect slaying



## Jacksonville cops charged in slaying, robberies

## Waldon guilty on 14 counts

Former cop could face death penalty



# A Heightened Level of EXCELLENCE

Board certification demonstrates a lawyer's significant commitment to and experience in criminal law.

Board-certified lawyers have dedicated themselves to a heightened level of excellence through character, professionalism, ethics, and credibility in the practice of law. These lawyers have been peer-reviewed, tried a minimum of 25 jury trials, completed 45 hours of advanced Continuing Legal Education (CLE) seminars, and passed a strenuous written examination. The Florida Bar has certified these lawyers as experts within their field.

Of the 109,000 members of the Florida Bar, there are currently 417 board-certified lawyers in criminal trial law. The State Attorney's Office is proud to employ six of those lawyers: First Assistant State Attorney Stephen Siegel; Legal Director Sheila Loizos (board certified in both criminal law and criminal appeal law); Special Victim's Unit and Juvenile Division Director Adair Newman; former Division Chief and now County Court Judge Jon Sacks; Division Chief Katelyn Johnston; and Assistant State Attorney Phil Bavington.



ASA David Johnston with his family.

## Earning Dual Degrees with Florida's Tuition Waiver Program

A benefit of working at the State Attorney's Office is the State of Florida Tuition Waiver program. This program allows State of Florida employees to take up to six credit hours per term at Florida state universities and colleges. Several support staff and assistant state attorneys have taken advantage of the tuition waiver and have completed undergraduate and advanced degrees.

David Johnston was one of those assistant state attorneys. In December 2021, Johnston completed his Master of Business Administration at Florida State University.



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS



# ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY CLASS OF 2021



*During her address to the new class, Nelson reminded the attorneys:*

Every day you wake up while you are an assistant state attorney, you have but one purpose: to do justice — which has become our credo: **PURSUE JUSTICE ALWAYS.**

The 2021 Class of Assistant State Attorneys was sworn in on Sept. 24 in front of division chiefs, directors, senior ASAs, and families who attended virtually. The Honorable Meredith Charbula — a former Assistant State Attorney herself — swore them into the Florida Bar, and State Attorney Melissa Nelson delivered their Oath of Attorney.







STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR FLORIDA'S FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

# Internships Make an **Explosive** Comeback

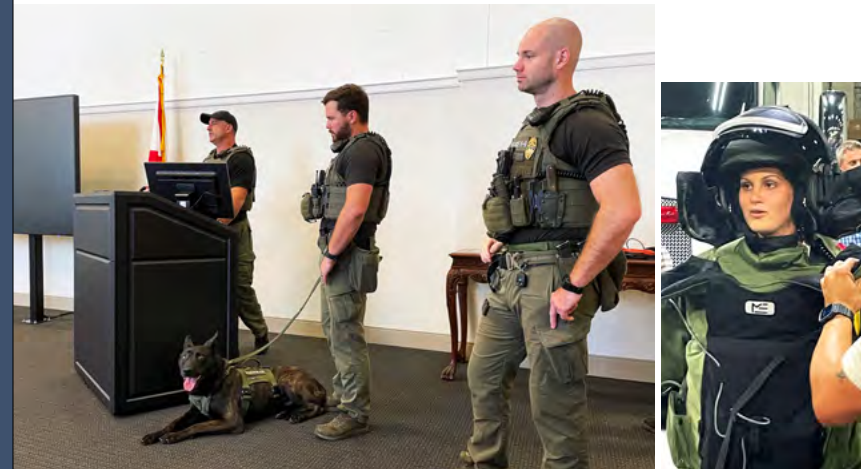
After a few delays and bumpy starts due to the pandemic, the SAO4 was excited to host in-person interns again for the Summer and Fall 2021 terms.



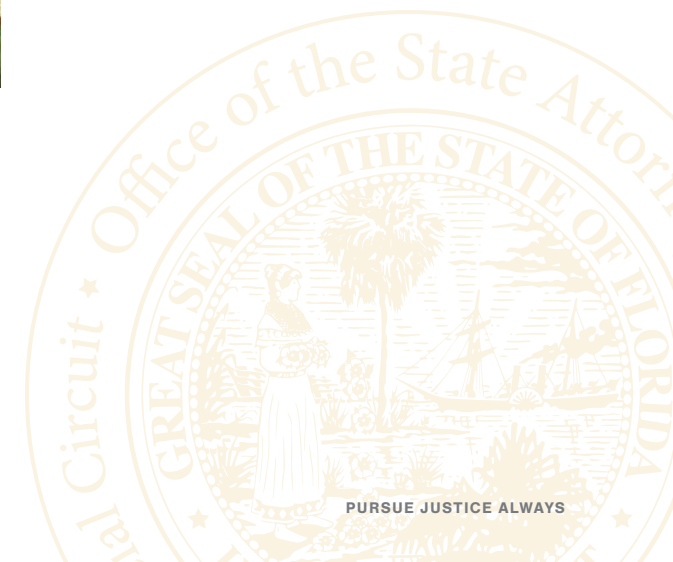
## ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY COMMITMENT IS A BIG DEAL



At a special ceremony, State Attorney Melissa Nelson acknowledged the assistant state attorneys who honored their commitment of service to the office. Nelson thanked them for their hard work, demonstrated their success to the incoming class of ASAs, and rewarded them with a newly minted challenge coin commemorating three years of service to the SAO4. (Not pictured: Marcus Isom)



Although at reduced class sizes, these interns were welcome additions as trials restarted, and the office began addressing its backlog of cases. Both classes met with the State Attorney, and the summer class even got to experience a day in the life of a JSO Bomb Squad member.







#### **CLAY COUNTY**

825 N. Orange Avenue  
Green Cove Springs, FL 32043  
**(904) 269-6319**

#### **DUVAL COUNTY**

311 W. Monroe Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32202  
**(904) 255-2500**

#### **NASSAU COUNTY**

76347 Veterans Way, Ste 2105  
Yulee, FL 32097  
**(904) 548-4700**