

**Acting Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin
Opening Remarks
Assembly Budget Committee Hearing
Monday, May 2, 2022 at 1:00 p.m.**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Pintor Marin, Vice-Chair Wimberly, and members of the Assembly Budget Committee.

It is my pleasure to join you today to discuss the work of the Department of Law & Public Safety.

This is my first appearance before this Committee – and the Legislature – since I was appointed as Acting Attorney General a few months ago, and so allow me to begin by thanking all of you for this opportunity to speak with you—

I also want to thank the Governor, for entrusting me with the great responsibility of leading 7,700 devoted public servants and the privilege of serving the residents of New Jersey.

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We do a lot in the Department of Law and Public Safety—

As the State's chief law enforcement officer, my primary responsibility is ensuring the safety and security of all New Jerseyans.

And working under the leadership of Colonel Callahan, the New Jersey State Police pursue that mission every day.

In addition, our Department serves as counsel to the State—

We regulate critical industries like casinos, alcoholic beverages, and horseracing—

We protect consumers and license dozens of professions—

We provide compensation, support, and justice to victims of crime—

We uphold the State's civil rights law – one of the nation's strongest—

We investigate and prosecute criminals –

And set criminal justice policy for the 38,000 law enforcement officers across our great state—

Among so many other things.

I say this to underscore what a privilege it is to serve in this role.

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On the day Governor Murphy announced his intention to nominate me to be the State's next attorney general, I said that I would focus on several key areas:

- Combating gun violence and violent crime—
- Advancing racial justice and equity—
- Strengthening community-police relations—
- And standing up for New Jersey residents and protecting their rights in court.

I would like to share with you some of the work we are doing in these areas, and which builds on existing initiatives from our office.

First, we worked to reduce gun violence, and upheld our position as a national model for gun safety, and violence prevention.

In collaboration with the United States Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey, the state's 21 County Prosecutors, and the New Jersey State Police, we created a statewide Gun Violence Reduction Task Force and an intelligence sharing network that will lead reactive and proactive investigations and prosecute violent crimes.

We organized the largest gun buyback events in New Jersey history and collected nearly 4,000 firearms across 12 counties.

We also led multiple successful operations that targeted dozens of gang members, including criminal organizations linked to shootings and weapons trafficking.

In doing so, we removed illegal guns and drugs from our communities.

And as part of Governor Murphy's fiscal year 2022 budget, we awarded over \$8 million in community-based violence intervention programs to reduce

crime and create solutions working directly with members of the community—

The largest single investment in New Jersey's history.

And I thank Governor Murphy for again recommending \$10 million in community-based violence intervention funds for fiscal year 2023 that will further our efforts to stop violence—

And provide much needed support programs to communities at the highest risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.

Our work is far from over—

And while my role has only just begun, we are already taking more steps forward.

To address the recent spike in auto theft, my office and the New Jersey State Police announced the expansion of the Auto Theft Task Force—

We recently made available up to \$125,000 in federal Justice Assistance Grant funds to ensure the Task Force reaches its potential.

We also indicted an auto theft ring that burglarized car dealerships in four New Jersey counties and stole high-end vehicles worth nearly \$800,000.

And last Friday, I stood with the Governor as we announced a \$10 million investment in license plate recognition technology that will allow law enforcement agencies to gather intelligence that can be used to spot stolen vehicles, locate possible suspects, identify patterns of auto theft and the crime it fuels, and deter future criminal activity.

Second, we increased efforts to promote equity for underserved communities.

In December 2021, we issued a directive that comprehensively incorporates racial justice into our office's civil enforcement priorities.

We did this by instructing the Department's civil enforcement divisions to affirmatively identify and prioritize matters that promote racial justice –

Work that we undertake on a daily basis.

We also addressed discrimination in the licensed professions—

By beginning the process for codifying a rule on discrimination and harassment.

If adopted, this rule would apply to over 720,000 licensees overseen by 51 professional and occupational boards.

And to address long-lasting disparities in our criminal legal system, the Murphy Administration signed into law a two-year initiative that focuses on initial and repeat youth involvement in the justice system.

The program is administered by the Juvenile Justice Commission and creates restorative justice hubs in Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton, and community-based reentry wraparound services including mental health services; substance use disorder treatment and recovery; housing support; and employment services, among many others.

Third, we promoted policing policy that enhances police-community trust and ensures that law enforcement officers have the tools they need to do their jobs safely.

We convened local elected officials, clergy, and mental health advocates and launched the first

mental health responder pilot program in Cumberland County called ARRIVE Together—

Which pairs a State Trooper with a certified mental health screener to respond to calls that involve a behavior crisis or mental health incident—

And aims to divert individuals away from the criminal justice system and direct them toward life-saving services.

This program has already seen success – as of April 14, 35 individuals have received assistance through the program and there have been zero reported incidents of use of force.

ARRIVE Together is in addition to the 40-hour crisis intervention training (CIT) program that includes de-escalation techniques and crisis resolution available to New Jersey law enforcement.

I had the pleasure of attending a CIT training session in March, and see directly the impact of this work.

We also issued a policy implementing a 2020 law signed by Governor Murphy that requires all

uniformed patrol officers in New Jersey be equipped with body worn cameras—

And oversaw the release of over \$57 million in grants to help police departments purchase body worn cameras and equipment.

As of this past January, 67 percent of agencies indicated they were in compliance of the body worn cameras mandate, and 92 percent indicated they would be in compliance as of this month.

To further ensure that law enforcement is accountable to the public, my office unveiled a publicly available online use of force dashboard that catalogues all uses of force incidents – the most comprehensive dataset of its kind in the country.

And finally, in December of 2021, we issued three major statewide law enforcement policies:

The first regulates the application of no-knock warrants to ensure they are used only when necessary and establishes approval and reporting requirements for the rare instance when no-knock warrants are used.

The second ensures that the First Amendment's bounds are as clear as possible to both law enforcement and residents with respect to the right to observe, object to, and record policy activity.

And the third implements requirements set by the Legislature to ensure that law enforcement agencies reflect the diversity of the community they serve, and establishes officer demographic data collection requirements.

And within our own Department, the State Police have continued their work in recruiting diverse candidates to be the next generation of Jersey Troopers.

NJSP has partnered with community and civic organizations to organize recruiting events, posting information on radio broadcasts targeting underrepresented groups, and hosting Q and A sessions in communities of color so that prospective applicants can speak directly to law enforcement.

All of which makes me so grateful for Governor Murphy's support of funding for the 164 and 165 NJSP Academy Classes.

These highlights provide a partial view of the comprehensive work that the Department does every single day to enhance public safety. But my office recognizes that protecting our residents goes beyond policing policy and holding law enforcement accountable.

We must also call for a sense of unity between law enforcement and community members and stakeholders.

We can achieve this by continuing to participate in community walks across the state—

Listening to community concerns—

Meeting with local organizations just as I did last month with Trenton's Capital City Community Coalition—

And by investing in initiatives and programs like the "Bolstering Police-Youth Trust Program."

Last year, my office awarded \$165,000 in grants to police departments and municipalities to engage youth and build trust through this program.

Finally, I would like to share a few ways that we are advancing our efforts to stand up for New Jerseyans and protect their rights in court.

In February of this year, all 21 counties in New Jersey and 241 municipalities, joined the State in signing onto the nationwide settlement agreements with Johnson and Johnson and the country's three largest pharmaceutical distributors –

McKesson, Cardinal Health, and Amerisource Bergen-

To resolve claims involving their roles in fomenting the country's opioid crisis.

As a result, New Jersey is on track to receive the maximum amount available to the State under the settlements, which is over \$641 million.

These funds will be invested in state and local programs focused on treatment, prevention, and other data-driven strategies to end the opioid epidemic.

We are also holding social media platforms and powerful tech companies accountable.

We joined 47 other Attorneys General in suing Facebook for allegedly monopolizing the market for personal social networking services, and by using anti-competitive tactics to maintain its monopoly.

And joined a coalition of 37 Attorneys General in suing Google for allegedly using its dominance to unfairly restrict competition with the Google Play Store, harming consumers by limiting choice and driving up app prices.

Currently, we are co-leading a nationwide investigation into whether Instagram is violating state consumer protection laws as well as a multistate investigation into TikTok's potential harms to minors.

Protecting our residents and children while they are online is imperative but so is protecting them on the street, in faith spaces, or when they seek housing or employment.

New Jersey is co-leading a multistate effort to support the adoption of stronger federal protections against worker misclassification and to ensure that workers are able to organize, and are given the wages they earned and have access to core workplace benefits.

As you may know, in recent years, we have seen a rise in bias and hate across our country, and in New Jersey.

According to preliminary data, 1,871 bias incidents were reported by residents last year, exceeding reports for 2020 by 29 percent—

And representing the highest annual number of bias incidents reported since 1994.

The Division on Civil Rights is tackling this issue on all fronts by convening sessions around discrimination, harassment, and anti-racism—

By hosting listening sessions about youth extremism, and domestic threats—

And conducting trainings on housing equity and fair housing rights.

Since the Fair Chance in Housing Act took effect at the beginning of this year, we have already begun proactive enforcement of the law.

So far, we sent cease-and-desist letters to seven housing providers whose advertisements unlawfully

discriminate against applicants based on their prior involvement with the criminal justice system.

And we continue to actively monitor the housing market for additional violations.

Lastly, to help us enhance bias incident reporting and raise awareness about hate in our state, we announced the receipt of two competitive U.S. Department of Justice grants totaling more than \$1 million.

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Our agenda is ambitious but with your support, I am confident in our ability to carry it out and make an even greater impact.

Thank you for inviting me to appear today, and I look forward to answering your questions.