Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman  
Law & Public Safety Budget Remarks  
Assembly Budget Committee  
1 p.m. April 15, 2015  
4th Floor, Committee Room 11  
State House Annex, Trenton  

Good afternoon Chairman Schaer, Vice-Chairman Burzichelli, and members of the Assembly Budget Committee.  

It is my pleasure to be here today, and to have the opportunity to address the Committee.  

With me today are Chief of Staff Robert Lougy, Counsel to the Attorney General Deborah Edwards, Administrator Jennifer Fradel, Budget Director William Cranford, Deputy Budget Director Rosanne Fairbanks, and Senior Advisor Rebecca Ricigliano.  

Also accompanying me are State Police Superintendent Colonel Rick Fuentes, Associate Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness Steven Gutkin, and other members of the Law and Public Safety leadership team.  

Before I begin, I want to thank the Committee for the chance to discuss our department and its mission here today.
At our department, thousands of dedicated civilian personnel and sworn law enforcement members come to work each day ready to put their knowledge, experience and expertise to work serving New Jersey residents.

But they cannot do their jobs without support, and particularly without adequate resources.

We appreciate this Committee’s continuing support of the department, and its readiness to provide the annual funding that enables us to fulfill our mission.

At the same time, we understand that every agency of State government has a duty to spend responsibly and realize cost-efficiencies where possible.

I am pleased to note that our proposed budget for the coming year represents a 3.7 percent reduction in state spending compared with last year.

But despite this reduction, the proposed budget supports our mission in important ways.

For example, it supports start-up costs for a new State Police class -- the 157th class -- and the purchase of approximately 300 new State Police vehicles.

It also supports a number of technology driven anti-crime efforts and cyber initiatives, which we consider vital to protecting New Jersey citizens at a time when many criminals are exploiting technology.
At the Department of Law and Public Safety, our responsibilities are far-reaching, and include everything from alcoholic beverage control to juvenile justice, and from gaming enforcement to civil rights.

But perhaps the most visible aspect of what we do involves protecting millions of people who live, work and travel in New Jersey by fighting crime of all types, and we approach that mission with great passion and commitment.

I am pleased to note that, in 2014, we obtained more state grand jury indictments and more accusations -- thereby charging more criminal defendants -- than in the past five years.

But beyond mere numbers, our work on the streets and in the courtrooms resonated forcefully in the communities we serve.

Through our Divisions of Criminal Justice and State Police, we prosecuted sweeping cases against violent street gangs that had been terrorizing the citizens of Camden, Atlantic City, Trenton, New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Newark, Paterson and Jersey City.

We seized illegal firearms from drug dealers and gang members, and charged previously-unsolved shootings and murders.

We prosecuted dozens of corrupt public officials at every level.

We took down the leadership of a major organized crime family.
We recovered millions of dollars in taxpayer money stolen by thieves -- including dozens who absconded with money intended for the victims of Superstorm Sandy.

We uncovered multi-million dollar fraud schemes targeting the elderly and poor, brought the perpetrators to justice, and recovered money for hundreds of victims.

We caught dozens of child predators, including those who stalked their victims online.

We dismantled an international carjacking ring that preyed violently on innocent victims.

And we charged and convicted human traffickers, both domestic and international.

The list goes on but, in short, our work in the area of crime fighting made New Jersey a better, safer place to live -- and continues to do so.

Of course, the Department has many other critical responsibilities as well, including:

Leading the State’s emergency response and homeland security efforts.

Protecting consumers.
Preventing unlawful discrimination.

Ensuring the integrity of New Jersey’s casino gambling and horse racing industries.

Discouraging drunk driving, and making highway travel as safe as possible.

Our Department also serves as New Jersey’s largest law firm, both advising and defending State agencies, and handling tens of thousands of civil litigation matters each year.

Through the efforts of our Division of Law in 2014, we obtained litigation settlements and judgments on behalf of the State totaling more than $346 million.

That figure represents a 14 percent increase over the amount recovered the previous year, and includes dollars obtained as a result of environmental lawsuits, debt recovery actions, taxation matters, lawsuits alleging fraud, and other types of affirmative litigation.

One of the most significant case resolutions in 2014 was the settlement with Occidental Chemical for $190 million that resolved long-standing litigation over Occidental’s liability for contamination of the Passaic River. Combined with two separate Passaic River settlements over the past three years, the Occidental settlement brought the total amount recovered by the State through the Passaic River Litigation to over $350 million.
As a result of these outcomes, the Passaic River will be cleaned up at no cost to New Jersey taxpayers and the State recovered $350 million on top of that.

The three Passaic River settlements were a tremendous victory for the citizens of New Jersey, and for our environment.

We achieved this result while also prevailing on Occidental, as well as the other settling parties, to pay millions for natural resource restoration projects to benefit New Jersey residents.

And we continue to work with DEP to protect New Jersey’s environment and hold polluters accountable.

As you are aware, the State recently published formal notice of a proposed $225 million settlement that resolves ExxonMobil’s liability for natural resource damages caused by contamination from its refinery operations in Bayonne and Linden.

This proposed settlement is subject to a pending judicial review process, which includes a 60 day public comment period.

These settlements, and the many other matters our Department handles, reflect the clear nexus between the work we do and the quality of life of the approximately 8 million people who call New Jersey home.

One of the most important issues facing our state from both a criminal justice and public health perspective is the alarming
increase in heroin use and use of illegally-obtained prescription medications.

Statewide, our Department is engaged in a multi-faceted effort to address the drug problem – from its root source to the related crime it generates and, finally, to the often tragic circumstances found at the “user” end of the supply chain.

This comprehensive effort includes the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and Project Medicine Drop, two important prevention initiatives under the direction of our Division of Consumer Affairs.

Thanks to unprecedented growth of the program in 2014, nearly 90 percent of New Jersey physicians are now registered for access to the Prescription Drug Monitoring data base.

And, as of the end of last year, 21.8 tons of old medications had been dropped off at more than 150 permanent and mobile Project Medicine Drop boxes throughout our state.

Our anti-drug efforts also include aggressive law enforcement measures such as multi-agency task forces, undercover investigations, opiate mill raids, street-level stings, and other pro-active policing strategies.

But we still need to do more.

And that is why we have been aggressive in moving forward with our statewide Narcan initiative -- equipping law
enforcement officers at every level, including the New Jersey State Police, with a life-saving dose of the antidote Narcan.

Simply put, there are still too many lives being lost to opiate overdoses.

But I am heartened to report that, after a three-year period between 2010 and 2013 in which overdose deaths climbed significantly each year, they declined by more than 13 percent in 2014.

Obviously, there is still a serious problem out there, and there is still much work to be done.

But the decline in overdose deaths is an encouraging sign, and I believe equipping our law enforcement officers with Narcan has been an important factor in this hopeful trend.

Another encouraging trend can be found in the cities of Trenton and Newark, where our crime-fighting and anti-violence efforts are making a difference.

In both cities, we have launched anti-crime initiatives known as:

- TIDE -- Targeted Integrated Deployment Effort

and

- TAG – Targeted Anti-Gun initiative.
Essentially, TIDE is about reducing crime – especially violent crime – through the deployment of more law enforcement resources, intelligence-led policing, and greater collaboration among partner agencies.

TAG is about getting guns off the street by refusing plea deals, imposing tougher sentences, and seeking higher bail for certain gun offenders with “aggravating” factors involved – such as gang involvement or a prior felony record.

In both cities where these “targeted” enforcement initiatives are at work, we have seen a significant reduction in the amount of violent crime.

In Trenton, TIDE was launched 18 months ago and has shown great success.

The number of shooting murders is down 18% as compared to the 18 months prior to TIDE’s launch and the total number of shooting victims, both fatal and non-fatal, is down 34%.

In Newark, TIDE was launched a year ago and is also showing promising results.

The number of shooting murders is down 29% versus the year before TIDE was launched and the total number of shooting victims, both fatal and non-fatal, is down 8%.

In both places, the county prosecutors are using TAG to take dangerous criminals off the street. In Mercer, TAG cases have been opened against 297 defendants, 41 of which have pled
guilty and none to less than three and a half years in prison. In Essex, 198 defendants have been charged, with 11 guilty pleas.

By taking these violent individuals off the street and refusing to offer cheap plea deals, the time that these defendants will spend in prison is exponentially higher and, we think, will result in greater safety in these communities.

So the indicators are hopeful, but we recognize there is no room for complacency or self-congratulation.

We also recognize that there is more to reducing crime and violence in our urban centers than just “boots on the ground.”

We recognize that another vital part of the solution is breaking the “misery cycle” of crime, imprisonment and re-offense that has been destroying so many lives and so many families – especially in New Jersey’s urban centers.

That is why our department is involved – working in partnership with community leaders, clergy, non-profit agencies and a host of other stakeholders -- in an array of re-entry and other programs designed to provide hope and encourage positive outcomes.

In Trenton, we are involved in the Trenton Violence Reduction Strategy or TVRS, a three-year, $1.1 million partnership initiative geared toward providing ex-offenders and those at-risk of engaging in criminal behavior the chance to redirect their lives.
Under TVRS, which is led by the Trenton Police Department, the College of New Jersey and Isles, a Trenton non-profit agency, participation is voluntary.

Participants receive help in securing employment, educational opportunities, counseling, treatment and other assistance -- if they are willing to take responsibility for their past mistakes, and take ownership of their futures.

TVRS means meeting the community where it lives -- literally -- by going into neighborhoods, engaging participants and their families directly, and offering the type of services -- employment, counseling, addiction treatment, and education -- that can lead to long-term success for both at-risk individuals and their families.

But our efforts are not confined to one program or location.

Statewide, we are providing Positive Youth Development Grants -- grants awarded to a half-dozen non-profit agencies that provide support services for young people at-risk because they live in economically-disadvantaged or high-crime areas.

The objective in providing these grants is to deter delinquency and criminal conduct, while at the same time encouraging positive, productive, “pro-social” behavior.

There is also JDAI -- the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative -- which is a partnership involving our Juvenile Justice Commission, the New Jersey Judiciary and a host of county and community-level stakeholders throughout New Jersey.
JDAI has allowed for the placement of thousands of juvenile offenders – young people who otherwise would be incarcerated in juvenile detention centers – in alternate settings while maintaining community safety and saving taxpayer dollars.

As a result of JDAI, the average daily juvenile detention population across 16 participating counties was reduced 60 percent in 2013 – the most recent year for which data is available – compared with pre-JDAI data for those sites.

I am also pleased to note that the number of counties participating in JDAI has grown to 18, and that the program continues to serve as a model for the nation.

JDAI is improving the conditions of confinement for juveniles still required to be in detention and, crucially, providing many young offenders a chance to change their lives by avoiding incarceration and finding placement in alternate settings where, with support, they can work toward becoming productive, law abiding citizens.

Time does not permit me to discuss all of the important programs and initiatives our department is undertaking on behalf of New Jersey citizens.

But before answering your questions, I would like to briefly highlight a few more examples of our work, including:

- Our Division on Civil Rights obtained approximately $2.2
million in settlement payouts on behalf of alleged discrimination victims in 2014. As important as the dollars were in these cases, non-monetary aspects of the settlements were equally important. Typically, the settlements required businesses, public institutions and others found to have discriminated to adopt new anti-discrimination policies or update existing ones, and have their staffs undergo training in the Law Against Discrimination.

- Our Division of Consumer Affairs, working with the state Board of Public Utilities, filed legal actions in 2014 against three third-party energy suppliers whose conduct generated complaints from the public. Specifically, these three companies allegedly failed to deliver on monthly savings they represented, or in some cases guaranteed, to consumers. One of the companies, Hiko Energy, agreed to pay $2.1 million -- including $1.85 million in consumer restitution -- to resolve the State’s lawsuit. Lawsuits against the other two companies are pending, and the Division continues to monitor this business sector for complaints and possible enforcement action.

- Our Division of Highway Traffic Safety continues to work with partner agencies at every level to protect drivers, passengers and pedestrians. This month, 38 police departments throughout the state are engaged in stepped-up enforcement efforts designed to discourage texting and other distracted driving through individual $5,000 grants provided by the Division. As we all recognize, distracted
driving kills, and the effort going on right now – dubbed “U Drive. U Text. U Pay.” – is a critically important one. Last year, police agencies using grants funds provided by the Division issued 13,000 summonses for illegal phone use, wrote nearly 6,000 speeding tickets and made 1,200 arrests for driving-while-intoxicated during this same distracted-driver initiative.

- We continue to strengthen ties with the communities we serve through such efforts as our Muslim Outreach Committee, as well as the separate Interfaith Advisory Council. The Muslim Outreach Committee is a group of a dozen Muslim leaders from across the state with whom I and other law enforcement leaders meet on a regular basis. Its purpose is to build mutual awareness, trust and understanding between law enforcement and the Muslim community. The goals of the Interfaith Advisory Council are similar, but the Council, which is hosted by our Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, is a gathering place for people of all faiths.

In a broad sense, these initiatives are important because they ensure that lines of communication exist before emergency situations develop, and they encourage communities that have not historically had a prominent voice with government and law enforcement to work with us, as opposed to seeing us as an adversary.

But these relationships also have shown themselves to be
practically useful in terms of the law enforcement mission.

Specifically, members of these groups have come to us to report dangerous or criminal activity, and we have developed important contacts with whom we have collaborated on safety and security issues.

The relationships we have built in cities throughout New Jersey are also important in the wake of recent events in Ferguson, Staten Island, and Bridgeton, which have highlighted the sometimes fragile relationship between the police and those they serve.

In the wake of these events, I was heartened by many things, including my conversations with faith and community leaders, many of whom expressed an appreciation for the positive relationships with the police we had already built in many communities – from Asbury Park to Trenton, Newark to Atlantic City and other places in between.

We continue to do all we can to cement these bonds and are doing so in several important ways.

In keeping with our commitment to building confidence and trust in every community we serve, we continue to work to increase diversity within the ranks of the State Police.

As some of you may recall, we recently graduated the 155th State Trooper class.
The 155th Class was the fourth and final class graduated from a single pool of applicants that was the most diverse in State Police history.

Collectively, the four classes drawn from that applicant pool – beginning with the 152nd State Police Class – was responsible for the greatest percentage and number of minority and female Troopers in our state’s history.

And two of those four State Police classes were actually “majority-minority” in demographic make-up on graduation day.

All of this said, we are committed to continuing our efforts to have, and sustain, a State Police organization that reflects the rich diversity of our state.

We are convening a committee of leaders from the African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American communities, as well as from among women’s groups, to identify ways in which we can promote the State Police to interested persons in the community, on college campuses, and among those being discharged from the military.

As some of you may be aware, many of our State Police members are now mentoring eighth-grade students from some of New Jersey’s urban centers as part of a new State Police FLEET (Future Law Enforcement Educating and Training) mentoring program.
Not only is this multi-year mentoring program enriching the lives of students and informing them about the benefits and demands of a career with the State Police, it is also fostering stronger ties between our Troopers and the community.

We also have deepened our outreach to groups such as the NAACP, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and others to address some of the broader concerns that have been voiced about police and the communities they serve.

There is no question that the future success of law enforcement – at every level – hinges on our ability to be agile in the face of change.

We must continue to strive for diversity, and we are doing so.

We must continue to listen to the concerns of all communities we serve, and we are doing that as well.

We must do our “due diligence” on such emerging issues as the use of body cameras by police, and the manner in which police-involved shootings are investigated.

We are doing that, too, as I’ve directed working groups within my office to examine these issues, among others.

A critical partner in these efforts is the Office of Law
Enforcement Professional Standards, the independent monitoring agency for the State Police. The objective monitoring and support OLEPS provides in the form of oversight and public reporting are invaluable tools in our community policing efforts.

Of course, this need to remain agile in the face of change extends to our enforcement efforts as well – particularly when it comes to technology.

As we all recognize, technology is a double-edged sword.

It has enhanced and strengthened our crime-fighting and other efforts in significant ways, but the criminals also use technology to further their illegal goals.

Our charge, then, is to remain a step ahead of them, and I believe we are doing an excellent job of it.

One example of the way we are harnessing technology to fight crime is the Corr-State Region Real Time Crime Center in Newark – the first of its kind in the state, and the first subsidiary of the New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC) or “the Rock.”

As many of you know, the ROIC is located at State Police headquarters in West Trenton.

It is a regional fusion center staffed with federal, state, county and local law enforcement personnel, as well as
information analysts.

The center’s primary function is to collect, evaluate, and disseminate intelligence data in order to help law enforcement detect and prevent criminal and terrorist activities.

In other words, it is where intelligence-led policing begins here in New Jersey.

The Real Time Crime Center takes those capabilities and laser-focuses them on the most populous region of our state – the stretch between Newark and Paterson, along the Passaic River and Route 21 corridor, that is home to 27 separate municipalities.

Because this densely populated area is overlaid by a network of highways, the crime that occurs here is highly mobile.

It is never just the problem of the municipality in which it occurs.

Sixty to 65 percent of the shootings and gun recoveries in our state occur in this relatively small area.

This transient crime problem requires a regional approach, and that is what the Real Time Crime Center facilitates.
The Real Time Crime Center's mission is to develop a network that will gather, receive, analyze, and distribute real-time tactical intelligence and support to law enforcement agencies operating within the Corr-Stat region.

Its primary focus will be on assisting agencies with shootings, murders, and carjackings.

However, the center is capable of collecting and analyzing data for other types of criminal activity as well, and poised to do so if necessary.

At the same time, my office has been working diligently to combat cyber-crime, frequently in cooperation with our law enforcement partners at every level.

We have investigated and successfully prosecuted many cases involving child pornography and child porn file-sharing networks.

We have successfully prosecuted cases involving individuals and groups who stole identities and committed theft on-line, or who operated Web-based fraud scams of one type or another.

We also have been working with the private sector on hacking cases, and currently have several prosecutions pending against individuals who -- having been fired from their jobs -- struck back at their former employers by hacking into their computer systems and stealing valuable intellectual property or causing disruptions.
But the nature of cyber-crime and cyber terrorism is ever-evolving and, as everyone here understands, the work is never done.

To that end, we are involved in many initiatives on this front, to include the New Jersey Cyber Terrorism Task Force, which includes most New Jersey counties, and the New York/New Jersey Electronic Crimes Task Force.

We also maintain excellent working relationships on cyber activity with academic institutions including Rutgers University, Monmouth University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Stevens Institute of Technology and New Jersey City University.

In addition, some of our newer initiatives include:

- The OAG Cyber Group, a working group made up of the various players involved in state cyber prosecutions. The aim of the group is, among other things, to improve the coordination of criminal and civil cyber prosecutions.

- The Northeast Cyber Academy, an initiative we are putting together in conjunction with agencies in neighboring New York and Pennsylvania, as well as partner agencies here in New Jersey. The Academy will provide free classes in cyber prosecution to all members of participating agencies.

As we continue the fight against on-line criminals and cyber terrorists – and as we seek to identify and address emerging new
threats—collaborative effort and creative thinking are going to be our most effective weapons.

Standing pat is not an option. Tunnel vision is not an option. And protecting turf is not an option.

We live and work in a densely populated state that is a hub of commerce, education, transportation, shipping, manufacturing, and many other vital endeavors.

We also live in a time when, potentially, a significant power outage or disruption of utility service that could paralyze critical systems -- and thereby endanger New Jersey citizens -- is only a keystroke away.

It is our job, then, and our shared responsibility, to ensure that our state is as prepared as possible to detect such threats and quell them.

Once again, I want to thank the Committee for its continuing support of our department, and for the opportunity to discuss some of our work here this afternoon.

I will now be happy to answer your questions.

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