

SOTC: State of Public Safety

Good Afternoon and welcome to our second address of the 2024 State of Monroe County. Last week I highlighted our achievements, programs, and partnerships in the field of Public Health.

Today, I'm delivering the 2024 State of Public Safety from the Greece Central School District bus garage, where a fleet of buses have been equipped with stop-arm enforcement technology.

Public Safety is a foundational community need. Being safe, and also feeling safe, is essential to ensuring a high quality of life for our residents and our neighborhoods. When people feel safe, they engage in more community activities, enjoy shared public spaces, and build social connections with their neighbors.

Safe communities also attract new businesses, inspire tourism, and deliver a boost to our economy. The success of Monroe County is tied to the safety of Monroe County.

Public safety must be dynamic and evolve to fit the changing needs of our community. Over the last year, we have placed a laser focus on public safety, seeking solutions that modernize services and equipment, and challenging our departments to find innovative strategies to reduce crime and keep us safer.

Investments in Sheriff's Office

One modernization effort was done in partnership with the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, where we made historic investments to build our safety infrastructure.

Like many essential workers in public-facing careers, our public safety workforce was negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Last May, I stood alongside Sheriff Todd Baxter to announce a \$7.3 million increase in funding for the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. The bulk of these funds, to hire additional road patrol deputies.

Over time communities change, populations shift, and it is essential that we respond by modernizing our services to meet these changes. Prior to this investment there was an average of one deputy per 3,600 residents, which is less than half the national average. Some deputies had to cover more than 30 square miles on their own.

We invested in new positions that will right-sized the Sheriff's office. This morning is the first day of the new Sheriff's academy, and when this class finishes our Sheriff's office will have the resources they need to meet our modernization goals.

The expanded hires and resources will help address the new demands and expectations faced by the Sheriff's Office. The demand to be proactive, to build and maintain a bond with the community, balanced with the need to be reactive, to address violent crime and repeat offenders.

These new hires will also allow the Sheriff to maintain enhanced coverage in the community and at the Frederick Douglass Greater Rochester International Airport.

As a practical matter, this also provides the Sheriff's Office more opportunity for training staff, more flexibility in allowing deputies to take time off.

This investment will also make possible some of the innovations and changes the Sheriff's Office is pursuing – such as an additional juvenile crime investigator and a newly created countywide crime coordinator to quarterback investigations that cross jurisdictional lines and involve other law enforcement agencies.

RIOC

In addition to new deputies, the \$7.3 million investment in the Sheriff's Office included funding for The Regional Investigative Operations Center or RIOC.

The RIOC is a real-time crime center, using multiple technology platforms to enhance and coordinate criminal investigations across multiple jurisdictions and has the capacity to identify and address criminal activity as it is occurring. This new center is a significant resource being made available to all county law enforcement agencies.

The RIOC will centralize the operation of large scale investigations and focus on patterns of criminal activity that are plaguing our community, such as organized retail theft and stolen vehicles.

The new RIOC facility has been secured and the remodeling and repair work is about 80% complete.

Once fully operational, the RIOC will enhance the efforts of the Rochester Threat Advisory Committee or ROCTAC, to proactively address threats of targeted violence and domestic extremism.

In the aftermath of the tragedy of the mass shooting that took place in Buffalo in May of 2022, and the ongoing incidents occurring around the country, we made the decision to provide the Sheriff with cutting edge technology to address threats to the community. Through these modernization efforts, we are building our capacity to solve and prevent crimes.

Investing more in the Sheriff's Office is only one way we've addressed public safety.

A series of investments including pay raises, retention payments, a personal time bank, and offering parental leave has allowed us to stabilize our workforce, in particular those who support public safety.

With an aggressive recruitment campaign, we reduced vacancies in our Probation Department by two thirds. This week a new group of candidates will sit for the probation exam, and I am confident we will have these positions filled.

Each new public safety position we establish, or vacancy we fill helps reduce wait times for residents in immediate need of help. It also allows our team to provide more personnel hours that expand our successful services.

New staff has enabled probation to bolster its Gun Involved Violence Elimination or GIVE staffing. With increased staffing probation officers are able to amplify efforts to interrupt violence,

take more illegal guns off our streets, and preventing future crimes.

An increased number of probation officers also means our team is managing proper caseloads. This results in increased frequency of contact with offenders. Investing additional time with individuals in the justice system, allows our team to provide them with more resources and connects them with the tools they need to get on the right path.

JEDS

One of the best tools we have developed for this is our Juvenile Enhanced Diversion Stabilization, or JEDS program.

Keeping our community safe does not come without challenges. When we experienced a sharp rise in car thefts, home and business robberies, and illegal gun violence, many of these crimes were being committed by youth. While arrests were occurring, what was missing was accountability, timely intervention and immediate access to support services for the juveniles and their families.

That's when we stepped in and took a bold new approach. Last summer we created JEDS.

In the past, when a juvenile was arrested, they'd be given an appearance ticket and released with a court date several days or even weeks in the future. Probation didn't get involved until they received information about the case in the mail.

There was no supervision or intervention between the arrest and court date to deter those juveniles from reengaging in the same behavior that got them arrested in the first place.

There was no accountability.

But under JEDS, those court dates come faster and an information packet about the case is immediately dispatched to probation.

The next day, probation officers engage with the family and start the stabilization process.

Youth connected with JEDS receive daily contact with probation, and access to additional programs and services like referrals to conflict resolution, mentorship support, family and youth counseling, and help with school.

The JEDS program is working.

Let me tell you how: One young woman recently in the JEDS program reached back out to her probation officer, she wanted to share that she graduated from high school and is furthering her education in a nursing program.

In another instance, a young man, arrested as a passenger in a stolen car, is on track to graduate this year and is going off to college - something he attributes in part to being in JEDS. That's because probation officers set him up with a mentor and helped his family access support services.

This is what success looks like. This is what accountability looks like.

In the three months before we implemented JEDS, nearly a third of youth arrested reoffended prior to their initial court date.

Since its implementation, more than 367 youth have gone through the JEDS program, and the recidivism rate for JEDS involved youth has been cut in half.

In the first 6 months of 2023; over 2700 vehicles were stolen across Monroe County. JEDS began in August of 2023, when vehicle thefts were at their apex, in the final 6 months of the year – which includes 5 months of JEDS – car thefts slowed to just over 1700 - a 35% decrease.

And when we i look at year-to-year data from January to April; in 2023 there were 1650 vehicle thefts which dramatically decreased in 2024 to 768, a reduction of 53%.

There's no doubt we still have our challenges, especially during the summer months.

This is a revolutionary program, and the success of JEDS is gaining state and national attention. Last month the United States Department of Justice highlighted the program in their e-newsletter, the Community Policing Dispatch.

Governor Kathy Hochul came to Rochester last fall to recognize our efforts and announce a \$1M commitment in funding to enhance Monroe County efforts to reduce juvenile crime.

Thanks to this investment from Governor Hochul, we will be expanding our JEDS program.

In doing this we will double the stabilization period from two weeks to four weeks. That's four weeks of daily contact and services we will provide to the juveniles and their families.

We are investing more in the part of the program that makes the most impact. Our data shows almost every young person involved in JEDS does not commit another crime during the stabilization period.

A longer stabilization period will ensure these young people are even less likely to commit new crimes, and they are connected to the services, supports, and resources they need to be successful.

Doing this means increased staff time from our probation officers, and that's another reason why it is so critical that we continue to invest in our public safety workforce.

CRIME LAB

Another area of public safety we are investing in is the Monroe County Crime Lab. The work conducted in our crime lab connects law enforcement investigations to arrests, and then to our District Attorney's office where those who commit crimes are prosecuted.

Last year the Monroe County Crime Lab was recognized by the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for successfully generating 4,000 investigative leads for the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network, or NIBIN.

NIBIN is a federal database that compares ballistic images of cartridge cases recovered from crime scenes to determine if the

same weapon is linked to multiple shooting incidents or if a recovered firearm was responsible for a specific shooting.

- Not long ago, crime lab technicians were able to link a 9mm semiautomatic pistol to 11 different shooting victims.
- Another example: a recovered 40-caliber “ghost gun” was linked to a different set of 11 shootings, three of which were homicides.
- In another case, the crime lab linked a 45-caliber semiautomatic pistol to 18 different shooting incidents.

The shootings I just mentioned not only happened in Monroe County, but also in other parts of the state and across the country. The ballistic information gathered by our team is vital to solving crimes locally and nationally.

Last year, I added two full time firearm examiner positions to the Crime Lab team—and the results speak for themselves.

Over the past year, the crime lab team has generated an additional 3,500 investigative leads. That’s a total of more than 7,500 leads to assist our law enforcement partners and take illegal guns off our streets.

To create these leads, lab technicians rely on 2-dimensional images of bullet casings, technology that is a century old, and while they have been able to use this to generate leads, new technology is changing the face of ballistics testing, and we are bringing that technology to our crime lab.

2D imaging limits us to conduct ballistics testing only if a casing is present, and we know not every crime scene with a bullet has a

casing. Often, criminals will pick up casings from a crime scene to hinder investigations.

The new technology we are bringing to the crime lab will use high-tech, high-resolution 3D imaging microscopes, that will allow examiners to use a casing, a bullet, or both to provide more data points for comparison. That means they can generate even more potential matches between illegal guns and ammunition used in crimes.

This technology will help solve more crimes going forward, but it also may provide new leads on cold cases, where imaging wasn't able to be conducted because there were no shell casings at the scene of the crime.

Bus Patrol

If we have access to new technology to protect the public, we should use it.

And we are doing that, here at the Greece Central School District bus garage. We are here to highlight another technological advance we have employed - school bus safety cameras.

Every day, hundreds — I repeat — hundreds of motorists all across Monroe County pass stopped school buses while children are either boarding or departing the bus.

This puts children in deadly peril.

Annually, 19 children across the country are struck and killed getting on or off their school bus - by drivers who didn't stop, like they were supposed to.

I'm a parent. I was the guy standing out in the driveway with a coffee, wearing PJ's, and putting my two kids on the school bus.

I saw with my own two eyes, cars passing a stopped school bus, and like every other parent watching this, I said to myself, why can't someone do something about this.

Well, now this parent is in a position to do something about it.

APPLAUSE

We partnered with stop-arm enforcement technology provider BusPatrol to offer school districts in Monroe County access to our school bus safety program.

BusPatrol installs camera systems on school buses that capture video of vehicles that illegally pass buses when the stop arms are out.

The technology has been deployed by BOCES 1, Hilton, East Irondequoit, Webster and right here in Greece.

It was just 12 weeks ago that this system went live on Greece buses.

The numbers I'm going to tell you are shocking.

Listen to this: In those 12 weeks, in Greece alone, more than 1,100 violations occurred. That means on average, about 100 motorists every week are violating the law and endangering children by passing stopped buses.

One hundred times a week.

In just one school district.

All told, nearly 3,700 violations have been recorded since the school bus safety program's inception in Hilton back in October 2023. That's a staggering number and proves how much we need this program.

Again, every district in Monroe County is eligible to participate, and I encourage them all to opt in to this life-saving program.

A program that is entirely violator-funded - at no additional cost to taxpayers. The fines pay for the program and equipment, and the remaining funds will come to the county.

It used to be common practice for county government to pour this kind of revenue into the general fund to spend on unrelated programs.

Traffic Safety

But, it is only right that money generated by traffic safety violations go back into protecting our children. I am committing to reinvesting the county's entire share of this revenue into traffic safety initiatives and programs.

We need to be intentional about our spending, and use these dollars for the common good.

With this new commitment, the county will work with the towns, villages and school districts participating in the stop arm camera program to target traffic safety concerns in their area.

We have to do more to ensure that drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and anyone else who uses our roads are safe.

On average, 47 people are killed in traffic crashes on roads throughout Monroe County each year. Another 5,073 are injured. This is a serious problem and one we are committed to addressing.

Through our Department of Public Safety, we are creating the Monroe County Community Traffic Safety Team, comprising stakeholders from federal, state, and local governments, non-profit and faith based organizations, neighborhood associations, local businesses, and interested citizens.

We relied on community input when we developed the first-ever Countywide Active Transportation Plan, and using this model, the Community Traffic Safety Team will engage residents across the county to improve the safety of our roadways.

Monroe County residents know their communities better than anyone, and they know what their communities need.

Resident and stakeholder feedback along with relevant data will inform proactive measures to improve infrastructure and foster a culture of safety on our roads.

This may include recommendations to examine the design of roadways, upgrade sidewalks, crosswalks, shared-use paths or trails, and public awareness campaigns that bolster traffic safety and adherence to the rules of the road.

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By focusing on modernization and innovation in the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the JEDS program, the crime lab and our

roadways, we are making real improvements in the day-to-day safety of county residents.

Every investment, every program, every policy is another step toward a Monroe County where families thrive, where children are protected and where our streets and neighborhoods are more vibrant.

To be clear: we know the work isn't over. Public safety is an ongoing mission that requires continuous attention and constant innovation. We will keep listening to our residents, and we will continue to forge new and innovative collaborations.

Every day our public safety partners, many of whom are right here, face new and evolving challenges in keeping our community safe. I recommit to standing by each one of you as we work together to meet and overcome these challenges.

Thank you all for your commitment, your partnership and your dedication to making Monroe County a place where everyone can live, work and raise their families with confidence and pride.

Together, we are building a safer Monroe County.