

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





A MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

We began this year ready to dig deep into a backlog of cases that started when in-person court proceedings were halted due to the pandemic. Throughout 2021, we utilized remote court proceedings, closing most cases by plea.

In March, Cherokee County Superior Court announced that jury trials could resume. By the end of the year, we presented 12 cases to Cherokee County juries, more than double the prior year. We are making progress, but still not back to normal.

Our team of 54 continued to move cases through the judicial system. We opened 1,674 new felony cases and closed 1,107 felony cases, and the Grand Jury met in person on 13 separate days from February through December.

During the year, members of the District Attorney's Office provided training on firearms/use of force, courtroom testimony, gang crimes, sex crimes, and domestic violence. Training benefitted hundreds of law enforcement officers, lawyers, victim advocates, and members of the community.

Our staff remains committed to justice and integrity, collaboration with partner agencies, and the achievement of a safer Cherokee County. Thank you for your interest in the work we do at the District Attorney's Office.

Sincerely,

Shannon Wallace

District Attorney

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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FRANK C. M
CHEROKEE COUNTY

INSIDE THE COURTHOUSE

In 2021, the District Attorney’s Office received **3,185** total cases for prosecution,

received **790** probation revocations,

presented **502** cases to the Grand Jury for indictment,

filed **526** accusations,

and staffed **371** cases of potential elder abuse.

In addition, the office collected **\$38K** in administrative fees

through its pre-trial diversion program,

assisted **3,060** crime victims,

opened **721** juvenile cases

and assisted law enforcement **24/7**

in fighting crime throughout Cherokee County.

2021 STATISTICS

Office of the District Attorney

INCREASING CASELOAD

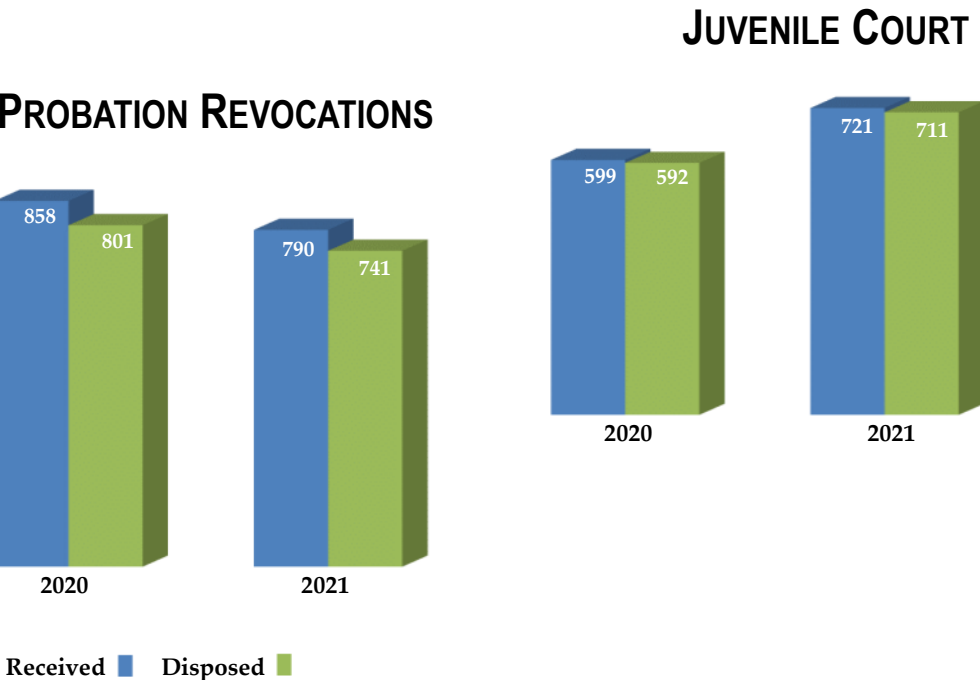
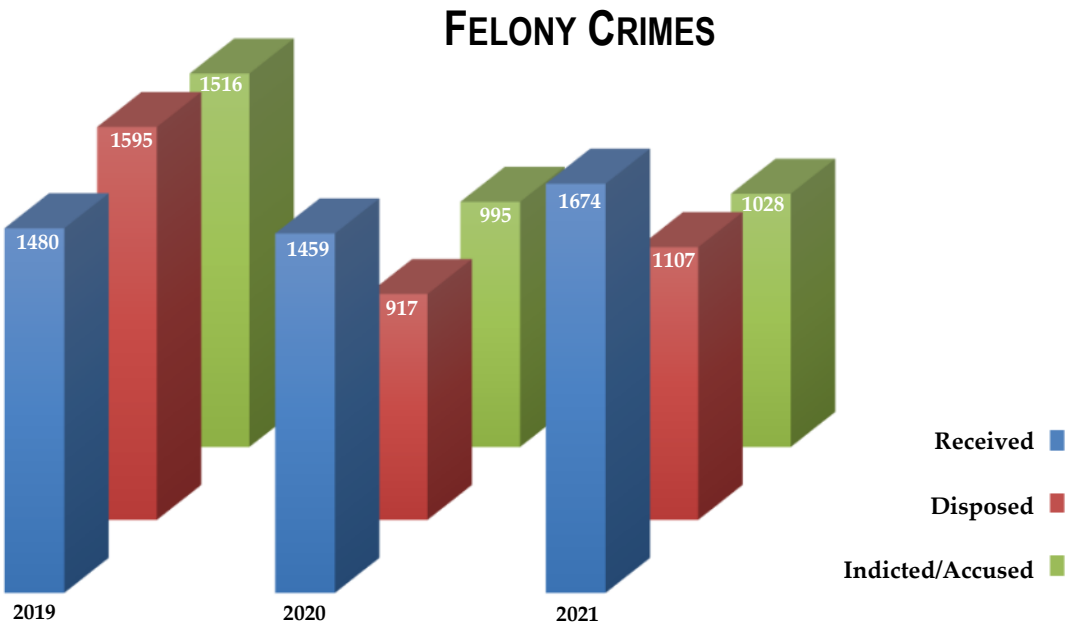
The number of criminal cases received by the Cherokee County District Attorney’s Office continues to steadily increase.

By year-end 2021, the total number of cases received was 32% higher than five years ago, in 2016.

ADDRESSING THE BACKLOG

Due to the pandemic and the resulting judicial emergency orders, our Office began 2021 with a backlog of 2020 cases. Local judicial emergency orders continued in 2021. As a result, the Grand Jury was not able to meet in January, and jury trials were not permitted until March. Once jury trials resumed, the judicial system began to address the backlog.

ANNUAL TRENDS IN CHEROKEE COUNTY



2021 STATISTICS

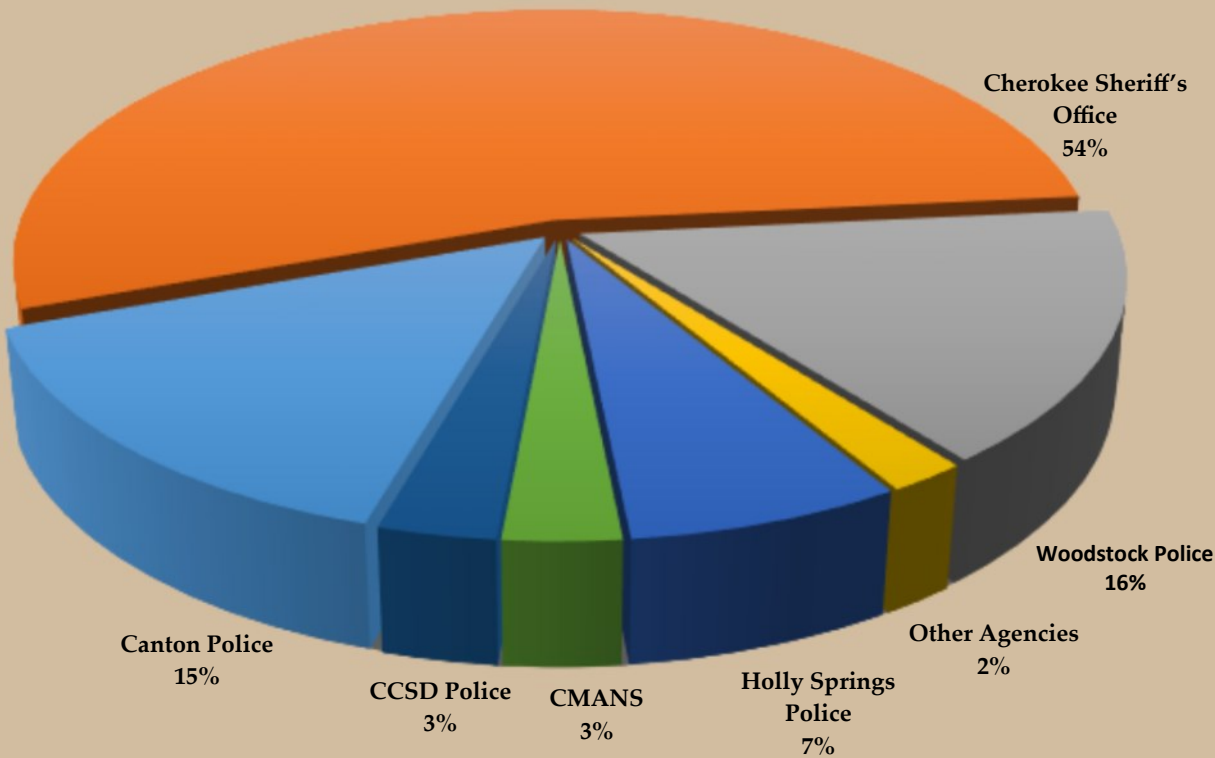
Office of the District Attorney

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Most new criminal cases (54%) that the District Attorney’s Office received for prosecution in 2021 came from the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office. Approximately 16% of new cases came from Woodstock Police, and 15% from Canton Police.

Effective prosecution starts with collaboration among agencies. Our Office is committed to working with our law enforcement agencies, with the goal to build better cases, successfully prosecute those cases, and keep Cherokee County safe.

ORIGINATION OF CASES RECEIVED IN 2021



Other agencies include Ball Ground Police, Cherokee Marshal’s Office, GBI, Georgia State Patrol, and Reinhardt University.

TYPES OF CASES RECEIVED & CLOSED IN 2021

During 2021, the Cherokee County District Attorney’s Office received 3,185 cases for prosecution, and closed 2,559. These figures are similar to 2020, when the Office received 2,945 cases, and closed 2,328.

Violent crimes increased this year. During 2021, our office began the prosecution of five new murder cases, involving 9 victims, a dramatic increase over 2020 when we received two homicide cases.

Of the cases received, 73% were probation revocations, juvenile, or drug-related, which is consistent with 2020 when those cases made up 71% of all opened cases.

Drug crimes made up the highest percentage of cases opened (25.5%). The District Attorney’s Office handles felony drug cases, including the purchase, possession, manufacture, distribution, sale, or trafficking of

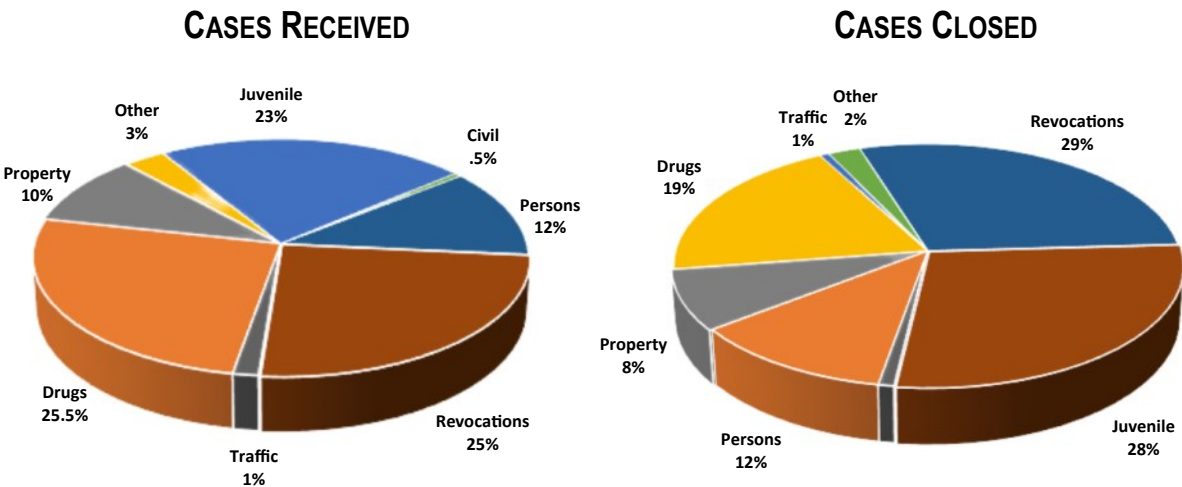
controlled substances.

Probation revocations represented the second highest percentage of cases opened (25%). Upon petition by the Probation Department, a probation revocation hearing is conducted to determine whether probation should be revoked. In 2021, our Office received 790 probation violations and disposed 741.

Juvenile cases made up the third highest percentage of cases opened (23%). In 2021, our Office reviewed 721 juvenile cases, and disposed 711.

Crimes against persons (12%) include aggravated assault, sexual assault, and crimes against children. Property crimes (10%) encompass charges of burglary, theft, and fraud. Traffic crimes (1%) include vehicular homicides, felony traffic with injury, and felony traffic without injury.

BREAKDOWN OF 2021 CASES
CRIMINAL, JUVENILE, AND PROBATION REVOCATION



THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

Led by third-term District Attorney Shannon Wallace, the Cherokee County District Attorney’s Office prosecutes felony offenders who commit crimes in our county.

Our staff is comprised of attorneys, investigators, victim advocates, legal assistants, and other professionals, who work together to ensure that justice is properly served in Cherokee County and victims of crime are protected. The Office handles a diverse docket of drug-related offenses, sex crimes, aggravated assault, child abuse, domestic violence, white collar crime, elder abuse, armed robbery, homicides, and many other felony crimes.

OUR STAFF

1
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

20
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEYS

14
INVESTIGATORS

19
OTHER STAFF

54
TOTAL

In response to the case backlog, on November 2, 2021, the Board of Commissioners approved 11 new positions including 5 ADAs, 3 investigators, 2 victim advocates, and 1 senior secretary, bringing the total staff number to 65.

TRIAL TEAMS

Members of the District Attorney’s Office work together to investigate cases, provide victim services, and close cases through plea hearings, bench trials, or jury trials.

- ◆ **DESIGNATED COURTROOM TRIAL TEAMS** are assigned to each of the three Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judges. Each trial team includes one deputy chief assistant district attorney, two assistant district attorneys, three investigators, one victim advocate, and one administrative assistant.

- ◆ **THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT**, a specialized trial unit, is partially funded by a \$70,000 federal grant. The unit prosecutes domestic violence crimes, including intimate partner violence.
- ◆ **THE SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT**, a specialized trial unit, handles physical and sexual offenses against children, as well as elder and vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

In total, the specialized units are staffed with two deputy chief assistant district attorneys, six assistant district attorneys, four victim advocates, and five investigators.

DIVISIONS & PROGRAMS

The District Attorney’s Office provides services through Accountability Court Programs, Appellate Court, Juvenile Court, Pre-Trial Diversion, and Victim Services.

- ◆ **ACCOUNTABILITY COURT PROGRAMS** include Drug Accountability, Treatment Accountability, and Veteran’s Treatment Court. When crimes are due to substance abuse and/or mental health, defendants may be eligible for special programs, which provide intensive court supervision and rehabilitation to help address core issues and reduce recidivism.

- ◆ **THE JUVENILE COURT TEAM** handles cases involving juveniles in our county. A deputy chief assistant district attorney, assistant district attorney, investigator, victim advocate, and administrative assistant are assigned to this division.

The primary goal of Juvenile Court, in addition to accountability and public safety, is to offer treatment and services that equip juveniles with the skills needed to be successful adults.

- ◆ **THE PRE-TRIAL DIVERSION PROGRAM** offers low-level, low-risk, non-violent offenders with no felony convictions an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system.

Created pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 15-18-80, the program provides education, counseling, and treatment while ensuring victims receive restitution for crimes.

By statute, individuals are eligible for the program as long as their offense does not require a mandatory minimum sentence of incarceration or imprisonment that cannot be suspended, probated, or deferred.

The division includes one assistant district attorney and an administrative assistant.
- ◆ **VICTIM ADVOCATES** provide support and guidance to victims while ensuring they are informed, present and heard throughout the criminal justice process. Our Office has nine victim advocates, including the Director of Victim Services.



Cherokee County Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea swears in a new assistant district attorney as Chief Assistant District Attorney Susan Treadaway watches.

HONORS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- ◆ District Attorney **Shannon Wallace** received the 2021 Robert S. Stubbs III “Guardian of Ethics” Award, from the Rotary Club of Canton.
- ◆ During the Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council summer conference, District Attorney **Shannon Wallace** received the District Attorney of the Year Award, and Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney **Rachel Ashe** received the Assistant District Attorney of the Year Award.
- ◆ Director of Office Administration and Victim Advocates **Lisa Williams** was recognized as a 2021 LiveSafe Woman of Achievement.
- ◆ Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney **Katie Gropper**, Chief Investigator **Dwight Kelley**, and Administrative Assistant **Cailee Malone** were honored as District Attorney’s Office Employees of the Year.

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC FROM VIOLENT CRIME



INCREASE IN HOMICIDES

In the past two years, communities across the country have seen a dramatic increase in violent crimes including homicides.

The 2021 national homicide rate increased 4% over the rate seen in 2020, when murders rose 36% over 2019 totals, according to the Council on Criminal Justice.

Cherokee County has seen similar increases in violent crimes. In 2021, our county law enforcement agencies reported a combined total of 13 homicides, a shocking increase of 550% over 2020 statistics. Two of the 13 were multiple homicides.

In 2021, our Office opened for prosecution five cases in which the defendant was charged with murder. Those five cases included 9 deceased victims and an unborn child.

One of the defendants accused of murder in 2021 was Robert Aaron Long, who pled guilty in July 2021 to murdering four individuals and seriously injuring another at Youngs Asian Spa in March 2021. Long was sentenced to serve four life sentences without parole plus 35 years.

STREET GANGS

It’s a hard fact to fathom, but violent criminal street gangs are present in Cherokee County, in our neighborhoods and in our schools.

Gang members often commit violent, theft, and drug-related crimes, such as armed robbery, aggravated assault, theft, entering autos, conspiracy to tamper with witnesses, felony narcotic sales, domestic violence, and other crimes.

We continue to see cases in which gang members canvas neighborhoods, looking for unlocked cars and stealing valuables, including handguns.

A survey conducted by the Georgia Gang Investigators Association revealed that, of the 159 Georgia counties, 157 indicated that gangs are a threat. The same survey estimated that Georgia has approximately 71,000 identified gang members and associates. The Georgia Department of Community Supervision supervises approximately 17,000 individuals who are validated members of gangs or security threat groups, including hundreds in Cherokee County.

Research conducted by the District Attorney’s Office determined that 61 criminal street gangs and 94 subsets currently operate in Cherokee County, with the most prominent gangs in our community being the Bloods and Ghostface Gangsters.

In November 2021, a Cherokee County jury convicted three known members and associates of the Bloods criminal street gang for their part in a gang-related ambush in July 2017 that killed two men on Crisler Street in Canton.

The trial took place over the course of five weeks, followed by two days of jury deliberations. The jury found the three men guilty of 59 charges, including felony murder, aggravated assault, and violation of the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act.

The District Attorney’s Office works in partnership with state, federal, and local law enforcement agencies to combat gang activity. Collaboration is critical in fighting gang crimes, as is continuous education and training. We have several investigators on staff with advanced training and experience with criminal gangs.

Our investigators and prosecutors also offer training to local law enforcement.

GANG STATS

- Georgia Gang Investigators Association estimates that our state has 71,000 identified gang members and associates.
- 157 of 159 Georgia counties see gangs as a threat to public safety.
- 61 street gangs and 94 subsets currently operate in Cherokee County.

Our Office utilizes a grant-funded platform to exchange information with agencies throughout Georgia, enabling more effective prosecution of gang-related criminal activity and better data on current criminal street gang members.

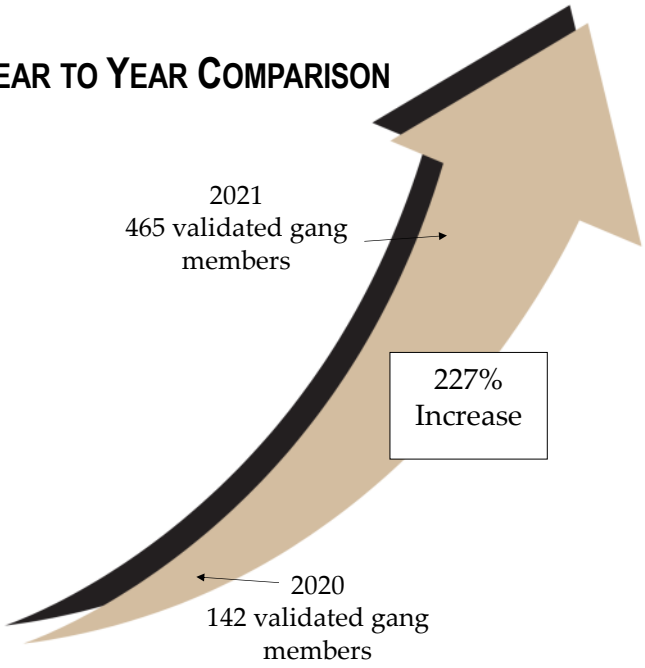
Sources:
Council on Criminal Justice. “September 2021 Update: Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities.” [Counciloncj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Pandemic-Social-Unrest-and-Crime-in-US-Cities-September-2021-Update.pdf](https://counciloncj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Pandemic-Social-Unrest-and-Crime-in-US-Cities-September-2021-Update.pdf)
Georgia Gang Investigators Association, GGIA.net.
Georgia Department of Community Supervision, DCS.Georgia.gov

CHEROKEE COUNTY VALIDATED STREET GANG MEMBERS

TOTAL MEMBERS OF SELECTED GANGS

Bloods	188
Ghostface Gangsters	112
Crips.....	52
Gangster Disciples	49
Good Fellas	38
Nine Trey	36
Young Slime Life.....	35
Sex Money Murder	34
Surenos	29
Paper Drugs Extortion.....	28
Rollin’ 60s Crips	22
Aryan Brotherhood.....	21

YEAR TO YEAR COMPARISON



Gang validation data compiled from Cherokee County law enforcement agencies.

PROTECTING OUR MOST VULNERABLE



CHILD ABUSE

The District Attorney’s Office prosecuted cases involving 157 child victims in 2021. This is a 54% increase in the number of child abuse victims from 2020, when cases involving 102 children were prosecuted.

Child abuse may consist of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and/or witness to violent act. The most prevalent child abuse crime in Cherokee County is sexual abuse, affecting 41% of all child victims in 2021. This serious crime includes sexual molestation, child pornography, sex trafficking, obscene internet contact with a child, and other crimes of a sexual nature.

Child molesters are often family members or friends who engage in grooming prior to sexually abusing a child. Internet predators typically use social media and mobile phone apps to engage potential victims. Individuals committing the crime of child pornography victimize a child throughout his/her lifetime since one pornographic image can be shared and viewed essentially forever.

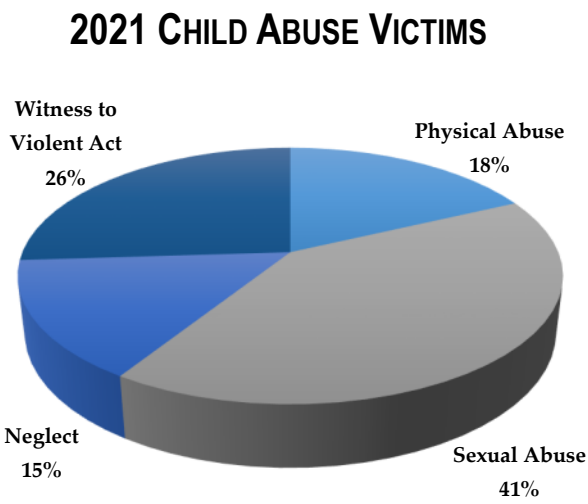
Specialized training, investigative techniques, expert witnesses, forensic interviews, and often long jury trials are required to prosecute

cases involving abuse of children. Young victims may be reluctant or afraid to testify. Some may be unable to speak due to age or development. Through effective prosecution and services provided by the Special Victims Unit, young victims receive the justice and help they need.

The District Attorney’s Office also participates in the Child Fatality Review Board and the Anna Crawford Children’s Center Child Advocacy Center multi-disciplinary team (MDT).

The Child Fatality Review Board reviews all deaths of children under the age of 18 and works to prevent child abuse and fatalities. In 2021, the Board reviewed seven child deaths.

The MDT, which meets monthly, consists of members of the Special Victims Unit, law enforcement officers, child protective service workers, medical professionals, mental health professionals, and court appointed special advocates. In 2021, 418 Cherokee County children were referred to the Anna Crawford Children’s Center, most of whom had experienced physical or sexual abuse.



ELDER ABUSE

Older residents are sometimes victimized by individuals who abuse them physically, sexually, or emotionally, fail to provide essential care, or engage in acts of financial exploitation.

Elder abuse cases are challenging since victims may be reluctant to prosecute when the crime involves loved ones. In some cases, the victim suffers from medical problems that make it difficult to report the abuse.

In 2017, the District Attorney’s Office and community partners established the Cherokee County Adult Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to help protect vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation.

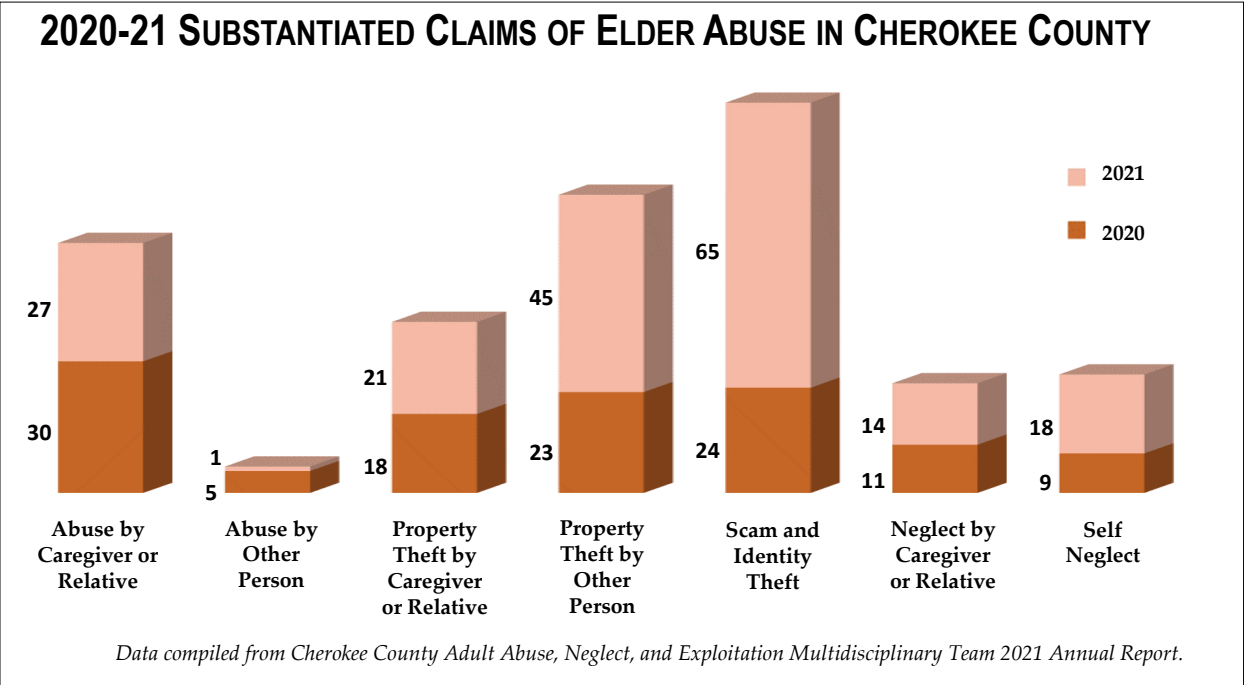
MDT members represent the Georgia Division of Aging Adult Protective Services, District Attorney’s Office, Cherokee County Solicitor’s Office, Cherokee County law enforcement agencies, Cherokee Senior Services, and other organizations.

During 2021, the group met monthly to review 371 reports of suspected abuse or neglect of elders or vulnerable adults in Cherokee County. The MDT determined that 177 reports were substantiated allegations.

Of these substantiated allegations, 34% were scam/identify theft, 24% were theft of property, and 14% were abuse by caregiver or relative.

By meeting regularly to discuss suspected abuse, case managers, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and victim advocates are able to work together to ensure that seniors in our community are protected and receiving the services they need.

In addition to the MDT, the District Attorney’s Office partners with Cherokee Triad S.A.L.T. (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together), an organization that is committed to reducing the victimization of senior citizens. Cherokee Triad S.A.L.T. supports the work of the Elder Abuse MDT by providing funding for lunches offered at monthly meetings.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Domestic Violence Unit handles crimes involving family violence charged under the Family Violence Statute. The unit is partially funded by a federal grant.

Domestic violence typically begins with emotional abuse and progresses to physical and psychological injuries. Many victims endure years of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression. These crimes can have lifetime consequences, with the effects passed on to the next generation. Felony cases of domestic violence show a pattern of violent acts that increase in frequency and intensity, and sometimes lead to death.

People of all ages are affected by domestic violence, including senior citizens and young children who can be victimized when they witness violent acts perpetrated on their family members.

Family violence cases offer complex challenges since these crimes involve people within the same family or household and the

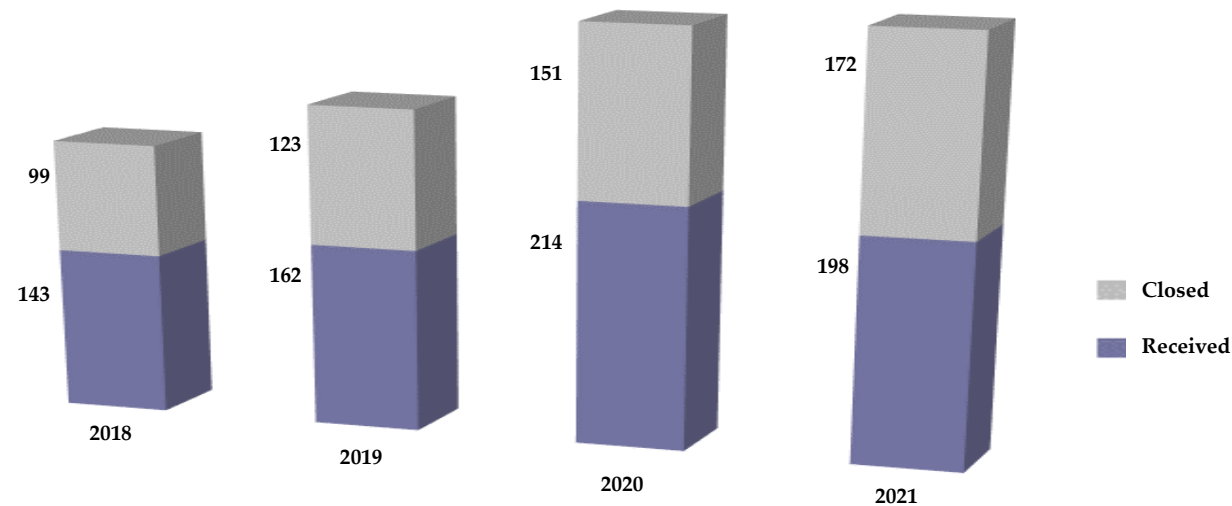
defendant is someone the victim may care deeply about, and even love. Victims who are emotionally attached to the perpetrator are more likely to forgive or overlook the danger in which they live. It is not uncommon for victims to recant their statements or minimize the defendant’s actions.

The Domestic Violence Unit participates in ongoing training in addition to providing training to law enforcement officers to ensure they are prepared to investigate these cases.

In late 2020, Cherokee County established a Domestic Violence Multi-Disciplinary team that includes individuals from the District Attorney’s Office, Solicitor’s Office, law enforcement agencies, probation, Division of Family & Children Services, Cherokee Family Violence Center, and the Anna Crawford Children’s Center.

Members review both open and closed domestic violence cases, with the goal of closing the gap by sharing information.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES
2018-2021



VEHICULAR CRIMES

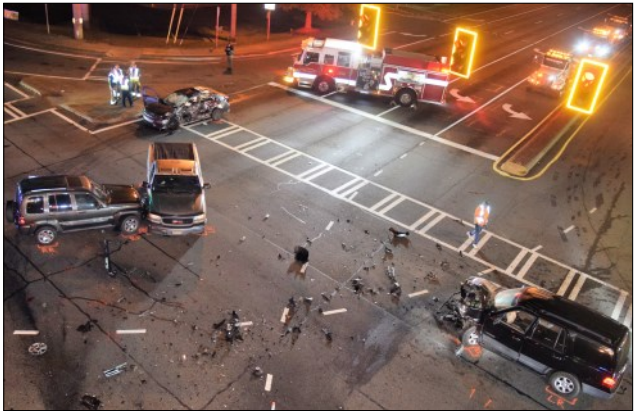
Drivers who engage in behaviors that lead to serious accidents and fatalities are charged with felony traffic crimes. These crimes often involve individuals who are driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.

Even small amounts of alcohol can impair a driver by affecting his/her alertness, judgment, coordination, and concentration. A blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08% or higher significantly affects driving and is against the law.

Many people are not aware that driving after having just one drink can cause impairment when alcohol is combined with common medications such as those taken for ADHD, allergies, and coughs, as well as antidepressants, anxiety medications, mood stabilizers, muscle relaxers, opioid pain killers, sleep aids, and other legally prescribed and over-the-counter medications.

Of course, illegal drugs, like marijuana, are extremely dangerous when driving. A combination of marijuana and alcohol is especially deadly.

The responsibility of a motorist is to drive safely, and driving under the influence is dangerous and against the law. When an impaired driver causes a fatal crash, he or she is charged with vehicular homicide in the first degree. The penalty for this felony is 3 to 15 years in prison, but the sentence for the victim is life.



On the night of November 22, 2020, Amelia Brooke Stringer consumed alcoholic beverages then drove her truck through a red light on Highway 92, causing a multi-vehicle collision that killed another motorist.

In 2021, our Office closed cases involving homicide by vehicle, hit and run, serious injury by vehicle, fleeing law enforcement, DUI, and suspended licenses.

During the year, two defendants pled guilty to homicide by vehicle.

Yann Fredrick Engamba admitted to vehicular homicide and other charges on March 17, 2021. On November 27, 2018,

Engamba left Creekview High School with two classmates. He drove his car at a high speed, causing it to veer off the road and crash into a tree, killing one teenage passenger and seriously injuring the other teenage passenger.

Amelia Brooke Stringer pled guilty on June 16, 2021, to

vehicular homicide and other crimes. Stringer caused a multi-vehicle crash in Woodstock on November 22, 2020, killing a 25-year-old woman. After the crash, Stringer’s blood alcohol was recorded at .12. Toxicology revealed levels of Xanax and Methadone in her blood as well.

Sources
CDC Transportation Safety. CDC.gov
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
Crashstats.NHTSA.dot.gov

SPECIAL PROGRAMS



JUVENILE COURT

Our Juvenile Court Division works closely with the staff of Juvenile Court, the local school system, and various agencies.

Rehabilitation is the purpose of Juvenile Court, with a focus on the child’s own home and community-based programs instead of detention centers.

Staff members review juvenile delinquency cases to determine if they are prosecutable. In 2021, the Juvenile Division received 721 cases and closed 711. This is a 20% increase from 2020 when the Division received 599 cases and closed 592.

In Cherokee County, the Juvenile Court Division handles matters involving:

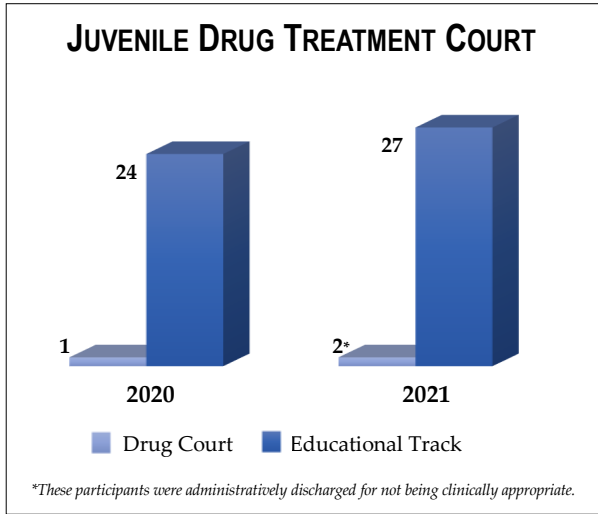
- Delinquency
- Traffic Violations
- Children in Need of Services Cases (CHINS)

DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAM FOR JUVENILES

Funded through a federal grant, the Juvenile Drug Treatment Court Program (JDTC) began accepting participants in 2020. The program uses judicial and community based interventions to provide a comprehensive response to young people in need of substance abuse treatment and behavioral interventions.

The JDTC offers two drug treatment programs: an educational track and a drug court track. The educational track is intended for first-time offenders and consists of a program that the juvenile attends with a parent. Once the juvenile has completed the class, the charge is dismissed. The drug court track is for juveniles with a medium to high-risk substance abuse problem.

In 2021, 27 juveniles participated in the JDTC educational track and 2 were admitted to the drug court track, an overall increase of 16% compared to 2020.



ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS

For many defendants, criminal activity is directly connected to substance abuse and/or mental health.

Accountability courts provide carefully screened offenders with the opportunity to overcome these issues so they can go on to pursue productive lives.

All programs take a minimum of 18 months to complete and require intensive court supervision.

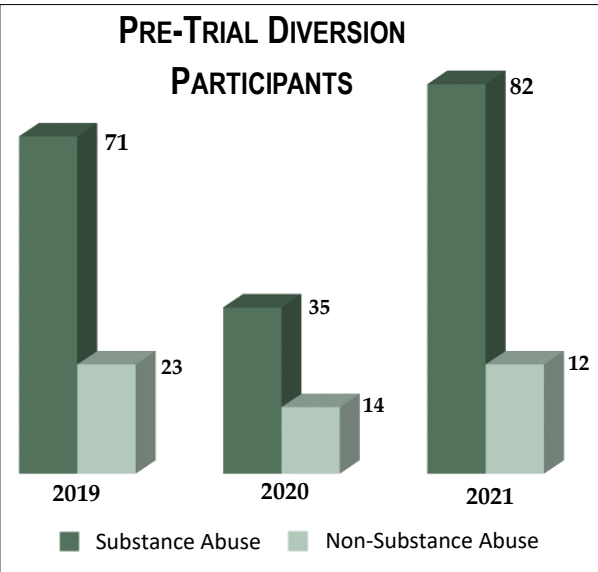
In Cherokee County, the following accountability courts are offered:

- 1) **Drug Accountability Court** — In 2013, Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea established this program, which is now overseen by Judge David Cannon, Jr. During 2021, 44 offenders with felony cases were accepted into Drug Accountability Court, and 27 graduated.
- 2) **Treatment Accountability Court** — In 2016, Probate Judge Keith Wood established this program. A total of 11 new offenders with felony cases were accepted into Treatment Accountability Court in 2021, with 9 graduating.
- 3) **Veterans Treatment Court** — State Court Judge Dee Morris established this program in 2017. This program assists many veterans who suffer from PTSD due to trauma in the military. Veteran mentors guide program participants through the process. In 2021, Veterans Treatment Court provided assistance to defendants with felony charges, including 2 who were accepted into the program, and 6 who graduated after completing all requirements.

PRE-TRIAL DIVERSION

In 2017, District Attorney Wallace started this program, which offers first-time offenders the opportunity to rehabilitate while deterring future criminal conduct. Eligible low-risk, non-violent offenders are presented with an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system. By statute, individuals may participate as long as their offense does not require a mandatory minimum sentence of incarceration or imprisonment that cannot be suspended, probated, or deferred. Policies and procedures established by the District Attorney determine which of these cases are admitted.

Since August 2017, 321 individuals have entered the program and 149 have successfully completed all requirements. In 2021, 94 people were accepted into the program, and 45 graduated. In total, the program has recovered \$28,383 in restitution to victims and generated \$129,760 in administrative fees, including \$38,070 in 2021, which has been added to the Cherokee County general funds.



SERVICES FOR CRIME VICTIMS

When individuals are victims of crime in Cherokee County, our Victim Witness Assistance Program provides support and guidance.

Victim advocates ensure that victims are informed, present, and heard throughout the criminal justice process, and that the Georgia Crime Victim’s Bill of Rights is followed.

Advocates help victims of violent crime and property crime, including assault, child molestation, domestic violence, homicide, burglary, entering auto, and identity fraud. Advocates provide the catalyst necessary to help crime victims exercise their rights and recover from trauma.

Within 72 hours of a felony arrest, victim advocates in our Office reach out to victims of crime and maintain contact with these

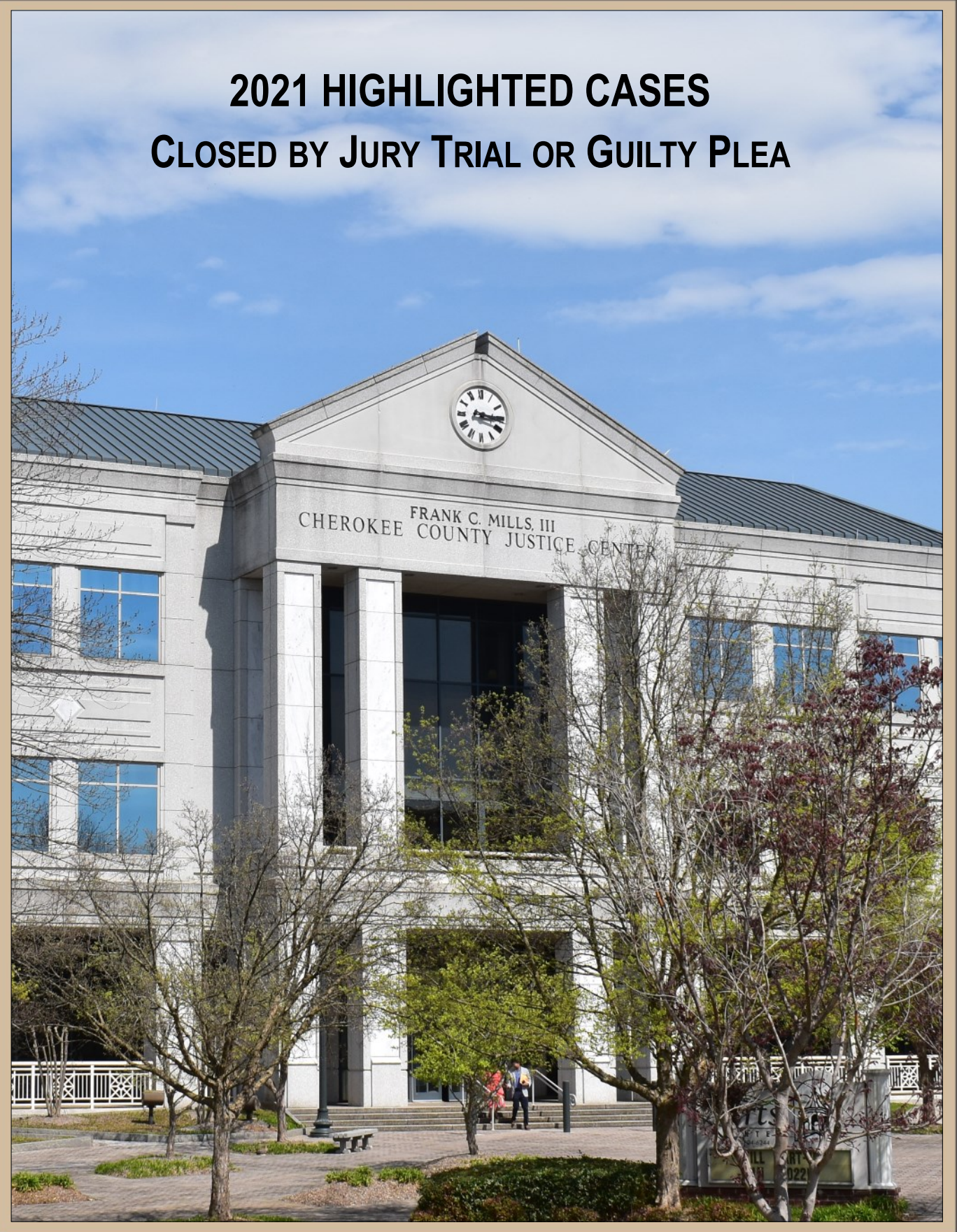
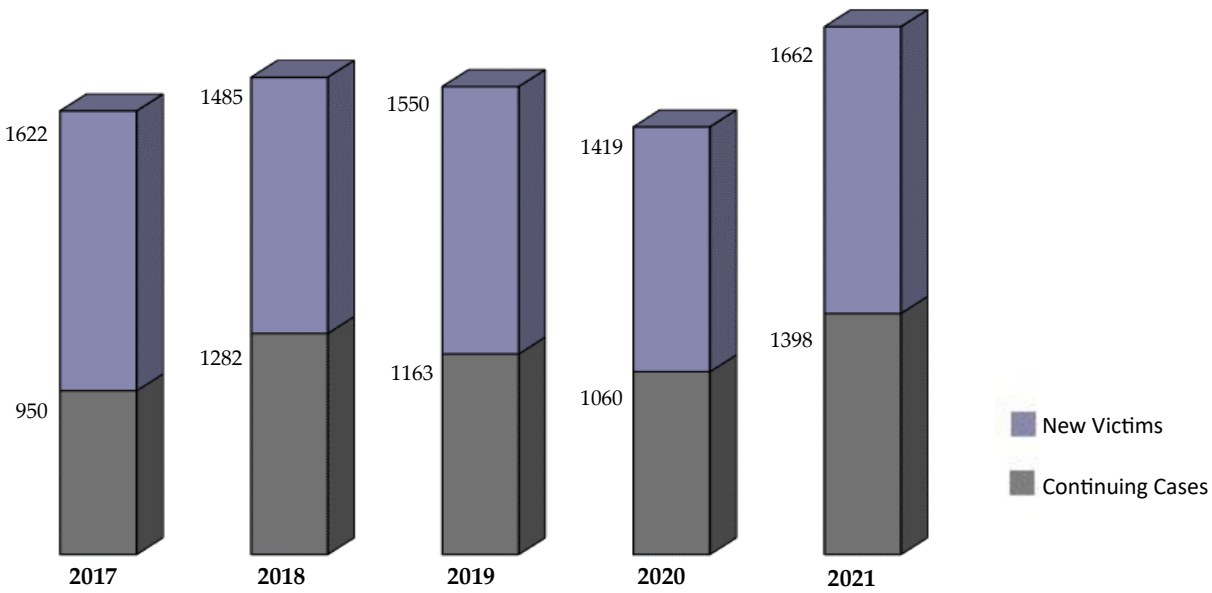
victims throughout the process. Advocates provide notification of court dates, obtain restitution information, assist in applying for crime victims’ compensation, attend meetings with the prosecutor, and accompany victims to court.

After conviction, victim advocates keep victims informed of important events, such as release from custody, restitution payments, and violation of probation.

In 2021, our nine advocates assisted 3,060 individuals in new and existing cases, including 1,006 new victims of violent crime and 656 new victims of property crime.

The District Attorney’s Office received \$258,253 in federal grant funds to support this program.

ASSISTING VICTIMS OF CRIME IN CHEROKEE COUNTY



2021 HIGHLIGHTED CASES CLOSED BY JURY TRIAL OR GUILTY PLEA



Robert Aaron Long pleads guilty to mass shooting, sentenced to serve 4 life sentences without parole, plus an additional 35 years in prison

Robert Aaron Long, 22, pled guilty on July 27, 2021, to murder and other charges related to the mass shooting that occurred at Youngs Asian Massage in Cherokee County on March 16, 2021. After admitting to the charges, Long was sentenced to serve four consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole plus an additional 35 years in confinement, ensuring that he will spend the remainder of his natural life in prison.

Four Lives Lost in Mass Shooting

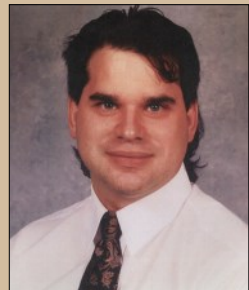
At the July 27, 2021, plea hearing, Robert Aaron Long entered a guilty plea to murder, admitting that he killed four individuals at Youngs Asian Spa, and severely injured another. Three women and one man lost their lives in the mass shooting.



Daoyou Feng



Delaina Ashley Yaun-Gonzalez



Paul Andre Michels



Xiaojie Tan

On March 16, Long entered Youngs Asian Massage and used a SAR 9mm handgun to murder Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Delaina Ashley Yaun-Gonzalez, and Paul Michels. He also severely injured Elcias Hernandez-Ortiz and placed six others inside the business in fear of being shot during the rampage.

The arrest and capture of this defendant was a collaborative effort involving multiple law enforcement agencies, including the Cherokee Sheriff's Office, the Cherokee Marshal's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Georgia State Patrol, and the Crisp County Sheriff's Office.

Deputies with the Cherokee Sheriff's Office responded to the crime scene within minutes of receiving the first 911 call, secured the scene along with members of the Cherokee Marshal's Office, located surveillance footage of the suspect, and quickly placed still images on social media asking the public for assistance.

Several individuals recognized the suspect, including the defendant's parents, who were instrumental in helping law enforcement locate their son. Once the suspect's location was determined, Sheriff Frank Reynolds contacted Crisp County Sheriff Billy Hancock, who worked with the Georgia State Patrol to capture the defendant without incident.

"On one of Cherokee County's darkest nights, the light still shown through our dedicated law enforcement professionals who worked tirelessly to apprehend this killer,"

said Chief Assistant District Attorney Susan Treadaway, who prosecuted the case along with District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "This defendant was on a mission to continue his violent acts. We are so thankful for our public safety officials for preventing him from taking more lives."

After Long was apprehended in Crisp County, he admitted to Cherokee Sheriff's Office detectives that he was responsible for

is signed and the cameras are turned off, the families will still be struggling and grieving.

"Once hatred is given a gun, it doesn't matter who gets in the way," Judge McElyea said.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge McElyea accepted the negotiated sentence, and the defendant was immediately remanded to the Georgia Department of Corrections.



Due to the widespread interest in the Robert Aaron Long case, the District Attorney's Office held a press briefing following the plea hearing on July 27, 2021.

the killings at Youngs Asian Massage, and described in detail his movements before, during, and after the murders. During the proceedings on July 27, Long again recounted the events of March 16.

The Court also heard impact statements from victims and family members of victims who described the feelings of loss and pain they have endured.

Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea then spoke directly to the victims and their families, saying that none of them deserves the fate that was visited upon them by the defendant. She added that after the sentence

"We said from the beginning that we would work tirelessly to bring justice for these victims, and we have," said District Attorney Wallace.

"Today, through effective collaboration of law enforcement, prosecution, and the judicial system, we have brought some closure for these families while ensuring a swift and firm sentence that confines this defendant to a life behind bars," said District Attorney Wallace. "It is our hope that the legal outcome obtained today will bring some measure of peace and healing to all those affected by this tragedy."



Yann Fredrick Engamba pleads guilty to vehicular homicide in 2018 crash that killed a Creekview High School student

Yann Fredrick Engamba, 20, pled guilty and was sentenced on March 19, 2021, for homicide by vehicle in the first degree, serious injury by vehicle, and reckless driving.

The charges related to a single vehicle crash that occurred on November 27, 2018, involving four Creekview High School students on Old Orange Mill Road. Witnesses reported that Engamba was driving his 2003 Infiniti G35 in a reckless manner and not maintaining his lane before veering off the side of the road and striking a tree.

The crash resulted in the death of Stephen "Stevie" Smith, 17, and serious injuries to Chase Burr, who was 17 at the time.

During the two-day sentencing hearing, 15 witnesses testified on behalf of the State. The State recommended a sentence of 30 years, with 10 to serve in confinement, 240 hours of community service, and other conditions. The defendant's attorney proposed a probation sentence with added mental health treatment. After accepting Engamba's guilty plea, Superior Court Judge David Cannon, Jr. sentenced the defendant to 15 years with a total of 12 months to serve in the Cherokee County adult detention center and the remainder to be served on probation. The



Stevie Smith, 17, was killed in the crash caused by Yann Engamba.

defendant must perform 2,400 hours of community service, pay restitution, have no contact with the victims' friends or family members, avoid drug and alcohol use, not possess firearms, complete a DUI risk reduction course and a defensive driving course, and submit to random drug screenings.

Judge Cannon specified that the defendant will serve approximately 40 days in custody each year for the next three years, to be completed the Tuesday before Thanksgiving through January 3rd of the following year. Judge Cannon explained that this sentencing ensures that Engamba will not be able to spend holidays at home or celebrate New Year's Eve for the next three years. Additionally, Judge Cannon wanted to ensure that the defendant spent the anniversary of this tragedy in custody.

"This was an unnecessary tragedy. A young life with so much promise was lost, and another life was permanently altered," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "Our hope is that other drivers will see that reckless decision making behind the wheel can lead to loss of life and will think before acting in such a way."



Mark Richard Lukehart admits to aggravated child molestation and other related sexual charges; sentenced to 22 years in prison

On March 22, 2021, Mark Richard Lukehart, 62, entered a guilty plea and was sentenced for aggravated child molestation, aggravated sexual battery, and other sex crimes.

These charges stemmed from incidents involving a child who was under the age of 16 and was a relative of the defendant.

Lukehart molested the child on multiple occasions over the course of a year. The child eventually disclosed the abuse to a suicide hotline, prompting Canton Police to conduct an investigation.

"Basic human decency dictates that you do not have sex with a child," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Katie Gropper, of the Special Victims Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State.

"This defendant, who was once a school-teacher in another county, took advantage of an innocent child and sexually assaulted her on multiple occasions, pushing her to a point where she contemplated taking her own life," said Deputy Chief Gropper.

During the plea hearing, the child victim provided an impact statement describing how the defendant's actions led her to attempt suicide and self-harm. She shared that she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, frequently has flashbacks, and continues to have issues with trust. She asked the defendant, "Why did you rape me? Do you hate me?"

After accepting Lukehart's negotiated guilty plea, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced him to 22 years to serve in confinement with no possibility of parole, followed by life on probation. Upon his release from prison, Lukehart is prohibited from contacting the victim or the victim's family and must adhere to sex offender special conditions.

"Our hearts go out to the young victim who has a long road ahead to recover from these crimes," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "While no outcome can restore this child's innocence, this sentence will prevent Mark Lukehart from hurting any more children in the future."

Lukehart pled guilty to:

- Incest
- Aggravated child molestation
- Aggravated sexual battery
- Child molestation
- Obscene internet contact with a child
- Sexual exploitation of children
- Cruelty to children in the first degree



Jury finds gang member Tyrell Maleek Corley guilty of aggravated assault and other charges; sentenced to 30 years with the first 15 years to be served in prison

A Cherokee County jury convicted Tyrell Maleek Corley, 24, on March 31, 2021, of charges related to an aggravated assault with a stolen firearm.

On June 6, 2018, Corley was involved in a fist fight in a McDonald's parking lot on Ridge Road in Canton. During the fight, Corley brandished a firearm and chased a man through the parking lot.

Corley initially told law enforcement that he was the victim, but Canton police officers were able to determine his involvement after interviewing witnesses on the scene and reviewing surveillance footage.

Over the course of the investigation, Corley was identified as a member of Sex-Money-Murder (SMM), which is a set of the Bloods criminal street gang. One of Corley's tattoos suggests that he holds "rank" in the Bloods.

Corley's gang affiliation complicated the investigation and prosecution of the case since many witnesses were unwilling to be forthcoming or cooperative.

At the conclusion of the three-day trial, the jury found Corley guilty of aggravated assault, possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, theft by receiving stolen property, possession of a schedule IV controlled substance (benzodiazepine), tampering with evidence, crossing the guard lines with drugs, and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. Corley was also found to be a recidivist offender under Georgia law, which requires him to serve the maximum sentence.

"The defendant relied on the gang culture of silence to protect him from accountability, but the jury saw through that and recognized him for the danger that he poses to our community," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "It is never acceptable to threaten someone with a gun, but this case was especially troubling when you factor in the gang element and the fact that this incident happened at dinnertime with children and others in close proximity."

After the jury issued its verdict on March 31, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Corley to 30 years, with the first 15 years to be served in confinement. Conditions of probation include 120 hours of community service, substance abuse evaluation and treatment, no alcohol or drugs, no weapons, no contact with the codefendant, no association with other gang members, and barred from entering Cherokee County.

"While this case posed unique challenges, I can assure you that in Cherokee County a culture of silence will not result in a failure of justice. If witnesses are unwilling or afraid to come forward, we will still prosecute these crimes when the evidence supports those criminal charges," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "Our community demands that we hold violent offenders accountable."

The trial, which took place March 29-31, was the first Superior Court jury trial held in the county since February 2020 due to the pandemic.



Kyle Raymond Walter admits to abusing his toddler son and causing severe head trauma; sentenced to 30 years with the first 8 years to be served in prison

Kyle Raymond Walter, 29, pled guilty and was sentenced on April 8, 2021, for abusing his toddler son, causing severe head trauma.

The charges related to an incident that occurred on March 7, 2020, during which Walter injured his nearly 3-year-old son while the child's mother was out shopping. The mother returned home to find her son bleeding from the mouth, having difficulty walking, and acting lethargic. She took the child to Northside Hospital Cherokee, where he was assessed then airlifted to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Initially, the defendant denied wrongdoing, telling Canton Police that the child must have fallen after climbing onto a bunkbed or dresser. Walter eventually told investigators that he hit the child with a plastic baseball bat because he was misbehaving. The child later told police his father hit him with a large action figure toy. During the plea hearing, Walter provided further details about the incident, explaining that he picked up his son by his upper thigh and threw him down, causing him to hit his head on action figures and other toys scattered on the floor.

The boy suffered multiple skull fractures, subdural hemorrhaging, and scattered subarachnoid hemorrhaging. While the child was receiving care at the hospital, medical staff noted bruises on various parts of his body, in different stages of healing.

During the hearing, Walter pled guilty to cruelty to children in the first degree, family violence aggravated battery, and family violence aggravated assault.

After accepting Walter's negotiated guilty plea, Superior Court Chief Judge Ellen McElyea sentenced the defendant to 20 years, with the first 8 years to serve in confinement. She ordered that he have no unsupervised contact with any child under the age of 18 during probation. He must also participate in a family violence intervention program, submit to mental health evaluation and treatment, avoid alcohol and drugs, and adhere to other special conditions.

"Innocent children should never suffer abuse at the hands of anyone, much less their own parent who should be committed to caring for and protecting them," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "It is our hope that this sentence will ensure that the defendant never harms another child."

Preventing Child Abuse

Whether abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, or neglect, or a combination, child abuse causes long-term effects on innocent victims. Everyone can play a part in protecting children and preventing this crime.

Here are a few local and state resources:

Anna Crawford Children's Center
CherokeeChildAdvocates.org

The Children's Haven
CherokeeChildrensHaven.org

Prevent Child Abuse Georgia
Facebook.com/preventgeorgia



Recidivist offender Michael Ray Dye pleads guilty to trafficking methamphetamine; sentenced to 30 years with 20 years to serve in prison

On May 14, 2021, Michael Ray Dye, 43, of Morganton, pled guilty to trafficking methamphetamine and possession of more than an ounce of marijuana.

Dye entered his non-negotiated guilty plea just prior to his jury trial, which was scheduled to begin on May 17, 2021.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies had arrested Dye on December 31, 2018, after receiving a report that Dye, an individual wanted for crimes in Fannin County, was at a shopping center on Cumming Highway in Canton.

CSO deputies quickly detained Dye, who was sitting in the driver's seat of a black Jeep Wrangler.

While speaking with law enforcement, Dye admitted that there were illegal narcotics inside the vehicle. The deputies located the drugs in the vehicle, later determined to be 29 grams of methamphetamine and 38 grams of marijuana.



Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies detained Dye while he was sitting in a black Jeep Wrangler that was parked in a Canton shopping center.

After Dye entered his guilty plea at the May 14 hearing, the State recommended a sentence that included a substantial period of incarceration, based on the defendant's prior convictions in drug trafficking and possession.

The State also filed notice of enhancement of punishment since Dye is a recidivist.

Superior Court Judge David Cannon, Jr. sentenced Dye to 30 years with 20 to serve in prison as a recidivist and a fine of \$200,000.

"Michael Dye has been distributing drugs in north Georgia for more than 20 years," said District Attorney

Shannon Wallace. "He has been given the opportunity to stop on many occasions but has instead continued to spread his poison on our streets."

"This sentence sends a clear message that drug trafficking will not be tolerated in Cherokee County," said District Attorney Wallace.



Co-defendant drug traffickers sentenced to prison: Saul Rivas-Garcia found guilty by jury trial; Maximiliano Bernardo pleads guilty



On two separate dates in April and May 2021, Maximiliano Bernardo, 35, and Saul Rivas-Garcia, 43, were sentenced to prison for trafficking methamphetamine.

The two men were arrested in January 2020, when a Cherokee Multi-Agency Narcotics Squad (CMANS) investigation revealed possible drug activity at two homes, one on Highway 92 and the other on nearby Quail Run, both in unincorporated Woodstock.

After executing a search warrant at those addresses, CMANS and the Cherokee Sheriff's Office located 261 grams of methamphetamine and arrested Rivas-Garcia and Bernardo, charging them with trafficking a schedule II controlled substance.

"Our local law enforcement officers successfully identified suspicious drug activity, investigated, and made these arrests, ensuring that a very large quantity of methamphetamine would not find its way into our community," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Randall Ivey, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State.

Bernardo entered a negotiated guilty plea on April 15, 2021, and received a sentence of 18 years to serve in confinement in the state penitentiary along with a mandatory fine of \$300,000. Rivas-Garcia requested a jury trial.

On April 26-27, 2021, the State presented

Rivas-Garcia's case to a jury. During the trial, the State presented evidence including photos of drugs found in one of the homes. On April 27, the jury delivered its unanimous guilty verdict. On May 20, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McEyes sentenced Rivas-

Garcia to 15 years to serve in prison and a mandatory fine of \$300,000.

"Dangerous drugs like methamphetamine tragically affect the lives of not only individuals who become addicted but also family members of drug users, many of whom are children," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "The biggest travesty is when drugs destroy the lives of these innocent victims. By sentencing known drug traffickers, we can reduce drug activity in our county and protect our citizens."



On January 22, 2020, Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies and CMANS agents located a large, open bag of methamphetamine in a home occupied by the co-defendants.



Jury finds Ricky Bernard Harris guilty on all counts of family violence involving wife and stepchildren; sentenced to 30 years with the first 15 years to serve in prison

On June 23, 2021, a Cherokee County jury convicted Ricky Bernard Harris, 36, on all counts in a case of family violence that involved his wife and stepchildren. Charges included family violence aggravated assault, family violence battery, and cruelty to children in the third degree.

The incident occurred on the evening of April 30, 2020. While his wife was cooking dinner, Harris became aggressive and began repeatedly poking her in the face. A physical altercation ensued and the children attempted to intervene. He then proceeded to attack his 17-year-old stepdaughter, pushing her down and strangling her by placing both hands on her neck. When his 14-year-old stepson attempted to intervene, Harris punched him in the eye. When he again attempted to go after his 17-year-old stepdaughter, his wife tried to stop him and he punched her repeatedly on the head.

Three other children in the home witnessed the incident and corroborated the story. The children involved ranged in age from 8 to 17.

Canton Police investigated the incident after receiving a 911 call placed by one of the children.

"This was not the first time the defendant lost control with his family, but it was the worst," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "On this occasion, his anger and need to control were not only focused on his wife,

but also his stepchildren, who were placed in a horrible position of having to act as deflectors and defenders of their mother, their siblings, and themselves."

Harris is a recidivist offender with prior family violence convictions, including a conviction in Cherokee County involving his wife and a conviction in Fulton County involving a prior girlfriend who testified at this trial.

During the trial, the State called 11 witnesses to the stand, including the children and Harris' wife. After deliberating for about five hours, the jury issued its guilty verdict on Friday, June 23.

Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced the defendant on June 30, 2021, to 30 years, with 15 years to serve in prison. Since Harris is a recidivist, he must serve all 15 years without the possibility of parole. When he is released from prison, he must adhere to conditions of probation including no contact with the victim or the victims' family.

"Domestic violence is a crime that often occurs behind closed doors, victimizing both adults and children. Thankfully, in this case, a child had the courage to call 911, which effectively ended the cycle of violence," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "Through this guilty verdict and sentence, our hope is that this family is strengthened and able to rise above the trauma they have had to endure."



Jury convicts Jesus Franco Arroyo of attempted child molestation and other charges; sentenced to 15 years with the first 5 years to serve in prison

On August 17, 2021, a Cherokee County jury found Jesus Franco Arroyo, 24, of Lakeland, Florida, guilty of computer pornography, criminal attempt to commit a felony (child molestation), and fleeing or attempting to elude police officers.

The charges stem from an investigation conducted October 30-31, 2020, during which Arroyo used a messaging app called *MeetMe* and text messaging to seduce, solicit, and entice a 14-year-old girl in order to commit an act of child molestation.

The girl was actually a fictitious child created by an undercover Woodstock police officer from the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force. Undercover agents on this task force receive training and education about current trends in child exploitation and offender behavior. This training enables officers to detect individuals seeking to exploit children before they are able to harm a real child.

During the course of Arroyo's communications with the fictitious child, he invited her to meet him in person at Dupree Park on Neese Road in Woodstock, for the purpose of sexual intercourse.

At nearly 2 a.m. on October 31, Arroyo arrived at the park to wait for the 14-year-old child to sneak out of her mother's house and walk through the woods to his car. While he waited, Arroyo continued to send text messages to the child utilizing his cell phone.

When Woodstock Police arrived, Arroyo sped out of Dupree Park toward Highway 92,

eventually wrecking into the carport of a private residence where officers arrested him.

"Arroyo's actions demonstrate the dangers that children face online every day. We are fortunate that the child was a fictional child, rather than a real 14-year-old," said Deputy Chief District Attorney Katie Gropper, of the Special Victims Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "Undercover operations like these are critical in detection and prevention of child exploitation."

Senior Superior Court Judge Frank C. Mills, III, sentenced the defendant on August 18 during a remote court proceeding. Arroyo received a sentence of 15 years, with 5 years to serve in prison and the remaining 10 years to serve on probation.

While on probation, Arroyo will be subject to the general conditions of probation, including no possession of firearms, alcohol, or illegal substances. He will also be subject to sex offender conditions of supervision, including no contact of any kind with minors under the age of 18.

"Many children are safer tonight, thanks to the excellent work of an undercover Woodstock police officer who identified this sick individual before he was able to hurt an innocent child, and to the Cherokee County jurors, who found this defendant guilty," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "This sentence ensures that this defendant will be confined, monitored, and unable to hurt a real child."



Rodney William Metzger admits to aggravated assault, kidnapping, and other charges in violent attack of ex-wife; sentenced to 70 years with the first 25 years to serve in prison



Amelia Brooke Stringer pleads guilty to vehicular homicide in 2020 crash that killed a 25-year-old motorist; sentenced to 19 years with the first 10 years to serve in prison

Rodney William Metzger, 36, admitted to 14 charges related to an attack on his ex-wife that included kidnapping, assaulting, threatening her with a handgun, and leaving her bound with homemade zip tie handcuffs.

Metzger pled guilty and was sentenced on August 4, 2021, to 70 years, with the first 25 years to be served in confinement and the remaining 45 years to be served on probation.

Around 2 a.m. on January 1, 2021, Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies responded to a 911 call and found Metzger on his ex-wife's front porch, appearing to be a concerned family member. He told police that he had just arrived at the house, where he found her bound with zip ties, face down on her deck, with a pillowcase over her head. The investigation revealed a different story. The day before, Metzger attempted to reconcile with his ex-wife, but she refused. Then, around 12:30 a.m. on January 1, Metzger broke into her home and entered her bedroom, wearing a mask and carrying a gun. When he spoke to her, he disguised his voice. He hit her with the butt of his gun and tried to strangle her two times. He zip tied her hands, assaulted her, placed a pillowcase over her head, and dragged her to the deck. He left her there, face down, instructing her not to move until she heard a car honk. He told her she would be shot if she moved.

After leaving his ex-wife tied up outside on the deck, Metzger went to his apartment, changed his clothes, and came back to her home, where he found her still lying face down, tied up outside.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office investigators located a handgun in Metzger's vehicle and zip ties in his apartment that were matched to the zip ties used to bind his ex-wife. Investigators also located surveillance video, including video of the defendant leaving Lowe's Home Improvement carrying a pack of zip ties.

"This man is a master manipulator," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "In the days leading up to this attack he faked a cancer diagnosis in an attempt to gain sympathy from his ex-wife. When that didn't work, he created a convoluted plan that the investigators in this case and our office truly believe involved a plot to kill her and then himself. When he couldn't go through with that plan, he instead devised a new plan to rescue her. Fortunately, Sheriff's Office investigators saw through this scheme and quickly arrested the defendant."

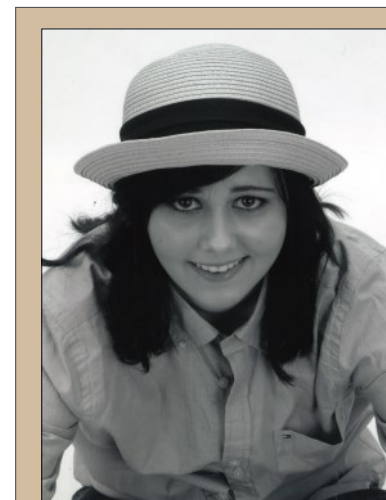
Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced the defendant as negotiated. The majority of his time in custody will be spent without eligibility for early parole.

"This defendant planned and carried out a violent attack on his ex-wife that included breaking into her home, disguising himself, and pistol-whipping her," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "I cannot imagine how terrifying this must have been for her. This is a classic example of how the most dangerous time for a domestic violence victim is when she decides to leave an abusive relationship."

On August 4, 2021, Amelia Brooke Stringer, 32, was sentenced for homicide by vehicle in the first degree, driving under the influence, reckless driving, driving while license suspended, and possession of a Schedule IV controlled substance. Stringer previously pled guilty to these charges during a virtual hearing held on June 16, 2021.

Stringer caused a multi-vehicle crash in Woodstock on November 22, 2020. The collision started when she drove her Ford Expedition through a red light on Highway 92 while traveling northbound on Main Street. Stringer's vehicle struck the driver's side of a Honda Civic driven by Kaitlin "Katy" Jade Martin, 25, pushing Martin's car into a Jeep Liberty, which then collided with a GMC Sierra.

Martin died of blunt force trauma to the torso, sustained during the collision. While investigating the crash, law enforcement officers noticed an "overwhelming odor" of alcoholic beverage emanating from Stringer. After the accident, she admitted to drinking Malibu Rum and taking medications including Risperdal, Xanax, and Methadone. Her blood alcohol level was recorded at 0.12 (0.08 is considered a per se violation of Georgia's DUI Statute). Toxicology also revealed levels of Xanax and Methadone present in her blood.



"Katy" Jade Martin, 25, was killed in the crash caused by Amelia Brooke Stringer.

Woodstock Police arrested Stringer on November 25 when she was discharged from the hospital. At the time of the crash, Stringer's license had been suspended pending a prior DUI in Fulton County in August 2020.

Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced the defendant to 19 years, with the first 10 years to be served in confinement and the remainder on probation. During probation, Stringer must perform 240 hours of community service, pay restitution, have no contact with the victim's family, participate in the MADD Victim Impact Panel, receive evaluation and treatment for mental health and substance abuse, take all medications as prescribed,

attend two 12-step meetings per week, wear a SCRAM monitoring device for one year following release, avoid alcohol and drugs, and not possess firearms.

"On November 22, 2020, this defendant made a series of bad choices that caused a life to be tragically cut short and parents to mourn the death of their only child," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "This defendant chose to drink and take medications, drive with a suspended license, and run a red light on a busy highway, ultimately causing the death of an innocent young woman. These unnecessary tragedies need to stop."



Jury finds Jose Jaimie Argueta guilty of false imprisonment and aggravated sodomy; sentenced to serve 40 years without the possibility of parole

Jose Jaimie Argueta, 46, was convicted of false imprisonment and aggravated sodomy charges, and sentenced on July 22, 2021.

The charges stem from an incident that occurred on May 24, 2020, in a Cherokee County home. Since the victim has physical limitations, Argueta provided basic care for him. The incident began when Argueta forced the victim into his bedroom, where he performed sex acts on the man against his will for approximately 45 minutes.

The victim was eventually able to get to a neighbor's residence for assistance and the neighbor called 911. The victim was transported to an area hospital for evaluation and treatment.

During the jury trial, which ended on June 30, the State presented evidence that Argueta forcefully sodomized the victim and that the actions were not consensual. Seven witnesses testified, including Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) from LiveSafe Resources who evaluated the victim and documented the injuries he sustained.

"Through our collaboration with LiveSafe Resources, as well as the Cherokee Sheriff's Office, we were able to conduct a thorough investigation and present a compelling case to the jury," said Assistant District Attorney Leyna Pope, of the Special Victims Unit, who

prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "The defendant took advantage of this fragile victim, leaving him frightened, in pain, and desperately needing help."

The victim told investigators with the Cherokee Sheriff's Office that despite his best efforts, because of his physical limitations, he did not have enough strength to defend himself during the assault.

At the conclusion of the sentencing hearing conducted on July 22, Chief Judge Ellen McElyea sentenced Argueta to serve 40 years in prison without the possibility of parole, followed by a lifetime of probation. During probation, Argueta will be subject to sex offender special conditions and may have no contact with the victim.

"The crime that Argueta committed on May 24, 2020, is despicable," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "It's horrifying to imagine the depth of betrayal and humiliation this victim felt after being hurt in this way by someone he once trusted."

"We are grateful for the Cherokee County jury who endured the graphic evidence and testimony presented during this case. Their verdict ensures that Jose Jaime Argueta will spend decades in prison for his crimes and will not be able to harm another innocent victim," said District Attorney Wallace.



Ronald Charles Lynch admits to armed assault of wife witnessed by child; sentenced to 40 years, with the first 20 years to serve in prison

Charles Lynch, 51, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea on June 16, 2021, and was sentenced on August 11, 2021, for charges related to an aggravated assault on his wife that involved a firearm.

The charges stem from an incident that occurred in a Canton home late in the evening on March 11, 2020. While a child was present, Lynch grabbed his wife, pushed her down, and brandished a firearm. He pointed the weapon at his wife's forehead, with the barrel of the gun touching her skin. He pulled the trigger, the gun "clicked," but no bullet discharged.

Realizing that the gun was not loaded, Lynch went into another room to search for ammunition. At this point, the woman was able to escape from the home with the child. During the course of these events, the woman called 911 and the child remained on the phone with dispatch.

Lynch then went to a nearby residence and asked, through a surveillance camera, if his wife was inside that home. The surveillance video showed a man brandishing a weapon and pacing on the front porch. Canton Police arrived at this point and were able to detain Lynch.

"If there had been bullets in that gun, we would have been here for a murder trial," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Rachel Ashe, of the Special Victims Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "He was surprised when the gun didn't fire

so he went looking for bullets, and then he went looking for the victims. His actions are inexcusable. This could easily have been a homicide."

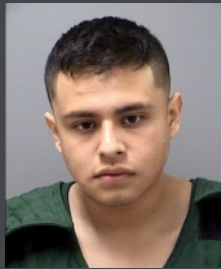
Lynch admitted during a June 16 plea hearing that he had committed family violence aggravated assault, cruelty to children in the first degree, obstruction of an officer, family violence battery, cruelty to children in the third degree, and simple assault.

On August 11, Judge Anthony Baker sentenced Lynch to 40 years, with the first 20 years to be served in confinement and the remaining 20 years to be served on probation.

"On March 11, 2020, a woman and a child were subjected to a horrific situation in which one or both of them could have died. The child involved showed amazing courage in talking to 911 dispatchers so police were quickly alerted," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "Fortunately, the gun was not loaded and no one was physically injured. Through this sentence, the defendant will be held accountable for his actions, and these victims and our community will be protected from this defendant."

Domestic Violence Resources

If you or someone you know is impacted by domestic violence and/or strangulation, please contact the Cherokee Family Violence Center, CFVC.org, 770-479-1703 (24/7 crisis hotline). In case of an emergency, call 911.



Eric York Cruz admits to violent knife attack of 3 men; sentenced to 30 years with the first 20 years to be served in prison

On September 28, 2021, Eric York Cruz, 22, admitted to the brutal stabbing of three Cherokee County men in 2018. He entered a guilty plea to 3 counts of aggravated assault and 5 counts of aggravated battery. At the conclusion of the hearing, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea sentenced him to 30 years, with the first 20 years to serve in confinement and the remaining 10 years to be served on probation.

Cruz, who is a California resident, traveled to the victims' Ball Ground home in December 2018 for a visit. The men were not aware that the defendant was on probation for stabbing his parents at their home in Vista, California.

On the night of December 22, 2018, Cruz became agitated and combative, and made accusations of infidelity involving a relationship with one of the victims and another roommate. One of the residents demanded that Cruz leave. When Cruz refused, the man called 911.

Cruz then retrieved a knife from the kitchen and started stabbing each man, beginning with the individual on the 911 call. All three victims received multiple stab wounds that left permanent scarring and nerve damage. One victim was stabbed 24 times. During the assault, a resident grabbed the knife's blade to protect his friend and kicked Cruz down the steps. Afterwards, he used a Samurai sword in an attempt to stop the assault.

When Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies arrived at the home, they found a gruesome

scene, with four injured men and no clear indication of who was the aggressor. One victim needed immediate life-saving treatment. The other victims had stab wounds to the head, neck, and abdomen. Cruz was also injured, due to a self-inflicted wound. Officers treated injuries while they investigated the case and ensured no more violence took place.

"On the night of this incident, law enforcement officers walked into a chaotic scene and quickly went to work," said Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "One resident of the home did what any hero would do – he ran towards danger to save his friend. If not for his intervention, I have no doubt that this attack would have resulted in a homicide."

The State was prepared to go to trial in October; however, Cruz elected to enter a plea at the September 28, 2021, hearing. When he is released from prison, Cruz must adhere to special conditions of probation which include no contact with the victims.

"Domestic violence usually begins with manipulation and control, which escalates to violent acts. No one expected this defendant to react in the way that he did. He was relentless in his drive to inflict injury on these men. They are lucky to be alive," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "This sentence will ensure that society is protected and this violent man remains in confinement for a very long time."



Jesse Lamar Simmons pleads guilty to murder of girlfriend, sentenced to life in prison

Jesse Lamar Simmons, 43, pled guilty on November 17, 2021, to malice murder, felony murder, aggravated assault, violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act, and tampering with evidence. The charges related to a shooting that occurred in Waleska on January 5, 2019. After shooting his girlfriend, Tammy Gilbert, 55, Simmons called 911 to report a suicide attempt in their basement apartment.

Upon arrival, Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies found Gilbert critically injured with a single gunshot wound to her chest and a gunshot graze to her upper arm. The defendant had not attempted to treat her wounds. Cherokee County Fire & Emergency Services engaged in lifesaving efforts, but Gilbert died shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Simmons initially told investigators that Gilbert was depressed, had a history of suicide attempts, and had shot herself after the couple argued. He then changed his story, claiming the gun accidentally misfired. Eventually, he admitted to shooting her, adding that she had yelled at him to "get out." During the investigation, deputies discovered a suspected methamphetamine pipe and the defendant later tested positive for methamphetamine.

Gilbert's family told investigators that she had been in an abusive relationship with Simmons and feared leaving him would have fatal consequences. The day of the murder, Gilbert told her brother that she was going to leave Simmons and planned to move in with her sister.

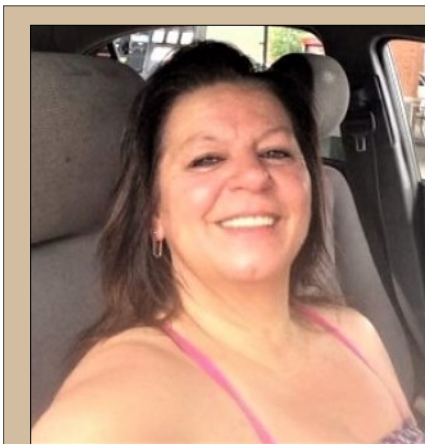
"January 5, 2019, started out as one of the happiest days of Tammy's life. That day, she celebrated her daughter's wedding and made plans to finally leave an abusive relationship and break the cycle of violence," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Rachel Ashe, of the Domestic Violence Unit.

"Unfortunately, her happy day ended with unimaginable

tragedy when this much loved woman was shot by Simmons, who then went on to lie about his involvement and hide evidence."

Superior Court Judge Tony Baker then sentenced Simmons as negotiated to life in prison.

"It was heartbreaking to hear Tammy's family describe a life without her," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "While his guilty plea will not bring back their loved one, our hope is that this sentence will bring them some closure."



Jesse Simmons shot and killed his girlfriend, Tammy Gilbert, 55, then told law enforcement she died by suicide.



Roy William Ray admits to molesting two children; sentenced to 20 years to serve in prison

On December 9, 2021, Jasper resident Roy William Ray, 38, entered a guilty plea to rape, child molestation, criminal attempt to commit aggravated child molestation, and computer pornography. These charges stemmed from sexual abuse of two children in separate incidents in 2020 and 2012.

In October 2020, Cherokee Sheriff's Office arrested Ray for rape and other charges after a child disclosed to her grandmother. During the investigation, another relative disclosed that Ray had raped and molested her eight years prior. Both victims were under the age of 16 at the time of the crimes.

The victims participated in separate forensic interviews at the Anna Crawford Children's Center, where they provided detailed accounts of what Ray had done to them.

"Sexual predators take advantage of vulnerable children, then threaten them into silence. This defendant told the first victim that she would lose her family and home if she ever told anyone about the abuse. She was afraid to tell authorities what this defendant had done to her and, but for the courage of another child coming forward, he would never have been held accountable for his actions," said Assistant District Attorney Leyna Pope, of the Special Victims Unit, who prosecuted this case on behalf of the State.

At the conclusion of the plea hearing, Chief Superior Court Judge Ellen McElyea accepted Ray's negotiated guilty plea then sentenced him to 20 years to serve without the possibility of parole, followed by life on

probation. Upon his release from prison, Ray is prohibited from contacting the victims or the victims' family members and must adhere to sex offender special conditions.

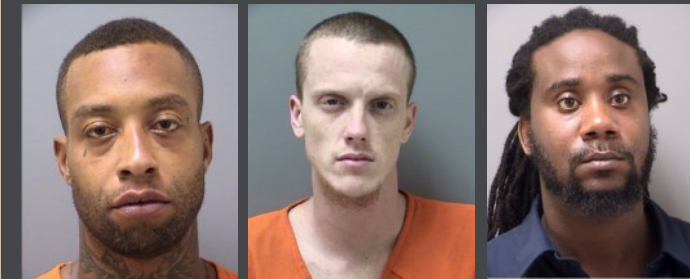
"This defendant stole the innocence of two children, likely causing long-term psychological harm," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "We are so proud of these young victims for standing up for themselves and helping ensure that this predator is now in a place where he cannot hurt young children."

Sexual Abuse of Children

Child abusers often engage in a grooming process that allows them to perpetrate sexual abuse undetected. "Grooming" in the context of child sexual abuse is a manipulative process intended to secure the child's silence. Some characteristics of grooming include gaining the child's trust, filling a need, flattering and isolating the child, sexualizing the relationship, buying gifts, and maintaining control.

Children who have been groomed are often conflicted about their feelings for the abuser because he/she has methodically established a positive relationship with the child prior to introducing sexual touches. Children who have been groomed are also more likely to conceal the abuse and delay disclosing the abuse to others.

To report suspected child abuse, call Child Protective Services at 855-422-4453. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911.



Jury finds Byron Elrod, Brody Samples, and Jeremy Zellous guilty of two gang-related murders; all 3 sentenced to life in prison

On November 18, 2021, a jury convicted Byron Elrod, 35, Brody Samples, 28, and Jeremy Zellous, 33, of charges related to two gang-related murders in Canton.

A series of violent events occurred on Crisler Street in the summer of 2017. Following a June 24, 2017, street fight, one group posted a video bragging about winning the fight. This was perceived as disrespect, leading Elrod and Zellous, who held a leadership position within the Bloods criminal street gang, to retaliate.

The following day, June 25, 2017, Elrod, Zellous, and Samples ambushed William Randall and Jamesly Baptist on Crisler Street. More than 70 shots were fired, hitting nearby churches, homes, and vehicles. William Randall, 23, and Tony Samples, 26, were both killed as a result. Then, on July 11, 2017, Elrod committed a drive-by shooting on Crisler Street in an attempt to intimidate witnesses who he believed were "snitching."

The five-week trial began on October 18, 2021, with more than 50 witnesses testifying. The State also presented evidence of gang association for each defendant and witness intimidation that occurred after the arrests. After 18 days of evidence, the jury deliberated for two days before announcing its verdict, convicting the three men of 59 counts in total, including felony murder, aggravated assault, and violation of the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act.

"This was a very thoughtful, diligent, hard-working group of jurors. Based on the verdict,

it's clear that they combed through and inspected every single count and held the State to its burden of proof," said Assistant District Attorney Megan Hertel, who co-prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "Through this verdict and sentencing, we have the opportunity to take a step toward the eradication of criminal gang activity in our county."

During the sentencing hearing on January 10, 2022, the State recommended the maximum sentence of life without the possibility of parole for each defendant.

"In Cherokee County, gang activity, which is a clear and present danger to our community, has continued to increase, with many felony crimes directly related to criminal street gangs," said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "We will continue to fight hard to dismantle gangs and will not allow fear and violence to infiltrate our community and make our neighborhoods unsafe."

Superior Court Judge David Cannon, Jr. sentenced Byron Elrod to life in prison plus an additional 15 years to serve in confinement pursuant to the recidivist statute of O.C.G.A. §17-10-7(a) and (c), followed by 30 years of probation.

Brody Samples was sentenced to life in prison, plus an additional 5 years to serve in confinement.

Jeremy Zellous was sentenced to life in prison, plus an additional 15 years to serve in confinement.

BEYOND THE COURTHOUSE

Office of the District Attorney

Cherokee County remains one of the safest places to live in Georgia due to excellent law enforcement and effective prosecution of crimes committed in our county.

Within the District Attorney's Office, prosecuting attorneys, investigators, and staff members work together to make sure cases are filed, investigated, and prosecuted in an efficient and cost-effective manner, all while keeping crime victims informed and supported throughout the process.

Members of the District Attorney's Office make vital contributions beyond the courthouse. They serve on multi-disciplinary task forces, participate in training and conferences, support nonprofits, and participate in community groups. Our Office also frequently participates in community service projects to benefit the people of our community. The pages that follow highlight some of our activities in 2021.

We are honored to serve the citizens of Cherokee County.



BEYOND THE COURTHOUSE

HONORS & AWARDS

1. District Attorney Shannon Wallace recognized Employees of the Year during a holiday celebration. Staff members honored included (left to right) Deputy Chief ADA Katie Gropper, Legal Assistant Cailee Malone, and Chief Investigator Dwight Kelley.
2. The Rotary Club of Canton presented District Attorney Shannon Wallace with the Robert S. Stubbs II "Guardian of Ethics" Award.
3. District Attorney Shannon Wallace received the District Attorney of the Year Award and Deputy Chief ADA Rachel Ashe received the Prosecutor of the Year Award at the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia summer Conference.
4. Director of Office Administration and Victim Services Lisa Williams (center) was honored as a 2021 LiveSafe Woman of Achievement.



BEYOND THE COURTHOUSE

COMMUNITY SERVICE

5. During the summer, the District Attorney's Office once again collected backpacks full of school supplies for the Give a Kid a Chance annual backpack drive. In July, we gathered for a group photo with volunteers and the large collection of donated backpacks before loading vehicles ready to take the backpacks to the distribution center.
6. In the winter months, we were busy shopping for holiday gifts for local children and seniors. Every year, we purchase gifts for Hasty Elementary and Cherokee High School students, as well as older adults in our community. The Hasty gift drive is especially popular in our Office and with the courthouse deputies because we have the opportunity to "adopt" families and purchase from their wish lists. This year, after the gifts were transported to Hasty Elementary, several staff members and deputies volunteered to help with the distribution of gifts.

On behalf of the entire staff of the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office,
I would like to thank you for your interest and support. We are dedicated to serving
our community and honored that you have entrusted us
to do the important work that we do.

Shannon Wallace
District Attorney
Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
SHANNON G. WALLACE

*The Office of the District Attorney is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity,
and working with our partner agencies
to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.*