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Contact: Andrew Sharp at

ASharp@sandiego.gov or (619) 533-6176

San Diego City Attorney's Office Awarded Grant from the Office of Traffic Safety for Specialized Prosecution Team

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced a 50 percent increase in funding from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) for a specialized team of prosecutors for drugged and alcohol impaired driving, within her Office. The City Attorney's Office will receive a \$410,000 grant to manage an expected large increase in drugged and alcohol impaired-driving testing by the Sheriff's Crime Lab. Funding runs through September 2024.

“The preventable crime of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs or the combination of alcohol and drugs remains a pervasive issue in our community,” says San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott. **“This grant provides additional resources we will use to hold accountable those who drive while under the influence of marijuana or prescription medication. This is the most effective way to save lives.”** Elliott says there's a lack of public understanding around drugs and drunk-driving laws. Even without alcohol, the use of cannabis or prescription drugs (particularly those with a warning to refrain from driving or operating machinery) can lead to a driving under the influence (DUI) arrest and conviction.

Thanks to the OTS grant funding in the previous year, the City Attorney's specialized prosecution team prosecuted 272 misdemeanor cases of driving under the influence of drugs or a combination of alcohol

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1200 Third Avenue, Suite 1620, San Diego, California 92101-4188 (619) 236-6220

and drugs. Overall, the City Attorney's Office reviewed approximately 2,479 DUI cases and filed 2,040 DUI cases during that period.

The San Diego City Attorney's Office Criminal Division is responsible for processing and reviewing misdemeanor driving under the influence (DUI) arrest reports occurring within the City of San Diego, the City of Poway, and the unincorporated area known as 4S Ranch. The City Attorney's Office prosecutes cases generated by more than 15 law enforcement agencies, who submit cases to the Sheriff's Crime Lab and the San Diego Police Department Crime Lab. The Sheriff's Crime Lab recently announced plans to test all DUI samples for drugs and alcohol.

Drugged driving cases can be difficult to prosecute - even following a positive test - due to public misconceptions about cannabis and prescription medications. Successful DUI drug and alcohol prosecutions require a proper understanding of the signs of drugged driving impairment, probable defense arguments, and familiarity of drug toxicology.

The highly trained Drug DUI Prosecution Team within the City Attorney's Office handles these complex cases throughout each step of the criminal process. One Deputy City Attorney oversees each case, from arrest through conviction and sentencing. Prosecutors work to secure convictions and appropriate sentences that reflect the public safety risk posed by the offender, mentor trial attorneys on how to successfully try high-risk DUI offenders and host quarterly roundtable meetings with law enforcement personnel.

The San Diego City Attorney's Drug DUI Prosecution Team is led by Assistant City Attorney Paige Folkman, Chief Deputy City Attorney Sangwon "Sam" Park, Supervising Deputy City Attorney Onu Omordia, and staffed by Deputy City Attorneys Anthony Esquibel, Janet Uson and John Mandio. The Unit is funded, in part, by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. As part of their work, the San Diego team also consults with the California Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Training Network to advance drug DUI prosecution across Southern California.



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