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Philly DA sets up new unit focusing on repeat gun offenders

The goal is to collaborate with other law enforcement agencies involved in this work as well.



By Tom MacDonald · April 15, 2024



The Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. (Angela Gervasi / Billy Penn)

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A new unit dedicated to prosecuting people who have been repeatedly caught with illegal guns is now part of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office.

DA Larry Krasner announced the unit Monday morning, noting that gun crimes have decreased significantly over the past year. He said the new unit will focus specifically on repeat offenders who use guns again and again in their crimes.

That includes “prosecutions relating to ghost guns, that will include straw purchasing, essentially the illegal purchase for others, and it will include addressing the very serious issue of juveniles in possession of firearms,” Krasner said.

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It's part of a multi-faceted approach to fighting the gun crime problem in the city, what the DA calls “friendship coupled with punishment” for failure to obey the law.

He says it's an “investment in violence prevention intervention, rehabilitation on the other hand, investment in modern enforcement, vigorous prosecution and proper consequences for the people who deserve them. This is not an ‘either/or,’ this is a ‘yes,’ and this is ‘both,’ and that is how the work gets done.”

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The goal is to collaborate with other law enforcement agencies involved in this work, too.

“Our office has been for years working collaboratively with PPD to identify the most prolific offenders, but we are once again onto additional ways to do this, additional intelligence gathering, additional intelligence sharing, and we’re very happy to see that system is going well,” he said. “We also have very close collaborations with Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, a federal enforcement entity with the FBI and with the U.S. attorney’s office.”

Currently, five attorneys in the DA’s office serve as Special Assistant US Attorneys focused specifically on gun offenses.

Jeff Palmer will head up the new unit. He said the group will be looking for the few who cause the most trouble with guns in the city.

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“I am very familiar with the impact and the danger that illegal guns pose in our city and the small percentage of very dangerous offenders who present a large danger to the vast majority of the peace-loving and wonderful citizens of Philadelphia,” Palmer said.

Palmer has worked in a variety of units within the DA's office, including the family violence and sexual assault unit. He was assistant chief of the gun violence task force, and is coming to the office leaving a position as the assistant chief with homicide and non-fatal shootings unit.

As of Sunday, April 14, there were 81 homicides in the city of Philadelphia. That represents a 33% decrease over last year when there were 121. The homicide number is 54 less than in 2022, and 64 below the total at this time in 2021.

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