



HCPO End of Year Report

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INTRODUCTION

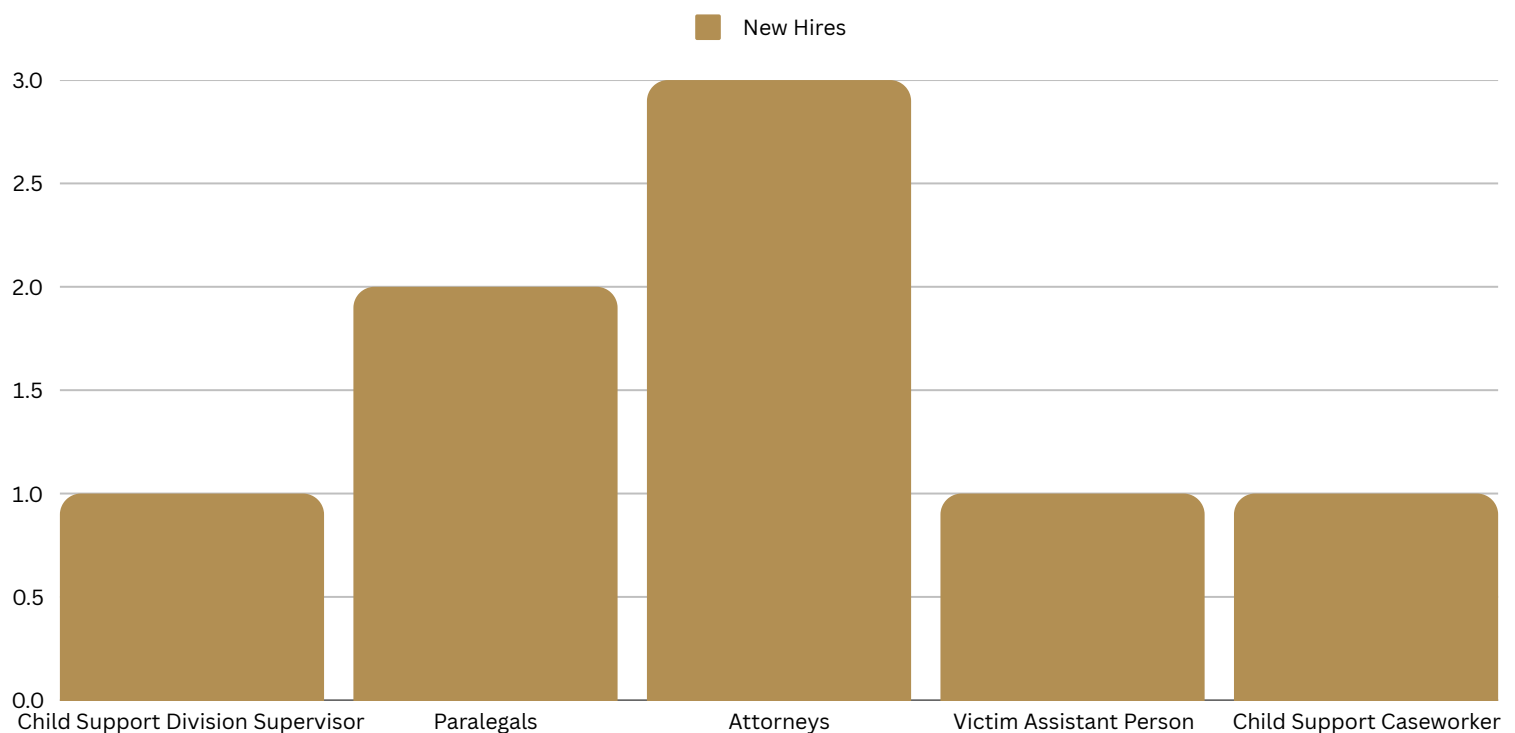
This report provides an overview of the operations of Hancock County Prosecutor's Office for the calendar year 2024. This is part of ongoing efforts to provide transparency to the Hancock County Criminal Justice System. This is a document intended for public consumption and is not protected work product.

Management Overview

The HCPO began 2024 with 25 full-time employees. Midway through the year, approval was granted for two additional positions, increasing the team to a total of 27 full-time employees.

It was necessary for HCPO to hire the following:

1. One New Child Support Division Supervisor (Prior retired)
2. Two New paralegals (1 new position, 1 paralegal left to a different job within HCPO)
3. Three New Attorneys (1 new position, 1 left for new employment, 1 had employment terminated)
4. One New Victim Assistant Person (New position, filled from hire within HCPO)
5. One New Child Support Caseworker (Previous left for different job within HCPO)

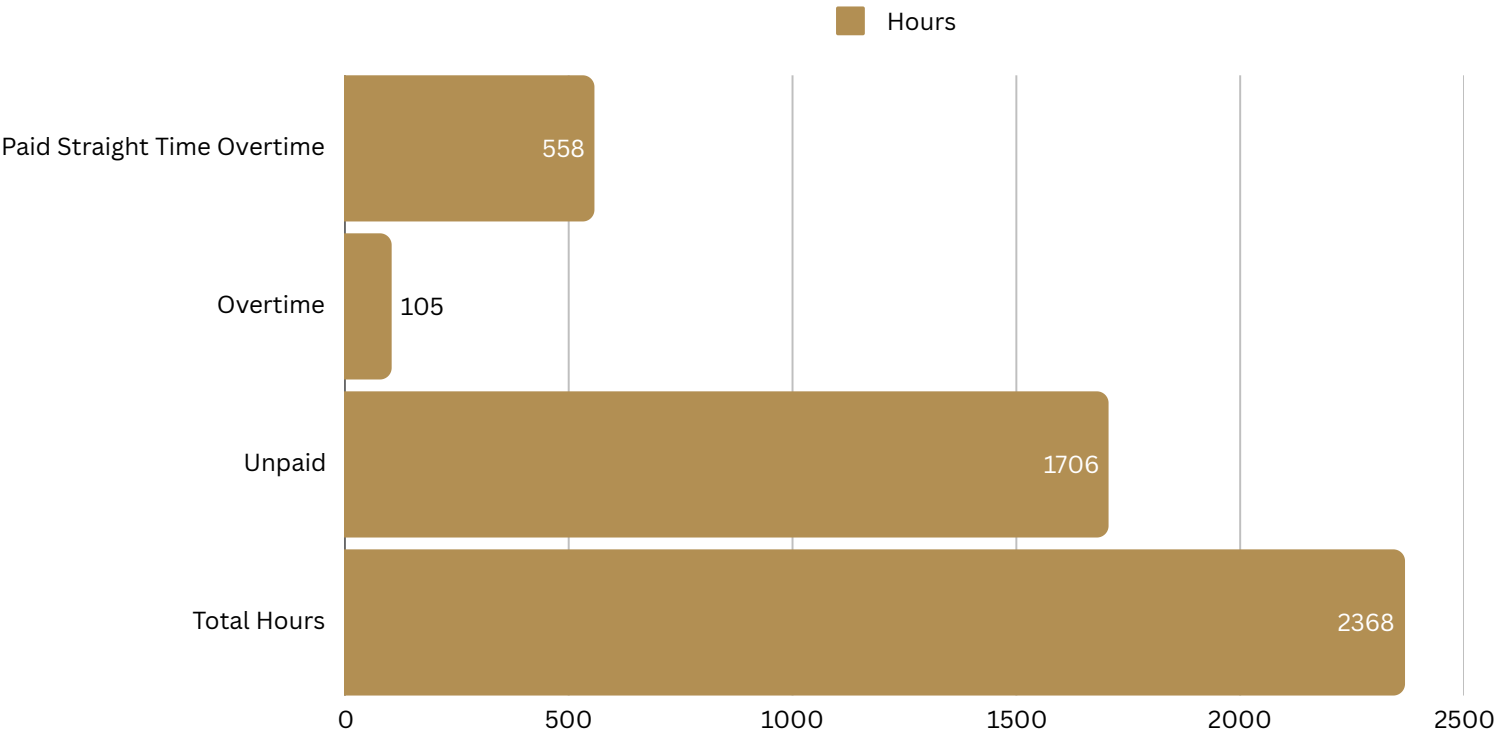


Throughout 2024, the Hancock County Prosecutor's Office never had all 27 approved positions filled at the same time. While we are grateful for the acknowledgment that additional staff was necessary to manage our daily responsibilities, our office still falls short of the staffing recommendations set by the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council (IPAC). According to IPAC, to meet the needs of our rapidly growing county—the fastest-growing in the state—this office requires 12 attorneys (an increase of three from the current 9), three additional paralegals, one more investigator, and one more administrative assistant.

The inadequate office space and poor working conditions remain significant challenges to employee satisfaction, retention, and recruitment.

Overtime Stats

- Non-Exempt Employees:
 - 557.5 hours of paid straight time overtime
 - 104.5 hours of overtime (time and half) pay
- Exempt Employees
 - 1,706 unpaid hours
- **2,368.25 total hours of paid and unpaid overtime**
- HCPO operates a 24/7 on-call line to assist law enforcement at any time. In the past year, HCPO attorneys responded to over 100 calls to this line outside of regular business hours.



SECTION 1: CASE FILING DATA

- **Criminal Cases Filed:** 1877
- **Percentage of Case Referrals resulting in Criminal Cases being filed:** 91%
- **Infractions (Tickets) Filed:** 2206
- **Percentage of referrals resulting in filings:** 99.7%
- **Firearm Retentions Filed:** 10
- **Search Warrants Reviewed and Filed:** 343
- **Subpoena Duces Tecum Reviewed and Filed:** 31
- **Juvenile Cases Filed:** 67
- **Overall Juvenile Cases formally filed:** 28% overall

Some criminal case referrals to HCPO involved multiple victims or incidents on different dates, which were consolidated into single cases for judicial efficiency. Filing these cases individually would have added over 325 additional filings, bringing the total to approximately 2,300 and the filing percentage closer to 94%.

Regarding juvenile cases, please note that there is strong legal precedent in Indiana to utilize the least restrictive means of pursuing justice and most frequently that juvenile cases are resolved by way of informal intervention with the Hancock County Probation Department, the juvenile and the family. This has been the long-standing practice in our community, with the support of the Courts, and HCPO. The goal of the juvenile system is to work to rehabilitate the child so they do not become adult offenders.

Child Support Enforcement

The HCPO Child Support Division has **1,186 open cases** on which it is pursuing enforcement action. In 2024 HCPO's Child Support Division **collected a total of \$3,977,900** in overall child support from those open cases. For the year, the HCPO Child Support Division met all federal performance measures and **received a 100% passing rating** on all metrics for the second year consecutively.

Victim Services

HCPO Victim Services are what connects crime victims to information about their case. Services can begin even before a case is filed, offering support through phone calls or in-office appointments to discuss the status of a potential case. These services continue throughout the process, including updates on court dates, preparation for court testimony, referrals to necessary victim services, and providing support and comfort during the trial.

- **Total Victim Contacts:** 15,047
- **Individual Crime Victims:** 911



VICTIM ASSISTANT KAYLA CROUCH, VICTIM ASSISTANT SHANNON CRULL, CHIEF DEPUTY AIMEE HERRING, PROSECUTOR BRENT EATON

SECTION 2: EXTRAJUDICIAL OBLIGATIONS

HCPO maintains a secure, password-protected web portal accessible to law enforcement 24/7, providing caselaw updates, frequently used statutes, important contact information, and commonly used forms.

Zoey's Place Child Advocacy Center

- **Investigative Forensic Interviews:** 197 (90%+ increase in the number of interviews from 2023)

HCPO plays an active role in the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) supporting Zoey's Place Child Advocacy Center by facilitating interviews with children who may be victims or witnesses of the abuse or neglect. These interviews provide critical information to the Department of Child Services (DCS) and law enforcement for interventions or potential criminal charges. In 2024, HCPO staff dedicated approximately **600 total hours**—split between a victim assistant and an attorney—to these interviews alone. This estimate excludes additional time spent on preparation, team meetings, and further investigations required to determine whether criminal charges are filed.

The MDT meets monthly to follow up on forensic interviews conducted the prior month. These meetings involve law enforcement, the Department of Child Services (DCS), HCPO, Victim Services, and occasionally mental health or medical professionals, ensuring all necessary follow-up actions from the interviews are completed. In 2024, there were **11 MDT meetings**, with four HCPO employees regularly attending and sharing responsibility for these essential efforts to ensure the safety of Hancock County children.

Behavioral Health Court Obligations

As part of supporting the Behavioral Health Court program, HCPO is obligated to attend bi-weekly staffing and court hearings. It is necessary for HCPO to attend and participate for this program to be successful. There were approximately **22 of these staffing meetings** and approximately **22 afternoon court sessions** (at which the entire team and participants are present in open court). Each of the staffing meetings is approximately 90 minutes in duration. The Court hearings are approximately 120 minutes in duration. Total estimate of time spent in **Behavior Court Staffing: 44 hours**. Total estimate of time spent in **bi-weekly Behavior Court Hearings: 55 hours**. These approximations only includes the actual time spent in these events and not the additional time required to adequately prepare to do so.

Drug Court Obligations

As part of supporting the Hancock County Drug Court Program, HCPO is obligated to attend bi-weekly staffing sessions and court hearings. It is necessary for HCPO to attend and participate for this program to be successful. There were approximately **22 Drug Court Program Staffing meetings** and approximately **22 afternoon court sessions** at which the entire team and participants are to be present in open court). Each staffing is approximately 60 minutes in duration. The Court hearings are approximately 90 minutes in duration. Total estimate of time spent in **Drug Court Staffing in 2024: 22 hours**. Total estimate of time spent in **bi-weekly drug court hearings in 2024: 33 hours**. Total overall: Approximately **55 working hours**. These approximations only include the actual time spent in these events and not the additional time required to adequately prepare to do so.

Office Hours with Law Enforcement Agencies

A prosecutor from our office regularly visits participating law enforcement agencies within the county to answer questions, consult on investigations, and provide feedback to improve case outcomes. These visits foster stronger relationships and enhance direct communication between law enforcement officers and prosecutors. This initiative serves as a platform for mutual education and collaboration, strengthening the partnership between our office and law enforcement agencies.

Hancock County Child Protection Team

Each community is required by law to establish a Child Protection Team comprising representatives from various sectors, including DCS, the judiciary, law enforcement, education, medical professionals, and community members. This team meets monthly, led by DCS, to review the status of open cases, share resources, and ensure children and families receive necessary services. The team also ensures allegations of criminal behavior are properly referred to and investigated. The Chief Deputy Prosecutor represents HCPO in these meetings, actively participating to support the team's mission and provide periodic reports to the state on child abuse and neglect cases.

Weekly Juvenile Justice Staffing

On a weekly basis, HCPO Deputy Prosecutors and a Victim Assistant Coordinator meet with juvenile probation to review incoming cases, receive updates on pending cases, and follow up on cases involving juveniles on probation. These meetings focus on balancing public safety with providing services to juvenile offenders and their families to support rehabilitation. Each meeting involves two Deputy Prosecuting Attorneys (DPAs) who handle juvenile court filings, ensuring both are fully informed on all relevant matters. In 2024, approximately **45 meetings were held**, resulting in an estimated 67 hours of participation for each DPA and Victim Assistant, **totaling approximately 268 hours overall**.

Hancock County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)

It is statutorily required for each Prosecutor's Office to maintain a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), which collaborates with law enforcement, medical providers, victim services, and the community. Historically, Hancock County lacked consistent best practices for investigating and prosecuting sexual assault cases, with no convictions between 2006 and 2016, and victims traveling over 25 miles for medical exams. Chief Deputy Herring has prioritized modernizing the county's approach to these crimes and ensuring compliance with state law. In 2024, the local SART **held seven Hancock County meetings**, including an **all-day training session**, and participated in **six statewide roundtable SART meetings**.

Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT)

The HCPO is legally required to participate in a Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT) to review child deaths under Indiana law. The team includes professionals from law enforcement, health care, education, mental health, and other local agencies. It reviews all child deaths under age 18 that are sudden, unexpected, or unexplained, as well as those investigated by DCS or determined to result from homicide, suicide, accidents, or undetermined causes. In 2024, **three formal CFRT meetings** were held, with **over 35 hours of preparation time** required per meeting to gather and compile necessary records.

Hancock County Law Enforcement Council

Three times a year, HCPO leadership hosts meetings with the leadership of local law enforcement agencies and other key stakeholders, including Zoey's Place and the Hancock County 911 Center. In 2024, meetings were held on February 1, May 23, and September 19.



CHIEF CASEY AND PROSECUTOR EATON

SECTION 3: LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAININGS

As the County's leading law enforcement organization, HCPO actively collaborates with uniformed law enforcement across the County and State to provide consistent training opportunities.

In 2024 HCPO provided the following trainings:

HCPO Firearm Liaison Training (January 16 and 17) - This training was a collaborative effort between HCPO, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), the Indiana State Police, and IMPD. It focused on evidence collection and interrogation techniques for cases involving illegal firearms. The practices introduced during this training have significantly improved evidence collection in firearm-related crimes and will continue to be utilized in the years ahead to ensure these cases are prosecuted effectively.

HCPO Domestic Violence Training (January 22) - This training aimed to assist patrol officers in identifying and documenting evidence of domestic violence. It provided practical tips for report writing in these cases and addressed real-world questions to enhance the enforcement of domestic violence offenses, which are often complex and dangerous for law enforcement officers.

HCPO Domestic Violence Training (March 5) - The regional training brought together agencies from across the state to help officers better identify and document evidence of domestic violence. This training was conducted in collaboration with nationally recognized family violence expert Dottie Davis, who came to Hancock County to present best practices and investigative techniques to all interested participants.

Jail Investigative Team Training (April 25, May 22) - HCPO provided training for the newly formed Jail Investigation Team (JIT) from HCSD, covering essential legal concepts, common crimes, and scenarios the team is likely to encounter. Since its formation, the team has become active and has provided critical information to HCPO, enabling the prosecution of multiple defendants who continued committing crimes while in jail.

United States Attorney Office Training (July 20) - HCPO partnered with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Indianapolis to provide training for law enforcement on evidence collection and investigative practices required for prosecuting cases in Federal Court. The training placed a special emphasis on firearms crimes and collaboration with federal agencies to ensure maximum sentences for violent offenders.

Indiana Law Enforcement Academy Training (September 20) - HCPO partnered with the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) to deliver a training focused on drafting effective search warrants. ILEA's General Counsel personally participated in the training, working alongside HCPO to provide valuable guidance to attendees. Following the training, a new search warrant database was created that is accessible to law enforcement. Officers can access that database for assistance with warrants 24/7/365.

Indiana Attorney General Office Training (November 22) - HCPO collaborated with the Indiana Attorney General's Office to present a training focused on basic investigation tips and best practices for addressing common law enforcement challenges. The training also covered recent changes in the law and their potential impact on the daily responsibilities of police officers.

Law Enforcement Officers are required to have 24 hours of continuing professional education annually. Through training that was provided free of charge by HCPO and its partners a significant amount of those hours could have been acquired, without leaving Hancock County, with no costs to local law enforcement.



DOTTIE DAVIS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRAINING

SECTION 4: OTHER PROFESSIONAL AND REGIONAL TRAININGS

ChildFirst Forensic Interview Training (September 25) - A statewide training was offered to law enforcement, DCS employees, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, medical residents, Child Advocacy Center staff, Deputy Prosecutors, and Victim Advocates. Chief Deputy Herring taught several sessions, including presentations on court rules, preparing child witnesses for testimony, and the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration to gather corroborating evidence of abuse and neglect.

Darkness2Light (July 10) - Chief Deputy Herring conducted a local training for volunteers outside of law enforcement and the justice system, focused on educating adults about steps to prevent child abuse and enhance child protection efforts.

SANE Training (September 26) - A statewide training was held for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners on effectively presenting their clinical findings in a courtroom setting. The course provided guidance on both direct and cross-examination aspects of testimony. Chief Deputy Herring presented material on how to prepare for testifying as a SANE from a prosecutor's perspective and taught key portions of the course by guiding participants through a practical courtroom exercise designed to simulate real court proceedings.



FORMER US ATTORNEY ZACH MYERS AND PROSECUTOR EATON

SECTION 5: LITIGATION STATS & TRIALS OF NOTE

Total number of trials conducted across all case types: 121

Results of the trials: 113 Guilty; 6 Not Guilty; 1 Not Guilty by reason of insanity; 1 mistrial.

Trial Conviction Rate: 93%

INDIVIDUAL TRIALS OF NOTE

NAME	COURT/DATE	RESULT
Michael West	Court 2, June 28	Mistrial due to Juror Misconduct.
Akeenen Hunt	Circuit Court, July 16-19	<p>Guilty Invasion of Privacy, Leaving Scene of Accident with Injury, Criminal Recklessness, Attempted Kidnapping, Criminal Recklessness X 2, Domestic Battery in Violation of No Contact Order X 2, Criminal Confinement X 2, Kidnapping, Attempted Kidnapping, Rape.</p> <p>46 year sentence to Department of Corrections. Initial 30 years to be incarcerated followed by 5 years of home detention followed by 11 years of probation.</p> <p>The State asked for 80 years with 65 executed.</p>
Dejuan Durrett	Court 2, June 28	Not Guilty (Jury Nullification).
Akeenen Hunt	Court, August 20-22	<p>Guilty of 102 Counts of Invasion of Privacy, 4 Counts of Attempted Obstruction of Justice. 35 years Incarcerated Department of Corrections.</p> <p>The State asked for 103 years, 9 months.</p>
Daniel Smith	Bench Trial: Court 1, August 9-11	Not responsible by reason of insanity.
Erick Wilkinson	Court 1, October 22-25	Mistrial, Hung Jury.
Kristina Sell	Court 1, December 9-12	Guilty Arson, Domestic Violence Animal Cruelty. 24 years Department of Corrections. 20 years incarcerated at department of corrections followed by 4 years suspended to probation.
Kevin Gavarrette	Circuit Court, December 17, 18	Guilty Unlawful Possession of Handgun by Serious Violent Felon, Habitual Offender. 14 Years Department of Corrections. 12 years

		<p>incarcerated followed by 2 years of home detention.</p> <p>The State asked for a 20 year term of</p>
Steven Benson	Circuit Court, February 20	<p>Guilty Invasion of Privacy Level 6 Felony. Sentenced 910 Days in Department of Corrections.</p>
Curtis Colvin	Circuit Court, March 19, 20	<p>Guilty Unlawful Possession of Firearm by Serious Violent Felon (with previous conviction for the same), Possession of Cocaine. 8 year sentence to department of corrections with 6 years incarcerated in department of corrections with 2 years suspended to probation.</p> <p><i>This was about half of the prison time that HCPO asked for at sentencing following the jury trial.</i></p>
Laquinta Gaines	Bench Trial, June 18, 2024	<p>Guilty Intimidation, Resisting Law Enforcement, Criminal Recklessness with Deadly Weapon, Carrying Handgun without a license. Sentenced to 6 years in Department of Corrections with 5 years to be served incarcerated and 1 year suspended to probation.</p>

SECTION 6: INVESTIGATIVE WORK

- 223 Subpoenas served.
- 114 investigations into witness/defendant location.
- 56 independent or assisting investigative reports seeking criminal charges to be filed.
- 4 arrests of people at HCPO.
- 13 in person responses to provide assistance at scene of crash as part of the Hancock County Fatal Alcohol Crash Team.