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San Diego City Attorney's Office Awarded State Grant to Prosecute Drugged Driving Cases

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced today that the Office has been awarded a grant of \$265,000 from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). This grant will be used to continue funding a special team of prosecutors that works on cases of driving under the influence of drugs.

“Driving under the influence of drugs can have devastating effects on San Diego drivers and their families,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“Our City continues to see DUI cases involving the misuse of prescription drugs, marijuana, and illegal drugs, often in combination with alcohol. This grant allows our highly specialized prosecution team to work closely with law enforcement to hold accountable those who endanger our community.”**

The San Diego City Attorney's Office has received special grants from the OTS to prosecute drugged-driving cases annually since 2015. This year's grant represents a substantial increase over last year's, which was for \$198,302.

Funding from the Drug DUI Prosecution Grant will aid the City Attorney's Office in handling cases throughout each step of the criminal process, prosecuting both drug-impaired and drug/alcohol-impaired driving cases. The highly-trained prosecutors on this team handle each case vertically, with one Deputy City Attorney in charge of each case, from arrest through conviction and sentencing. The team members also work with the state's Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Program to expand knowledge and resources in the emerging problem of drug-impaired driving throughout the state.

In the past year under the 2019-2020 OTS grant (Oct. 1, 2019-Sept. 30, 2020), the specialized prosecution team filed 157 misdemeanor cases of driving under the influence of drugs or a combination of alcohol and drugs. The office as a whole filed 1,800 DUI cases during that period.

The purpose of the program is to prevent impaired driving and reduce alcohol and drug-impaired traffic deaths and injuries. So far this year there have been 24 DUI-related deaths in San Diego County, despite the presence of fewer cars on the road due to pandemic-related restrictions. If that trend continues, this year is on track to surpass the County's worst year, 2017, during which 25 people were killed in DUI crashes.

Recent City Attorney media releases can be accessed on the San Diego City Attorney's home page located on the Internet at <https://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney>

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Drug-impaired driving cases have been increasing in recent years in California. The City Attorney's Office supports efforts from OTS to remind the public that "DUI Doesn't Just Mean Booze." Even without alcohol, the use of marijuana or prescription drugs -- particularly those with a warning to refrain from driving or operating machinery -- can lead to a DUI arrest and conviction.

"If you drink or use drugs and decide to drive, you put lives at risk," OTS Director Barbara Rooney said. **"This funding from the OTS makes sure that those who make the choice to drive under the influence are held accountable for their actions."**

Funding for this vertical prosecution program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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