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San Diego City Attorney's Office Receives State Grant to Prosecute Drugged and Drunken Drivers

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced today that the Office has been awarded a grant of \$244,008 from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). This grant will fund the special team of prosecutors that works on both drug-impaired and drug/alcohol-impaired driving cases.

“Driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol can destroy lives and families,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“In San Diego we continue to see DUI cases involving the misuse of prescription drugs, marijuana, and illegal drugs, often in combination with alcohol. This grant allows our team of special prosecutors to work closely with law enforcement to hold accountable those who endanger our community.”**

The funding from the Drug DUI Prosecution Grant will aid the City Attorney's Office in handling cases throughout each step of the criminal process. 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.

Under the 2020-2021 OTS grant (Oct. 1, 2020-Sept. 30, 2021), the specialized prosecution team filed 284 misdemeanor cases of driving under the influence of drugs or a combination of alcohol and drugs. This is nearly double from the previous year in which 157 cases were filed. The City Attorney's Office as a whole reviewed approximately 2,200 DUI cases and filed 1,756 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 35 DUI-related deaths in San Diego County. This year's toll has already surpassed the County's worst year, 2017, during which 25 people were killed in DUI crashes.

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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.

"Experience and knowledge are critical for prosecutors to build successful impaired driving cases," OTS Director Barbara Rooney said. **"This program provides resources, tools and a strong training network for DUI prosecution teams that hold people who drive under the influence 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. The San Diego City Attorney's Office has received special grants from the OTS to prosecute drugged-driving cases annually since 2015.

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